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# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

Viktor Orbán's Hungary

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From Young Democracy to Illiberal State

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2021 / Vienna, 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Betreut von: / Supervisor:

UA 066 610

Masterstudium Interdisziplinäre  
Osteuropastudien

Univ.- Prof. Dr. Philipp Ther.



# Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	4
1.1	Is Hungary still a Democracy?.....	8
1.2	The Focus of the Research.....	12
2	The Background and the Decline of the Left .....	14
3	The Creation of th New Order .....	25
3.1	The Content of the New Fundamental Law.....	28
3.2	Preserving Power due to Rewriting the Rules.....	34
4	The Central Space of Power .....	43
5	A Change of Strategy.....	53
6	The Fourth Power .....	62
6.1	The Media War and Multyparty Control over the Media(1990-2010) .....	63
6.2	One-party Control over the Media (2010 to present day).....	63
7	Conclusions and possible Scenerios for the Future.....	77
7.1	Orbán’s System.....	77
7.2	Possible Scenerios for the Future .....	85
8	Sources and References. ....	95.
	Abstract.....	103.

# 1 Introduction

In the past 10 years, Hungary's name is mentioned a lot in the news throughout Europe. Despite being such a small country with a population of less than 10 million people, and as a former socialist state, it does not seem such an important country, however, it became a stable topic in the European public and politics. The reason behind that is the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, who led the country into a strong transformation after returning to power in 2010. He is a controversial leader within and outside of the country. Many scholars say, Hungary went back towards the direction of an authoritarian regime, but despite of this, many politicians still see his views as a direction to follow. Orbán is criticized a lot, his politics are often controversial, but despite of this, his power and influence is not questionable.

His name is often mentioned alongside politicians like Recep Tayip Erdogan, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump and Matteo Salvini. These men have a common history of nationalism and populism and show the strong transformations of Orbán: during the time of the collapse of the eastern block, when he was known for his liberal views. Then he converted his party to a conservative, civil direction after realizing the vacuum on the right wing during the turbulent decade of the 1990's. He was able to lead a then populargovernment between 1998 and 2002, but lost his power despite of that. However, the two terms of socialist governments did not manage to produce such a progress, and those years did not lack of corruption and scandals, and on the top of that, the economic crisis of 2008 hit the country hard. All these processes made Orbán's return by 2010 unquestioned. Although despite his progressive first term, his policies went towards another direction: nationalism and populism. Just like in the nineties, when he realized the new opportunities within the Hungarian politics, he reflected to the international trends in the same way, mostly in 2015.

In comparison, today's Hungary seems to be a different country than it was eleven years ago, when Orbán returned to power for his second term. I will make an attempt to describe the current conditions in the introduction in general, before going into details and analyze the processes let to these changes in the rest of my work.

The economy of Hungary performs undeniably better under the new system, but on the other hand, the democratic principles and human rights went through a significant decline. On the night of his reelection, Orbán himself claimed to establish a new system, what he referred as the "System of National Cooperation". Since then, his party, Fidesz penetrated that deep into the state administration, that the country went under the dominance of one particular party just

20 years after the fall of communism.<sup>1</sup> “Over the course of his eight years in power, Prime Minister Orbán has chipped away at the foundations of Hungarian democracy. It has been replaced with an authoritarian regime that wields a cynical interpretation of the law as a weapon; the country is governed by rules like the journalism permits, regulations that can seem reasonable on their face but actually serve to undermine essential democratic freedoms.”<sup>2</sup> However Ash used the phrase “authoritarian, the new system established by the current government is still more democratic, than many regimes known from being authoritarian, such as Belarus, or Russia.

The high concentration of power within the hands of Orbán allowed him to change the electoral system. The elections however are free, but must not be called fair. The decisive majority of the media belongs to the government, or loyal businessmen, due to this fact, the opposition does not have enough publicity, even in times of campaigns. Orbán’s party, FIDESZ also creates fake parties before elections, to further divide the votes for the opposition. This aspects show, how unfair the last parlamental elections were.<sup>3</sup>

The independent media has almost vanished, loyalist businessmen took over 90% of that by 2017, including every single regional newspaper, which is a decisive factor, due to a wide range of mostly elderly people have only access to these outlets. In most of the times, this happens due applying financial pressure on the owners of independent media outlets, then the mediators of Orbán himself persuade them to sell, or to change their tone into a less critical one. On the other side, the state media is fundamentally loyal to the governing party. This is a major issue, because for masses of people, especially for the older generation, this is the only available source of news. With no access to any independent media, these people, especially in the rural areas have no opportunity to know any alternative voices, they only meet the narrative of the government.

Tensions are part of every day between people with different political orientations and the progressive conversation, such things as progressive debates are nowhere to find. The constant

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<sup>1</sup> Ash, Timothy Gardon: Europe must stop this disgrace: Viktor Orbán is dismantling democracy, The Guardian, 2019.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/20/viktor-orban-democracy-hungary-eu-funding>, (last accessed on 16.02.2020.)

<sup>2</sup> Beauchamp, Zack: It happened there: how democracy died in Hungary A new kind of authoritarianism is taking root in Europe – and there are Warning signs for America, Vox, 2018  
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/13/17823488/hungary-democracy-authoritarianism-trump>, (last accessed on 16.02.2020.)

<sup>3</sup> Beacuchamp, 2018.

drumbeat of state propaganda appears everywhere, demonizing everything the government hopes advantage of. For example, the European Union, George Soros, with a latent anti-Semitic meaning, the refugees, the NGOs, and in addition to this, the newest element in this line in 2020 is to create artificial tensions between ethnic Hungarians and Roma people.

The constant negative campaigns against these critical non-governmental organizations, already have a significant impact in the general Hungarian public. We have to take a look at the case of George Soros. Hungary's best university, the Central European University was founded and funded by the Hungarian-born American businessman. In 2017, the government started to make a campaign against the institution, starting by passing a law questioning its legal working. The legal act and the constant campaigning resulted the University alongside other NGOs to continue their work in Vienna, and in other cities in the region. The campaign against Soros has also made an impact on another aspect too. A Holocaust-survivor, who is widely referred according to the government's communicational campaigns, as a puppet master whose who can be used as a stereotypical figure of the global power of money. He is openly a promoter of human rights and civil liberties. Those values Orbán is positioning himself against. Before the beginning of his Political ambitions, Orbán's studies were financed by the American billionaire in order to support the emergence of a civil society. Despite of that, the prime minister now sees him and his institutions as a threat to his power, and the state propaganda created a portrait about him as a puppet-master, who is financing immigration to underline the Christian tradition in Europe. Soros' interests, including one of Hungary's most important university are under threat, or already left Hungary because of the constant attacks.

This campaign can be harmful for another reason: However, Soros has a controversial reputation, many sees him as the stereotypical figure of the influential, Jewish billionaire, and some religious communities are afraid, that this can start a new wave of anti-Semitism. "I am distressed by the current Hungarian regime's use of anti-Semitic imagery as part of its deliberate disinformation campaign. Equally, I am heartened that together with countless fellow citizens the leadership of the Hungarian Jewish community has spoken out against the campaign."<sup>4</sup> – reacted the billionaire.

Besides Soros, the most common case in the state media is the refugee crisis. Immigrants are also demonized, and this created a wide-scale prejudice and latent racism in the

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<sup>4</sup> BBC: George Soros: Hungarian government posters 'Anti-Semitic', bbc.com, 2017  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40576224>, (last accessed on 19.02.2020.)

country, predominantly against Muslims and against sexual minorities, and the campaign against them has worked. According to Eurobarometer, 51% of Hungarians believed immigration as the biggest issue of the European Union, and according to Pew Research, 72% of the population has a negative view on Muslims, which is far higher than the EU-average.<sup>5</sup>

This aspect also shows the strange nature of Orbán's Hungary: after these examples, many compare that to Vladimir Putin's Russia, and Erdogan's Turkey. But in fact in Hungary, there had not been cases of critical journalists, or oppositional politicians to be jailed, or dying violently. "Instead, the Orban government quietly changed the rules by which all foreign universities like C.E.U. can operate, allowing Mr. Orban to frame its treatment as a merely technical decision, rather than an attack on academic freedom. It is a recurrent paradox of Mr. Orban's rule: Despite all the steps he has taken to erode the Hungarian democratic process, Mr. Orban has rarely allowed his government to get its way by blatant force."<sup>6</sup>

Not just the media and state propaganda, but whole economic sectors were taken over by loyal businessmen, including family members, and old friends of Orbán himself. Corruption had always been a problem in the country, scandals even played a crucial role in the emergence of Orbán by 2010. But after that, it became commonplace and systematic, allowing experts to label the system as "kleptocracy", whose goal is to enrich its elite, according to Jan-Werner Müller.<sup>7</sup>

The quality of democracy has also fallen also drastically. The new constitution including the new electoral law, and the rule over the media caused the fact, that there is no other political force in sight who would be able to challenge the governing party, and the oppositional actors are forced to cooperate with each other, despite sitting on very different position on the political spectrum.

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<sup>5</sup> Manevich, Dorothy: Hungarians share Europe's embrace of democratic principles but are less tolerant of refugees, minorities, Pew Research Center, 2016.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities/>, (last accessed on 22.02.2020)

<sup>6</sup> Kingsley, Patrick: On the Surface, Hungary is a Democracy. But what Lies Underneath?, The New York Times, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/world/europe/hungary-democracy-orban.html>, (last accessed on 24.02.2020.)

<sup>7</sup> The Economist: Europe's civil war of sovereignty is earing its soul apart, London, 2018., see:

<https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/07/18/europes-civil-war-of-sovereignty-is-tearing-its-soul-apart>, (last accessed on 08.12.2021.)

## 1.1 Is Hungary still a Democracy?

At the beginning of my thesis, I also must ask the question, many scientists are interested in: Is Hungary still a democracy? Unlike the communist period just three decades ago, Hungary has a Constitutional court and multiple organizations whose task is to watch over the state of democracy. These are still independent nominally, but they are not able to fulfill their roles anymore, because the majority of their members are nominated by Orbán, or his party. This is the reason, why have not any of the members had to face any corruption allegations. The journalists also do not have to fear of any physical danger. This fact was underlined by Michael Ignatieff, president of the CEU: “The closed regimes of the past were behind barbed-wire fences and police watchtowers, and the repression was overt and clear and unmistakable, but in Orbán’s Hungary, you can protest, you can leave, you can set up a business and you’re a member of the European Union, which is supposedly a union of democracies.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to the internal politics, Orbán has courageous ambitions outside of the borders of Hungary. His power in his country is unquestionable, and he expended his political and business interests. After establishing a brand new system, Orbán is attempting to create a new ideology to oppose the western model of liberal democracy. At first, he labeled this “illiberal democracy”, then changed it to “Christian democracy”, and he also attempted to justify that in his speech in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

Other political scientists and thinkers have different opinion about the current conditions, “Mr. Orban and his allies proudly acknowledge that their system of government has diverged from a model of liberal democracy. But they insist that it is still democratic — as long as one widens one’s definition of what democracy is. For Mr. Orban, democracy depends primarily on the occurrence of elections, rather than on the separation of powers or the vibrancy of public discourse.”<sup>10</sup> This statement from Patrick Kingsley is very important, because the prime minister managed to keep his policy in a grey area, where is very difficult to find a definition to describe his system.

To justify his political view, Orbán summarized his system in the following way: Christian democracy is, by definition, not liberal: it is, if you like, illiberal. And we can specifically say this in connection with a few important issues — say, three great issues. Liberal democracy is

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<sup>8</sup> Kingsley, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Bodnár, Zolt: Egy demokrácia nem hogy illiberális, de még keresztény sem lehet, Qubit, 2021. <https://qubit.hu/2021/06/18/egy-demokracia-nemhogyan-illiberalis-de-meg-kereszteny-sem-lehet>, (last accessed on 23.02.2020.

<sup>10</sup> Kingsley, 2018.



in favor of multiculturalism, while Christian democracy gives priority to Christian culture; this is an illiberal concept. Liberal democracy is pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration; this is again a genuinely illiberal concept. And liberal democracy sides with adaptable family models, while Christian democracy rests on the foundations of the Christian family model; once more, this is an illiberal concept.”<sup>11</sup>

According to his words, the Hungarian prime minister attempted to find a grey zone within the definition of democracy. In the last few years, many scholars attempted to analyze this phenomenon, but the theories are spread on a wide range, including competitive authoritarian system, elected autocracy, or hybrid regime. The most common phenomenon of these is, that they do not eliminate every aspects of democracy, but they do empty them on that scale, that they are not democracies anymore.<sup>12</sup>

According to Kingsley as well, the creation of a system being in the grey zone between democracies and autocracies requires another element besides widening the definition of democracy: you also have to update your knowledge about autocracy. This was underlined in his article cited by the previously quoted Ignatieff. He believes, Orbán’s regime is a new thing under the sun, which cannot be described by the templates of the 20<sup>th</sup> century authoritarianism. He insists, we are dealing with a new form of a one-party state.

On the other hand, others say, there is absolutely no need to analyze authoritarianism to understand the nature of Orbán’s system, like Jason Stanley in his work titled “How Fascism Works”. He thinks democracy is a culture, that respects the truth, and in Hungary’s case, it is not valid anymore because of the nature of the propaganda coming from the state media. There are multiple more theories attempting to describe this unique political system. One of them is a classic view on corruption. Due to a report of Transparency International in 2017, there are two major groups of corporations in Hungary’s business life. “The inner circle group of companies are those which win the public procurement bids in significant shares, thus a salient portion of their revenues are generated by public tenders. These companies have more favourable positions than the ‘ingroup’ companies thus they do not need SPAs. The lobbying activity of this inner circle is totally non-transparent and lacks any formal elements of communication with the government. None of the companies assumed to belong to this inner

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<sup>11</sup> Kingsley, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Kingsley, 2018

circle have concluded strategic partnership agreements with the government.”<sup>13</sup> However, there are multiple other theories, it is hard to argue, that the organization of corruption in Orbán’s Hungary had risen onto an unprecedented level, but we cannot describe the relationship between the economic elite and the state by only talking about the prime ministers lust for power and mafia methods. Mafia methods are strong words, but even Bálint Magyar referred that in his book: *The Post-Communist Mafia State- The case of Hungary*. In an interview for an online website close to the governing circles he said „Hungary does not have a government, but rather a crime organization”, referring to the organized corruption and the conscious strategy of possessing economic goods.<sup>14</sup>

These arguments come according to Transparency International, from the neutralist state theories. The common aspect of these is they create complex conditions, and political relationships take the place of the selection based on performance. This causes lawmaking unpredictable and diverts the governing from optimal, which is not favorable for investments. This bureaucracy creates a perfect landscape for corruption, where the public resources do not serve social utilization, but to benefit to an inner circle instead. These neutralist state theories claim this form of system to be defined by the politics. On the other hand, the centralized corruption is not enough to explain the decline of democracy, because the supporters of the system are not just the oligarchs from Orbán’s circle, but other international actors, most significantly the capital from Germany, especially from the automotive industry. However, the capitalism of the narrow group of loyalists is stronger, than ever, this is still just a part of the whole capitalist system.<sup>15</sup>

Gábor Scheiring claims in his cited article, that Orbán attempted to create a developing state after 2010, which cannot break the rule of the international capital, that is why the policy of Fidesz is exactly, what the global investors want to see, but in this case in a nationalist form. This is how Zoltán Pogátsa also argues in his article. He compared Hungary to a far-eastern

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<sup>13</sup> Burai, Petra & Ligeti, Miklós & Martin, József Péter & Salgó, Ella: *Democratic Backsliding and Economic Performance*, Budapest, Transparency International Hungary, 2017, Page 18.

<sup>14</sup> Mandiner: Magyar Bálint: Magyarországnak nem kormánya van, hanem bűnszervezete, Mandiner, 2021., own translation  
[https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20210420\\_magyar\\_balint\\_magyarorszagnak\\_nem\\_kormanya\\_van\\_hanem\\_bunszervezete](https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20210420_magyar_balint_magyarorszagnak_nem_kormanya_van_hanem_bunszervezete), last accessed on 22.07.2021.)

<sup>15</sup> Scheiring, Gábor: *Az Orbán-rendszer természete: autoriter kapitalizmus és felhalmozó állam*, MÉRCE, 2018  
<https://merce.hu/2018/12/25/az-orban-rendszer-termeszete-autoriter-kapitalizmus-es-felhalmozó-allam/>, (last accessed on 02.05.2021.

developing state, and Péter Ákos Bod claimed in a since banned, controversial publication, that Hungary went towards that direction after 2010, instead of liberal capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

Despite of the wide range of arguments, Orbán's country is neither a mafia, nor a developing state. The goal of the latter one is the continuous technological development of the economy. The focus on the most profitable sectors based on skilled and cooperative workforce to rise the export.

First, an organized developing state has a strong bureaucracy able to create a mutually beneficial partnership with the international capital for lobby activities. Secondly, the state has to be able to unfold and tax large private assets. They also prioritize the sectors supporting the good quality of human capital, such as educational system, healthcare and state insurance. And lastly, these states are strong in strategic industrial policy, which protects the own market and to create capital. These aspects are far from what Viktor Orbán is building in Hungary.<sup>17</sup>

On the economic perspective, the political state created by Orbán after 2010 is an agglomerating state, which attempts to politically handle the internal inconsequences of dependent capitalism. The competing state fell, because the institutional ruling coalition between social classes, the transnational capital, and the technocratic politicians cracked. After this, Orbán realized, that the agglomeration of this capital can be compatible with a restricted form of democracy. This situation was however double edged. Because of the lack of economic integration on the international level and the lack of human capital, the process led to an internal social and economic disintegration in form of growing inequality, debt, low payment and economic duality.<sup>18</sup>

In these forms of states however, there is a new phenomenon: besides the international capital, the national one also appears, and the interests of the new economic elite can require to restrict democracy. The agglomerating state of Orbán systematically interfering the institutions of liberal capitalism to aggregate the national and international, meanwhile he manages the social tensions by the radical restriction of competition, de facto authoritarian tools.

These economic processes led to the controversial laws of the recent years, for example the restrictions of working laws, the so-called "slavery-law" drastically raised the legal overtime to weaken the influence of labour unions, and maybe the most important aspect, the reorganization of educational system to benefit the national capital which needs unskilled

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<sup>16</sup> Scheiring, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Scheiring, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Scheiring, 2018.

workforce in the industrial sector.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the massive aggregation of capital, this kind of state is not a developing one. This is led by short-term interests which is not able to position itself against the current interests of the national and international capital. Aggregating states conserve an already given economic structure without developing the country. In such a state the international and national capital, and the political class have an oversized influence. It lacks the independent state bureaucracy with an internal selection, that is why these working fields are not attractive for those, who are looking for professional challenges. This apparatus, the most important point is loyalty, which is the exact opposite of the rationality of bureaucracy described by Weber.<sup>20</sup>

What the most important difference between developing and aggregating states is innovation.

So as I previously mentioned, Orbán is attempting to create a counterpart of the western type of liberal democracy by rewriting its definition. But to achieve this, his country is clearly not enough. However, he realized some new trends within the global politics, where the belief in democracy in general has declined.

The politics of Orbán are controversial. It is widely seen as anti-democratic, corrupt, anti-Semitic and racist. Despite of this, there is no force within the opposition able to challenge his power, and a shift of the political landscape I the country is currently unimaginable.

We can clearly admit, that after the two decades between the fall of state-socialism in 1989 and the reelection of Orbán in 2010, the democratic institutions did work, and the all-time governments did have achievements, for example joining different western and European organizations, like NATO and the European Union. However, since 2010, Orbán fundamentally changed the principles of Hungary, and the current situation must be described, as a new and stable political system.

## **1.2 The Focus of the Research**

In my master thesis, I am going to make an attempt to analyze the processes leading towards this radical change of the entire state, and the main aspects of that. To do this, I will need to answer three major questions, which will describe the nature of the system together in a wider context.

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<sup>19</sup> Scheiring, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Scheiring, 2018.

1.: What lead to the overpower of Orbán's party, allowing them to change the principles of the democratic institutions?

At the first part, I will have to write shortly about the state of the country in 2010, before Orbán returned to power, and the events before that allowing him to gain such a strong control, that was without a precedent in the democratic history of Hungary. Without analyzing the social and the historical background playing a marginal role behind the new political entity, its nature and legitimacy would be more difficult to understand.

This could happen, because there was a need in the society, as well as a very strong distrust against the previous government. One of the most important phenomenon is, that a large layer of the society supports Orbán and his party, and to understand this, we have to take a short look at the times before 2010 and analyze the failures of the previous leadership, meaning the political scandals in 2006 and the economic policies in the 2008 financial crisis, both leading to the decline of their popularity. These are going to answer the important question, why Orbán was able to gain power with such a strong support, allowing him to change the fundamental elements in the democracy, and to establish a new system in just few years.

2.: The second, and more important question is, how Orbán stabilized his power create a different form of state within less, than a decade. This chapter is going to analyze the main elements of the system making it work.

This is an extremely complex topic, and will be the main part of my thesis. This is of course going to need a deep analysis of his deeds in the Hungarian politics beginning with his first law about the dual-citizenship for the Hungarians living in the neighboring countries with a voting right, and the new constitution of 2012, with the new electoral system, the takeover of the media, and most importantly, the polarization of the Hungarian politics which allow Orbán to keep his positions unchallenged.

This transformation is very difficult to describe. The changed electoral and constitutional laws could even be defensible by analyzing them one by one. But if we take a look at the context and the system as whole, with the additional corruption and populism, the system appears democratic, but its functionality does not.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Beauchamp, 2018

My main sources for this topic will be the works of Lendvai, Magyar, Scheppele, and regarding to topics about the electoral system, I will be inspired by the various publications of Róbert László.

3.: The third question is, how Orbán manages to preserve his unchallenged power. After analyzing the fundamental changes in the constitution and the electoral system, there are also questions to ask about why the current rules make the opposition's situation even more difficult. Behind this phenomenon are also multiple factors. I will need to take a look at the opposition itself, but also the well-composed power-play of the government which makes the maintenance of the status quo a much easier task.

## 2 The Background and the Decline of the Left

Viktor Orbán and his party was almost effortlessly put into power in 2010, he managed to establish his system without substantial resistance. To understand the nature of the “System of National Cooperation”, the political landscape before 2010 has to be analyzed first. This will help us to understand, why Orbán was able to come into power with such a large-scale support of the masses.

The four years between 2006 and 2010 were characterized by three different, yet undeniably linked processes. First, the total breakdown of the Socialist-Free Democrat coalition after their electoral win in 2006, secondly, the rise of Viktor Orbán himself and his party, Fidesz, and the third important development is the radicalization of Hungarian politics, where anti-Semitism and Roma-phobia emerged in a wide layer of the society.<sup>22</sup>

The main result of the groundbreaking victory in 2010 was the result of multiple processes, which pushed the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) towards a moral crisis, from which it has not been recovered since then. Their support free-fell between 2006 and 2010 (from 43% to 19%). The left suffered from multiple divisions and is currently struggling for survival. The collapse of the Socialists led to a power vacuum, and Orbán's FIDESZ being the only other popular party, which had not lost the trust of the voters yet, his victory was known as inevitable even from the fall of 2006, just months after the electoral success of MSZP. Their political and economic incompetence, their systematic corruption caused the majority of the society to be dissatisfied.

Viktor Orbán lost the parliamentary elections to MSZP in 2002, so he could not stay in office. However, just three weeks later, the government found itself in a coalitional crisis, after an article published in the FIDESZ-supporting newspaper “Magyar Nemzet”. It suspected the newly elected socialist prime minister, Péter Medgyessy was a former secret agent for the communist ministry of interior between 1977 and 1982 under the codename of “Comrade D-209. Shortly after, he admitted his past, saying, he was responsible for protecting Hungarian state secrets during the negotiations with International Monetary Fund, but he declined accusations of spying against the West. "I helped prevent foreign spies from getting their hands on Hungarian secrets and ensured they should not be able to block our joining the IMF," he told parliament. I would like to emphasize that a spycatcher is not an agent, not an informant.

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<sup>22</sup> Lendvai, Paul: Orbán – Hungary's Strongman, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 62.

Counter-intelligence and intelligence are ancient professions and serve to protect the country."<sup>23</sup> This scandal almost ended the reign of Medgyessy, because the partner in coalition, the liberal SZDSZ just barely decided to continue the partnership with SZDSZ however, it is considered to be a major step towards the fall of the promising party at the dawn of the transition.<sup>24</sup> The so-called D-209-scandal was not the main reason, why Péter Medgyessy could not stay in office through his 4-year term and had to step down in 2004. Shortly after his election, he started his politics of "Welfare Transition" and his "Program of 100 Days), which included massive expenses on pensions, scholarships and wages, especially in the sector of public employees. After the success, the government launched a similar program again. These actions resulted the prime minister to gain popularity to win the local elections later that year too. Despite of that, this policy became a trap for him. The expenses made the budget unbalanced and reduced the room for the government to navigate.<sup>25</sup>

Because most of the resources were spent on welfare institutions, it was evident, that the socialists have to make restrictions and higher taxes just 2 years after the two programs of 100 days. Despite of the bad economic decisions and the large deficit in the budget, these actions were not the ones causing the quick fall of Medgyessy. He did not have any party affiliation in MSZP, which was already paralyzed by continuous internal bickering. While planning the still painless restriction, the general opinion within the party became sceptic, and the major politicians thought, they have no chance to stand against Viktor Orbán in 2006 by nominating Medgyessy for the position of prime minister for the second time. The raising distrust against their prime minister raised after the European Elections in 2004, when MSZP received 37%, while Orbán's FIDESZ did 47%. That shook the socialists and they started to look for an ideal candidate instead of Medgyessy, who wanted to reorganize his government. His final failure was the sacking of István Csillag, Economy Minister, who was nominated to the government by the Free-Democrats. This turned not just his own party, but his coalition partner also against him. The Socialists were planning to vote for a constructive motion of no confidence, putting

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<sup>23</sup> Huggler, Justin: I was a spy for communist Hungary, says prime minister, Independent, 2002. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/i-was-a-spy-for-communist-hungary-says-prime-minister-180848.html>, (last accessed on 05.03.2020.)

<sup>24</sup> Torkos, Matild: 2004: kormányválság – Medgyessy ment, Gyurcsány jött, Magyar Hang, 2019. <https://hang.hu/gazdasag/harmincevharminctortenet/2019/08/22/2004-kormanyvalsag-medgyessy-ment-gyurcsany-jott/>, (last accessed on 06.03.2020.)

<sup>25</sup> Somogyi, Zoltán: Elvakító Népszerűség, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2008. [https://www.politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=367](https://www.politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=367), (last accessed on 04.02.2020.)



Ferenc Gyurcsány, Minister of children, youth and sport in his place. Medgyessy prevented this by resigning as prime minister on 25. August, 2004.<sup>26</sup>

Gyurcsány was probably the most capable ambitious, but in the meantime the most controversial prime minister on the left. As minister, he was known for his articles about to transform his party from a post-communist one to a modern social-democratic party following German and British examples. Gyurcsány was known for his ambitions who had high positions in the Communist Youth League, and after the transition, he successfully became a billionaire. He was a good speaker, who even managed to win the debate against Orbán before the elections of 2006, helping the socialists to win an unprecedented consecutive elections in post-communist Hungary. Both of the biggest parties promised social benefits, despite the state of the budget was not in a good enough condition to fulfill this promises. The second term of Gyurcsány basically started with belt-tightening measures, and his popularity quickly fell from 55% in to to 34% by August.<sup>27</sup> The once again governing MSZP-SZDSZ coalition started there so-called New Balance Program in spite of the social benefits promised in the campaign just weeks before. The plans included the rise of gas prices by 30%, electricity by 15%. Also part of the package were elements that increased the burdens of enterprises and news spread about impending reorganisations and layoffs in the public sphere. These announcement immediately made their effects in the popularity of the socialists and their creditability crisis already started to materialize before September, 2006, when the political nuclear bomb exploded.<sup>28</sup> Despite his fourth major loss in his political career, Viktor Orbán got a significant chance to return to power, as being the head of the only large-enough party besides MSZP capable of winning any elections. This chance happened on 17. September, 2006, months after the parliamentary elections, when the political nuclear bomb exploded on a Sunday afternoon, creating a scandal, in my opinion with the most impact in the history of Hungary. A scandal, which basically destroyed the Socialist Party and which turned out to be the reason behind the major victory of Orbán in 2010.

At that afternoon, every single TV and radio stations were broadcasting a leaked speech by Ferenc Gyurcsány from the time his party had just won the elections. He spoke in front of the

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<sup>26</sup> Dezső, András & Dull, Szabolcs: Éppen 10 éve bukott meg Medgyessy Péter, Index.hu, 2014. [https://index.hu/belfold/2014/08/25/eppen\\_tiz\\_eve\\_bukott\\_meg\\_medgyessy\\_peter/](https://index.hu/belfold/2014/08/25/eppen_tiz_eve_bukott_meg_medgyessy_peter/), (last accessed on 02.04.2020)

<sup>27</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p.66.

<sup>28</sup> Bíró Nagy, András & Róna, Dániel: Freefall: Political agenda explanations for the Hungarian Socialist Party's loss of popularity between 2006-2010, Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Political Science, MTA Centre for Social Sciences, 2012. p. 9-11.

190 newly elected MPs. In the record Gyurcsány used vulgar words to motivate the socialist fraction and admitted very serious statements. Actually, the speech was more than 20 minutes long and its context was to motivate the politicians, and urged them to start real work, because they had not done much in the previous term.

"There is not much choice. There is not, because we screwed up. Not a little: a lot. No European country has done something as bone-headed as we have. Evidently, we lied throughout the last year and a half, two years. It was totally clear that what we are saying is not true. You cannot quote any significant government measure we can be proud of, other than at the end we managed to bring the government back from the brink. Nothing. If we have to give account to the country about what we did for four years, then what do we say? We lied in the morning; we lied in the evening. I've almost killed myself the last one-and-a-half years having to pretend that we were governing. Instead we've been lying morning, noon and night. And I don't want to do that anymore. Either we do something about it, and you have the man for this, or you carry on with somebody else."<sup>29</sup>

Gyurcsány wanted to leave the politics of dishonest compromise behind, but his speech and the fact, that it was leaked turned out to make the opposite effect and put his political career into risk. The record spread quickly in the whole country, and destroyed Gyurcsány's creditability within minutes. It is still unclear, who made the records in the internal party meeting, but it proves the distrust and lack of common direction within the fraction. The other question is, when the leadership of FIDESZ got the tape. Most of the Hungarian foreign journalists claim, that Orbán's circle had already possessed it by July. It can be confirmed by Orbán's timing of his campaign against "Gyurcsány's lie government." He also made a speech in the Hungarian minority town in Romania, when he said, "For the first time since 1989 Hungary has become the victim of an open, organised political lie". The leader of the stronger party of the opposition continued his campaign in the paper "Magyar Nemzet", and in his articles stating, the government won the elections on lies.<sup>30</sup>

If we take a look fourteen years back, this campaign seems more like a carefully orchestrated chain of events, slowly building it up to a climax of the leaked speech of Gyurcsány. The media coverage was well organized and they cleverly inverted the content. The opposition with the leadership of Orbán immediately attacked the government, which was not legitimate anymore

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<sup>29</sup> The Guardian: Hungary PM: we lied to win election, The Guardian, 2006.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/18/1>, (last accessed on 04.06.2020.)

<sup>30</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p 58.

in their points of view. Despite of the well-orchestrated coverage, a wide layer of the society was disappointed after hearing the news, and hours after the first broadcasts, thousands went to Kossuth Square, in front of the parliament building to demonstrate and to demand the resignation of the government. The crowd was also joined by violent right-wing extremists and the supporters of the then anti-Semitic and racist party of Jobbik. They continued the demonstrations on the next day too and ambushed the building of the Hungarian TV, which was partly set afire. The mobilization of the masses was successful before the communal elections on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, where the opposition won almost every positions within mayors and district leaders. After the results, both Orbán and President László Sólyom demanded the resignation of the head of government, who called a parliamentary vote of confidence instead. He was supported by his own party and the Free Democrats from the coalition.<sup>31</sup>

The demonstrations did not stop and Orbán called his supporter to arms against a “chronic liar”, as he named his rival multiple times. The peak of the protest however were on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, which was the fiftieth anniversary of the uprising against the communist dictatorship. No less, than 50 heads of states were invited for the ceremony, but instead of the celebrating masses, a total chaos ruled the streets of Budapest. The anti-government demonstrators were still violent, but this time the police also responded aggressively after their failure to defend the TV building few weeks before. The authorities did not make a difference between far-right hooligans and peaceful people who were celebrating the anniversary of the revolt. “To this day the background, course of events and the responsibility of the ringleaders and the police for the acts of violence, which, according to a commission set up by the government, caused damage amounting to €37 million during the weeks of rioting, are all the subject of dispute. All reports confirm the occasional brutality of the police. On this tragic day of unrest 326 civilians were injured (sixteen badly), as were 399 police officers (forty-seven seriously). There was particular outrage at the police’s use of rubber bullets. These caused open wounds to the chest and stomach, with two demonstrators losing an eye each.”<sup>32</sup>

After the fall of 2016, Orbán hardened his anti-government rhetoric maintaining such heavy statements, as “the government started a war against its people”. The Hungarian politics suddenly radicalized, which reflected in the undermining of trust in democratic institutions. Observers in general published, that the emerge of then extreme-right party, called Jobbik and

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<sup>31</sup> The Guardian, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Mayer, Gregor & Odehnal, Bernhard: Aufmarsch. Die rechte Gefahr in Osteuropa, St. Pölten, Residenz, 2010, p. 49., own translation

other extremist organizations profited from these events, meanwhile the Socialist-Coalition needed to adjust to a defensive rhetoric during the whole term. Due to Paul Lendvai, the leaking of the speech was the starting point of the 'power of fear' in the Hungarian politics, which started to feed Orbán's confrontational course.<sup>33</sup>

Despite his hardline rhetoric against the government, the well-built infrastructure was also behind Orbán's success. By that time, Fidesz had already spend a term as governing party, and they had an economic hinterland behind them. Their most notorious supporter was Lajos Simicska, a then close friend of Orbán from the student years. The oligarch had two daily newspapers, two weeklies, a free newspaper and two TV and radio stations. Besides that, there were other news sites, TV and radio stations owned by other groups favouring Fidesz. With this media support, Orbán was already able to dictate the agenda of the common talk, forcing the coalition into defensive, when the governing parties were already in a panic-driven position in both rhetoric and political point of view. Due to this, the internal conflicts on the left received large-scale media-coverage, just like their lack of common vision of such sectors as healthcare and education. While on the counterpart, Fidesz managed to publish its unified line about these topics supported by other organizations like teachers' association. This coverage played a marginal role in the mobilization of the people and collection of signatures for a referendum for reforms in the healthcare..<sup>34</sup>

This referendum was held on 9th of March, 2008 and it was the moment of truth for Gyurcsány's government. The electorate was asked three simple questions: should the charge of 300 forints (about €1) per visit to the doctor, the same charge for every day spent in hospital, and university tuition fees (about 100,000 forints annually) all be abolished? The Free Democrats had always been the driving force behind the privatization of the healthcare system. However the governing parties tried to stop the referendum with the conscious misinterpretation by constitutional lawyers, the three questions were allowed to be asked, and the results meant a disastrous defeat for them, because 82% of the people voted against the charges.<sup>35</sup>

The referendum was a victory for Fidesz, and the government went towards a more defensive strategy of communication. Gyurcsány put the responsibility of the failed restructuring of the healthcare system to the Free Democrats, which led to yet another coalitional crisis. Gyurcsány attempted to replace Ágnes Horváth, minister of healthcare, and offered a common solution,

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<sup>33</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> Lendvai, 2016,, p. 65

which was denied by the smaller party.<sup>36</sup> After the many disputes between the two political entities, that time, the liberal party did quit the government, forcing the Socialists to lead as a minority. However, in the important votes, the MPs of the Free Democrats always supported the left. This was the point, where multiple commentators said, that Gyurcsány should have resigned, although, he maintains, he attempted to do that, but only one member of the party presidium supported was willing to accept that.

After multiple scandals and political defeats, the September of 2008 brought a global economic meltdown, which hit Hungary very hard, and bankruptcy was avoided only with the help of IMF, the World Bank and the EU. “For the first time since the Socialist–Free Democrat coalition had first taken office in 1994, and of course far too late, serious budgetary cuts were now implemented. State employees, for example (civil servants, teachers, railway workers etc.), lost their right to a thirteenth monthly salary. The cutbacks led to a 3.5 per cent fall in consumption and a reduction of 2.5 per cent in real wages.”<sup>37</sup>

After the many scandals and defeats, Gyurcsány finally offered his resignation in March 2009, just one week after his re-election as the president of the Socialist Party. The opposition led by Orbán demanded new elections, but the governing party alongside with the Free Democrats did not support that demand. While the country was in the middle of the financial crisis, the successor of Gyurcsány became Gordon Bajnai, the minister of economic affairs in the minority government, but had never been a member of the party. However, his technocratic government was supported by the Socialists in every circumstances, and they manage to avoid bankruptcy by the austerity measures, but their popularity sank. The austerity hurt the people, including the cancellation of thirteenth month pension and salary, the raising of retirement age from sixty-two to sixty-five years and the raising in VAT to 25 per cent.<sup>38</sup>

However Fidesz voted against such painful measures, it was actually Orbán’s interest, because it was not Orbán, who had to implement this painful program to. In fact, the crisis management of Bajnai was rated very highly by the international community and financial institutions. In around a year, his government managed to regain the trust of the investors by making savings of approximately 5 per cent of the GDP. Orbán however rejected all of the measures. The opposition was already assured of its victory in the elections of 2010, and the media circle of

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<sup>36</sup> Index.hu: SZDSZ: Elfogadhatatlan Gyurcsány javaslata, Index, 2008.  
<https://index.hu/belfold/mola0329/>, (last accessed on 04.16.2020.)

<sup>37</sup> Sárközy, Tamás: Magyarország kormányzása 1978-2012, Budapest, Park Kiadó, 2012, p. 364.

<sup>38</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p. 67.

Fidesz continued to criticize Bajnai's work to create a continuity with Gyurcsány despite being a technocrat and not even a member of any political party. As a reaction, Bajnai announced in the parliament, that he has no political ambitions. He claimed, his only task was to manage the crisis, and he did exactly, what he promised. He withdrew from politics in 2010, but returned to found a small party in 2012 in an attempt to unify the then already very polarized opposition against Orbán, but he definitely failed, and left the politics forever behind, and returned to the business world.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, Gyurcsány is still a significant character in Hungary's internal politics. After more, than a decade, the media close to Fidesz still refers the events of 2006, as the times of state-terror. Many thinkers in Hungary, myself included believe, that the brutal response of the police had an even larger impact on the emergence of Orbán in 2010, than the 'lie-speech' of Gyurcsány. And this is why the former socialist prime minister has an important role to play in the current political system: as long as Orbán does not use violent police forces against demonstrators, he is always going to stand the comparison against Gyurcsány. The media also trying to build up Gyurcsány, as a natural counterpart of Orbán, and both of the politicians do play this role. As long as the former prime-minister is active in politics in the opposition, the media close to Fidesz will always be able to mash the whole opposition with him, who was in their narrative, responsible for the state terror and the economic meltdown of the country. Gyurcsány's current party, the Democratic Coalition (DK) split from MSZP in 2011, but never had a higher popularity, than 8-10%, until 2019, when they managed to send 5 MPs to the European Parliament, and became the most popular party in the opposition. Many say, it is rather a negative phenomenon, because many voters are sceptic to vote for an oppositional cooperation on elections, when the former prime minister, who had been compromised multiple times, is one of the candidates.

April 2010 was the month which officially ended the turbulent era of post-socialist state and turned out to be the starting datum of a new, stabile system. After explaining in a shorter chapter, how the political landscape changed, allowing Orbán to march into power, in this one, I am going to analyze, how the System of National Cooperation was established with the new constitution, and new methods of practicing power. Ten years after his election victory with a supermajority, we have to say, that the political changes applied under this system are already irreversible. If Orbán loses his power, it will not be possible to return into the old order.

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<sup>39</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p. 67-68.

The first round of the elections was 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2010, while the second one on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. FIDESZ-KDNP won 67,88% of the mandates, which gave them the right to modify the constitution. Another phenomenon was in 2010, how much the right wing and the far-right strengthened with Jobbik also winning 47 mandates, which means, almost 80% voted for a right-wing parties. This shows how the political landscape transformed in the previous term. The losers of the events however, were the Socialists, who got only 19% of the votes, which means a drop of 24% in just four years. Besides the Socialists, there were other losers too. The two major parties in the democratic transition of 1989, the moderate-right MDF, and the moderate-left Free Democrats did not reach 5% of the votes, which means, they failed to win any mandates. This ended basically the two-decade long era of the transition.<sup>40</sup> Despite the shocking amount of votes, Fidesz enjoyed the anomalies of the Hungarian electoral system, which traditionally gave advantage to the winner. The 2.7 million votes were in reality a little more than 50%, so with an electoral system with only party lists, like for example the Austrian one, these results would have been enough for a simple majority, while in the Hungarian one, it gave almost 68 per cents of the seats for the winning party. There were similar results in 1994 too, when the Socialist Party won 54 per cents of the mandates by only 31,6 per cents of the votes.<sup>41</sup>

Orbán was given the biggest power ever in the short history of Hungarian democracy, but there were already people who warned about the new balance of power in the Hungarian politics, for example, József Debreczeni, who wrote two biographies on the prime minister, warned in the epilogue of his second book: ‘Once he is in possession of a constitutional majority, he will turn this into an impregnable fortress of power ... Nobody should have any doubts that Orbán will recklessly and utterly exploit this power.’<sup>42</sup>

In his speech after receiving the results, Orbán declared the day as a historical one, when ‘ a Revolution happened in the polling booths. Hungarian people today have ousted the regime of oligarchs who misused their power, and the people have established a new regime, the regime of national cooperation’.<sup>43</sup> Due to this statement, is the regime in the Hungarian common talk called that way, or in the shorter Hungarian form, just NER. By exploiting to the full its two-

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<sup>40</sup>National Election Office of Hungary: Official Statistics, [static.valasztas.hu](http://static.valasztas.hu), 2010.  
<https://static.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv10/outroot/vdin2/en/l22.htm>, (last accessed on 06.11.2020.)

<sup>41</sup> Széky, János: Bárányvakság, Bratislava, Kalligram Könyv- és Lapkiadó Kft., 2015., p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Lendvai, 2016, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Dunai, Marton & Than, Krisztina: Hungary's Fidesz wins historic two-thirds mandate, [reuters.com](http://reuters.com), 2010.  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-election-idUSTRE63O1KB20100425>, (last accessed on 16.06.2020.)

thirds majority, in just two months Fidesz had passed fifty-eight resolutions, including twelve new laws and forty-four legislative amendments; it had also elected two Fidesz politicians as state president and speaker of parliament. Moreover, a further forty-two resolutions were announced for the autumn session.<sup>44</sup>

I felt necessary to describe the events leading to the emergence of Fidesz and Viktor Orbán. These events are important to understand, how the political environment was formed allowing Orbán to gain power with an overwhelming victory, and de facto without any opposition, giving him so much power to create a brand new system, which will remain irreversible after 10 years.

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<sup>44</sup> Hungarian Telegraph Office: Negyvenkét törvényjavaslattal készül a kormány, HVG, 2010.  
[https://hvg.hu/itthon/20100802\\_osz\\_torveny\\_javaslat\\_kormany](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20100802_osz_torveny_javaslat_kormany), (last accessed on 17.06.2020.)



### 3 The Creation of the New Order

After examining the necessary processes leading towards the collapse of the left, and the parallel rise of Fidesz, I start the analysis about the transition of the Hungary from a semi-consolidated democracy towards a controversial, but unique system, which is by some called a hybrid regime, and by some an illiberal democracy. The period after the transformation in 1989 may be called in the future, as the two troubled decades between two stable systems: the communist state until 1990, and the illiberal one of Viktor Orbán. The political system of the transitional years was – like in the case of the other post-communist states – modelled on the democracies of Western Europe. After April 2010, there is a new era, where the change of the government is less likely to be replaced in an election.

According to Bálint Magyar, when constructing the new model, Fidesz did not look back to history, they rather established a brand new and unique system, which may be related to others, like the former soviet states, but the basic model is evolved. Orbán created the Putin model of mafia state by another approach, by detour, through the West and establishes itself, as the Trojan horse of the post—communist mafia states within the European Union. Probably the biggest difference between the two approaches, that Orbán’s model grew out of a corrupt state administration of liberal democracy, while in Russia, the oligarchism with a weak central power was replaced by a pyramid-like chain of command after monopolizing the central power.<sup>45</sup>

Even before the elections of 2010, Orbán stated, he is not planning just a single change of government, but to create a “central field of power” which would allow him to stay in office for even decades. This phenomenon is basically a fundamental base of NER, and will be analyzed in a later part of my work after examining, how the constitution was disabled.

After winning the two thirds of the mandates, the new ideology became the “national freedom fight” and the “unorthodox” economic measures. Before 2010 in a speech Orbán, made a program for regime change in moderate terms, in 2014, after his second large-scale win, he announced the liquidation of liberal democracy, and the establishment of the “illiberal state” of Hungary, while he named certain autocratic states as examples, like Singapore, Russia, Turkey and China.

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<sup>45</sup> Magyar, Bálint: Post-Communist Mafia State – The case of Hungary, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2016, p. 87.

The probably most important aspect defining the new order is the new constitution, because this gave it the legal barriers, and made it clear, that there is a new political system, instead of adjusting the old one. After the overwhelming victory in his speech about the “Polling booth revolution”, Orbán drafted his plans about the creation of a new system, however in the campaign, there were no mentions at all about any major plans of constitutional changes, his majority gave him the rare authority to change that.

The drafters of the constitution during the transition in 1989-1990 had two worries: a scenario, when the parliament is too fractured and the many small parties would not been able to form a stable majority; and an entrenched coalition, which would be too hard to change, once the parties agreed to apply a high volume of laws requiring two thirds of the majority to change in order to prevent a possible communist return to power. The first one was solved by the election law, which put the larger parties in favor, while the constitution claimed, that a two-third majority will be enough to change that.<sup>46</sup>

After 2010, Fidesz used this opportunity, and the government amended it 12 times, and changing more than 50 provisions within one year in office, Orbán suddenly announced the first drafts of a brand new constitution, caller the “Fundamental Law of Hungary” on February 11, 2011. The more surprising aspect was the speed of the process: in about two months, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, it was accepted by the governing party in a fast procedure, which lasted for 9 days in the parliament, and represented the entire nature of the System of national Cooperation. There was neither a national or parliamentary debate, or a referendum, or a wide-scale consultation behind such an important measure. The only action was a so called “National Consultation”, which is a questionnaire with cleverly written answers posted to every citizen eligible to vote.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of this institution to serve as an alibi before any controversial governing action. Since the constitution, there have been nine Consultations sent to the citizens, mostly to have nominal support for the current political rhetoric, for example immigration, “fight against Geroge Soros’s plan” and against the European Union. According to the government’s rhetoric, it gives authorization but the results and statistics are nowhere registered and not public. It is also criticized because of the easy nature to hack it. Reporters

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<sup>46</sup>Miklósi, Zoltán: Constitution-Making, Competition and Cooperation, in. Tóth, Gábor Attila: Constitution for a Disunited Nation. On Hungary’s 2011 Fundamental Law, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2011, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Lendvai, 2016. p. 82.

in 2017 managed to send online 81 different questionnaires within an hour by using invalid and made up E-Mail Addresses and Names.<sup>48</sup>

The new fundamental law had a symbolic meaning by officially closing off the democratic transition of 1989, and there were significant changes in the new document.

The old constitution, which was created in 1989-1990 by the parties negotiating the transition, had three pillars. The first one was the text itself. The base and that was the communist constitution of 1949 but with more, than 100 individual amendments agreed by the sides. This was once again amended after the first free elections by the two strongest parties removing the last elements referring to the communist text.<sup>49</sup>

The second pillar of the then temporary constitution were laws requiring two thirds to be changed. The parties during the roundtable negotiations, and then after the first elections agreed, that the crucial aspects of institutional design were to be decided through laws requiring the majority of two thirds, including the structure of the government or fundamental laws, for example budget. These large amount of laws requiring supermajority however would have made the administration too complicated, so another agreement in 1990 reduced these laws. The ones requiring the two thirds were still so fundamental, such as laws on the Constitutional Court, judiciary, elections, political parties, media regulation, protection of nationalities, Prosecution Office and citizenship all needed the supermajority. “Given that these laws filled in the blanks in the constitutional text about how the constitutional order would be structured, they should be considered constituent parts of the constitutional order, even though the two-thirds laws were all subordinate to the constitutional text itself. The procedures used to adopt the two-thirds laws distinguished them from ordinary laws and entrenched them almost as much as the constitution.”<sup>50</sup>

The pillar three was about the Constitutional Court, which became an unusually powerful institution after the 1989 amendments and the two-third laws, to ensure the stability of the new model of plural democracy and guard above the constitution. It had the right to veto all

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48 HVG.hu: Nem létező e-mail címekkel, nevekkal is ki lehetett tölteni az online nemzeti konzultációt, HVG.hu, 2017

[https://hvg.hu/tudomany/20171007\\_nem\\_letezo\\_emailcimekkel\\_nevekkel\\_is\\_ki\\_lehetett\\_tolteni\\_az\\_online\\_nemzeti\\_konzultaciott](https://hvg.hu/tudomany/20171007_nem_letezo_emailcimekkel_nevekkel_is_ki_lehetett_tolteni_az_online_nemzeti_konzultaciott) (last accessed on 22.06.2020.)

49 Bánkúti, Miklós; Halmai, Gábor; Scheppele, Kim Lane: From Separation of Powers to a Government without Checks: Hungary's Old and New Constitutions, in Tóth, Gábor Attila: Constitution for a Disunited Nation. On Hungary's 2011 Fundamental Law, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2011, p. 241.

<sup>50</sup> Bánkúti, Halmai; Scheppele, 2011., p. 243.

unconstitutional laws, but also to review them in multiple stages of legislation. That resulted almost one third of all the laws to be viewed as unconstitutional in the early years.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the Court had a significant influence on human rights, and had the duty to ensure the separation of power besides controlling the constitutional limits of other state institutions.<sup>52</sup>

Mostly because of the Constitutional Court, which was also unusually strong from a European perspective, and due to the two-thirds-laws, the Hungarian Constitution after 1990 was stable and had the necessary system of checks and balances. The governance was until the fall of Péter Medgyessy in 2004 stable, and the institutions worked well to maintain the rule of law.

April 25, 2011, the day when the new Fundamental Law was accepted by the legislation, began a constitutional overhaul, and brought in lots of changes into the separation of power.

### **3.1 The Content of the New Fundamental Law**

Despite the radical changes, the new Fundamental law kept a continuity with the old one regarding to a number of subjects. The system of the unicameral Parliament remained, but the number of the representatives was drastically reduced from 386 to 199, however, they kept the right to elect the Prime Minister and the President for the next four and five years, so this part of the checks and balances remained intact. The Prime Minister remained also replaceable only by a constructive vote of no confidence. The Head of state has also only nominal and representative rights. His right to veto any laws can be done only once to be sent back to the legislation to be reviewed, or he can send it to the Constitutional Court for a legal review. These powers are very similar to the heads of state of other democratic states, but the nature of being elected by the legislation, creates the President a weaker legitimacy and respect, than in the Austrian model, where he is elected directly by the people. These fundamental subjects remained and are the same, as in many other European democracies, but if we continue our analysis, it will turn out to be, that the institutions became less powerful, and the whole picture of the democracy lost its quality.

The parliament received a wider range of right due to the increased number of cardinal laws, which require a two-thirds majority to pass them. This reflects on one of the most important aspects on the nature of the System of National Cooperation, which is to create many acts, which will be complicated to turn back by any future governments. New fields were to require

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<sup>51</sup> Bánkúti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 244.

<sup>52</sup> Sadurski, Wojciech: Constitutional Justice, East and West, Democratic Legitimacy and Constitutional Courts in Post-Communist Europe in a Comparative Perspective, The Haag, Springer Netherlands, 2003.p 226-253,

a supermajority to change even, if they do not in a western democracy. This helps to create a fundamentally different political entity. From 2012, cardinal laws protect taxation, family protection, and the structure of the pension system. The latter one creates concerns among critics, because of the flaws of the pension system, while the population of Hungary is shrinking, and is in decline. It prevents any future governments with a single majority to reform that field.

The radical changes in the separation of powers came with the new rights of the Constitutional Court. As I mentioned before, the Hungarian Court was very strong in comparison with other European models. The weakening of the Court had two main aspects: modifying its size and nominating the loyal candidates, and on the other hand, the new rules limited sharply the access to the Court.

Prior to the Fundamental Law, any citizen was allowed to challenge a law's constitutionality by the action popularis. This practice gave the Court a very serious tool to check the legislation and execution, even in a Western-European perspective. This system was replaced by a German model, where individuals are only able to challenge the laws if they effect them personally. Eliminating the right of the citizens for individual petitions weakened the institution in general.<sup>53</sup> Abstract posterior review is now only possible for one fourth of the members of the Parliament, the commissioner for fundamental rights, or the government. This right was taken away even from the President.<sup>54</sup> This is a radical change, because there are currently no other powers in the Hungarian Parliament having a bloc of one fourth except for the governing party, and they are very unlikely to review their own acts.

A second reduction of role are the new limits the reviewing on fiscal policies. After accepting the new constitution, a restriction of the Court's jurisdiction will disappear, when public debt drops below 50 per cent of the GDP, which is not likely in the foreseeable future.

Besides the Constitutional Court, the ordinary judiciary was also weakened by a new process of appointing and reassigning the judges. In comparison with the old system, where court judges were selected by their fellow judges, the new Constitution gave this right to the newly created National Judicial Office, including promoting, demoting and selecting the leaders of any courts. "According to the cardinal acts on the structure of the judiciary and the legal status

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<sup>53</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele: Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitution, in Krasztev, Peter & Van TIL, Jon: The Hungarian Patient. Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2015, p. 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 266.

of judges, the head of the National Judicial Office can select either any judge from among the top three candidates recommended by the judicial council of the court where the appointment would be made or none of them at all. She may then call for a new tender, so she still has substantial power. And, in any event, by the time these limits were placed on her powers, she had already replaced nearly 10% of the judiciary without this check. While formally, the president of the republic must sign off on all new judicial appointments, the decision of the head of the National Judicial Office alone is necessary in order to promote or demote a judge presently sitting anywhere in the judiciary. The president of the National Judicial Office needs to be elected for nine years by a two-third majority of the Parliament, and after her nine years, the successor also needs to have the same support. Until there is no candidate to have it, the old president is able to stay in office. This structure gives the government of Orbán the opportunity to support a loyal person to nominate the judges, so having FIDESZ a large influence on justice.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to these methods, the new measures reduced the retirement ages of judges from 70 to 62 years, forcing hundreds of them to retire already in 2012, when the Fundamental Law takes place, including court presidents and Supreme Court Judges. 274 judicial posts, 10 per cents of Hungary's were suddenly to be filled because of the early retirement. These numbers raised even more, because the government suspended every nominations for half a year because of the transition of the two systems, halting all appointments before the new Constitution takes place. The combination of both the lower age of retirement, and the suspension of the appointment procedure gave Orbán's party the opportunity, to appoint hundreds of judges selected by themselves. This phenomenon created the worries, that justice will not be objective and independent enough, especially, after the legislation with a two-thirds majority elected Tünde Handó, as the president of the National Judicial Office, whose husband, József Szájer is a close friend of Orbán, being a member of the European Parliament since 2004, and one of the chief authors of the constitution. While according to the official communication, these changes were necessary to improve the efficiency of courts, but they opened the way for the judges to be handpicked to favor the governing party.<sup>56</sup>

The Fundamental Law did not only weaken the constitutional law to affect the balance in the separation of power, but other institutions were to be changed. The new constitution reduced

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<sup>55</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 262-263.

<sup>56</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 263.

the right of the parliament to manage the budget. There was a new Budget-Council created, which had the right to veto any proposal by the legislation, in case it adds to the national debt in order to strengthen fiscal discipline. This means, the parliament needs to serve the political and economic ambitions of the Council, reducing citizen influence over crucial public spending measures. There is however an even more serious problem with the institution: its three members are elected on a long term. Two of them for 6, and the third one is for twelve years, meaning, that the council, whose members are politically handpicked, outlast any government, which could result serious consequences with such a significant influence over the budget process. It is so, because the Head of State has the right to dissolve the Parliament and call for midterm elections, if they do not manage to accept the budget by the 31<sup>st</sup> of March each year.<sup>57</sup> As long as Orbán keeps staying in office, this is a latent problem, but if the opposition would gain power, they would have a very strong resistance to even keep the country working.

The phenomenon of the Budget Council is not the only institution, helping to maintain such a stable political system. FIDESZ used its majority to appoint their own candidates and loyalists for a line of key institutions and positions, emptying democracy by limiting their independence. These are very similar to the already mentioned case, that they are mostly elected on longer term, than multiple election, allowing the actual governing party to maintain their power even, if they lose the majority. The prosecutor in chief and the President of the Supreme Court are nominated for nine, and the head of the State Audit office for twelve years. The members of the Media Council serve also for nine, the president of the National Bank for six years, but in addition to the already long term of all these key positions, they can remain in office, because they are only replaceable with the majority of two thirds. Theoretically, they can stay in office for years after the, until the parties make a consensus.

The length however is not the main problem with these institutions and key positions, but the people nominated to preside them. The supermajority made Orbán's appointments easier to avoid debated, consensus and deals between parties to appoint candidates to lead these institutions. Under the System of National Cooperation, the values shifted from experts to politicians, and loyalty became the new standard. The new people in these positions make the system working, for example by overlooking corruption, or financially fining oppositional parties by the state audit office. This phenomenon however does not connect so close to the

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<sup>57</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 263-264..

constitutional reforms, but was a parallel process to fill the institutions one by one, as soon as the mandate of the previous leaders expired, being one of the most important elements of Orbán's political system. In my personal opinion, this nature of the system is can inspire many other politicians to concentrate their power on such a high level. Due to the rules, everything is constitutional and legal, but the independence of the institutions is very much questionable, letting the leaders of the government free hand to change the fundamental of the political and economic system of Hungary. That is why, Róbert Puzsér, a Hungarian publicist named the system, as a "constitutional autocracy" in an open debate about the actual form of the current state, what I personally attended in 2018.

The president of the State Audit Office with practical experience was replaced by László Domokos, former MP of Fidesz, while the powers of his office were even extended. The State Audit Office has the authority to audit all of the local and national government agencies and publicly funded projects, and has the right to freeze state funding, if a local government failed to implement a financial management plan. It is worrisome, that the president of the Office can promote and demote auditors without any justification, or reassign them from one project to another, and him being a political loyalist, makes the situation to be worried of.<sup>58</sup> The Office's most infamous act was in the end of 2017, when they punished Jobbik, the then strongest party of the opposition for accepting illegal founding. The fine was exceptionally high, 660 million Hungarian Forints – about 1,8 million Euros –, which put the existence of the party in question on the eve of the election campaign of 2018. The former far-right party did not manage to appeal neither on the Constitutional Court or the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>59</sup>

The policy of constitutional reforms combined with handpicking loyal people for strategic institutions was similar in the fiscal policy as well, increasing the government's influence on that field. The politically motivated appointment of the President of the National Bank is not very surprising, but the new constitution increased the government's influence over its monetary policy. Act CCVIII of 2011 increased the numbers of vice-president of the institution from two to three, and also gave the prime minister the right to choose them

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<sup>58</sup> Bánkuti, Halmai, Scheppele, 2011., p. 267.

<sup>59</sup> : 444: Hiába ment Strasbourgba a Jobbik a 660 milliós gigabüntetése miatt, 444, 2020.

<https://444.hu/2020/06/22/hiaba-ment-strasbourgba-a-jobbik-a-660-millios-gigabuntetese-miatt>, (last accessed on 17.07.2020)



directly, changing the old method of choosing them by the president of the National Bank.

The next institution in line fundamentally changed by the new constitution was the Ombudsman. Three of its four main offices – human rights, minority protection and future generations – were united into one ombudsman, while data protection and the freedom of information was led to a separate agency. Even the ombudsperson of that field was forced to leave his office, and the new person responsible in the new agency was nominated by Viktor Orbán for nine years, which is long enough to outlast multiple election cycles. In addition, the government had become the right to appoint a commissioner to hold the fields of the Ombudsman together, making it dependent on one person and less autonomous.<sup>60</sup> Putting this institution under direct political control can be a very dangerous situation. In Orbán's system, where the rights of minorities, immigrants and other groups are attacked by political motivations, they can support that policy legally. On the other hand, putting the freedom of information and data protection under a separate agency led by also direct political control, are also worrisome in the age of digitalization, when the concerns over data protection are drastically increasing in the whole world.

In my opinion, the Fundamental Law of Hungary is not a democratic constitution. This was already the case right after the first steps, when they announced it. In a western democracy, it cannot happen to announce such a groundbreaking measure without any debates and in such a short time. It is a fact, that the Fundamental Law has had its flaws, that is why it had been changed or amended multiple times, even shortly after it took place in early 2012. A truly democratic constitution guarantees the system of checks and balances, encourages political pluralism, and maintains the continuity for future democratic elections. In the case of Hungary after 2010-2012, still can be said in a legal point of view, but on the other hand, the power of democracy had significantly been reduced. In the meantime, the power became even more centralized, the checks and balance meanings despite still having a role – nominally. Orbán with such a large-scale victory in 2010 had the possibility to change the constitution, and he did so. But after already two years into his second term, it was clear, that he did use his supermajority to expand his power. The Fundamental Law reduced the separation of powers and created a system of cardinal laws, helping to establish a new political system. This was

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<sup>60</sup> Szabó, Máté: Az új ombudsmani szervezet és eljárási modell tanulságai, in Berkes, Lilla & Csink, Lóránt: Az Ombudsmani rendszer és az alkotmánybíráskodás átalakulása – Tanulmányok az alapjogvédelem köréből, Budapest, Pázmány Press, 2015. p. 11-12.

however not enough for that, but combining the constitutional reforms with the nomination of loyalists to lead strategic institutions, did create the new order. This large-scale expansion of power is strong enough to maintain the political grip on the country's politics, even if Orbán would lose an election. In theory, the whole economic and political life would be blocked, until a favorable party would win an election. From the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2012, Hungary cannot be stated as a truly democratic country. Legally it is still one of them, but in practice, it is already something else. Probably a symbolic act, but the Fundamental law removed the word "Republic" from the country's name. The new structure of power was implemented in 2012, but transformation was still far from over.

## **3.2 Preserving Power due to Rewriting the Rules**

The constitutional reforms fundamentally changed the structure of the Hungarian state. We can say with consensus, that the Third Republic of Hungary, which was founded in 1989-1990, had an end with the Fundamental Law taking place on January 1. 2012. A new era had started under the name of "System of National Cooperation", which will most likely be remembered that way in the future history books comparing it to the era within the two world wars, and the communist system.

As I wrote in the previous subchapter, the combined effect of constitutional reforms and the appointment of loyalists to lead strategic institutions were crucial to spread the political influence of FIDESZ, and to expand their power and influence to an as wide range, as possible, helping to preserve the system, even in case of losing the elections, which is right now, not very possible. The power of the governing party is unquestionable because of their interests in media, the weakening of the opposition, and last, but probably most importantly, the changes in the election system, a system, which was adjusted to the supermajority of Orbán's party, which was able to maintain its number of mandates with receiving less per cents of the votes in 2014 and 2018.

Instead of small adjustments, the system was drastically changed in many areas, including giving vote to right for a wider range of people, the number of districts and their borders. Most importantly, the ratio between party lists and personal districts shifted towards the importance of the latter ones, where a relative majority is enough for a candidate to win a mandate, representing the will of fewer people, making the system less proportional. The changes made the Hungarian electoral system closer to the British model, than to the Austrian one disfiguring

the nationwide party preferences. The new law has many changes favoring the all-time most popular party, as well as the all-time right-wing parties. These changes helped FIDESZ to preserve his influence, and to be less replaceable on a single elections. In this chapter, I am going to analyze the elements of the new electoral system, and how it helps Orbán to preserve his power.

As I described the process over the acceptance of the Fundamental law, the debate over the new electoral system took also place mostly among the rows of the governing parties, however, the public opinion was constantly monitored by publishing some parts of the plans. On the other hand, we have no accurate information about the process itself. Measures with such high importance need a social consensus and debate to gain legitimacy, and in the case of the electoral system, it could theoretically lead to question the results.<sup>61</sup>

As always, there is the question of right to vote, and there were significant changes in this field. One of the very first laws passed under the new government was granting the dual-citizenship for the ethnic Hungarians, who can prove his Hungarian ancestry. Outside of the country, there are approximately millions of ethnic Hungarians throughout the world, most of them live in the neighboring countries. Their easy access to the citizenship went along with gaining the voting right without a permanent address in Hungary. A measure, which already reflected to the nature of NER: it was not made ready by a technical debate, so any analyses can be done post facto. The citizenship act paved the way for a preferential naturalization of Hungarians living in the neighboring countries after the consequences of the Trianon treaty. The new act allowed non-Hungarian citizens to gain the citizenship, if his or her ascendant was a Hungarian citizen, or proves his knowledge in the language. There is no longer any exam of constitutional knowledge or permanent residence required. These Hungarians live mostly in the neighboring countries, but the case of their citizenship was not equally easy. In Romania for example, there were no problems, because their constitution recognizes dual-citizenship in order to promote it for Romanians living in Moldova for example. The case however was different in Ukraine, because dual nationality is prohibited there. Hungarians living in Ukraine consequently could lose their Ukrainian citizenship upon the acquisition of the Hungarian one. The case was even different in Slovakia, where the government used to recognize dual-nationality before 2010, but they suddenly changed their practice and started

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<sup>61</sup> László, Róbert: *Félúton a választási reform*, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2012., p.3.

to refuse it. In the summer of 2010, the Slovakian parliament accepted the act, that a person loses his/her Slovakian citizenship, after voluntarily acquire another one. The only exceptions are marriage and birth.<sup>62</sup>

As I mentioned, the dual citizenship was not only a symbolic measure, but the ethnic Hungarians, who applied it, were automatically granted the right to vote too. This made and makes even today many to worry, because FIDESZ made itself very popular among the new citizens, by simply giving them the right, while the left side campaigned against their dual-citizenship in a referendum in 2014, creating a long-lasting tension between the two parts of the nation. According to Róbert László from the Hungarian think-tank, Political Capital Institute, it was a well-planned action by FIDESZ. In opposition with the Socialist Party, they understood the feelings of the ethnic Hungarians, that belonging to the nation is very important for them, that is why they are grateful for the new rights.<sup>63</sup>

The new citizens without a permanent residence in Hungary cannot vote for personal candidates, only for the lists of the parties, and after a pre-registration, they can request to receive the voting papers by post, which need to be filled and sent back to the authorities in Budapest. On the other hand, the citizens living, or staying abroad on the day of the elections, but having a permanent residence in their home country need to vote on the embassies or consulates, often needing to travel long distances to vote, which creates an inequality between the two groups of Hungarian citizens living abroad, in favor of the ones in the neighboring countries without residence. The other difference between them is already briefly mentioned: the new citizens in mostly Romania and Serbia are thankful for getting the citizenship, and they strongly support Orbán, while the case among the Hungarians living in for Example, Western Europe is not that one sided. They can be much more critical towards the government, and dissatisfied with their situations, which can be a motivation to leave the country.

According to the official database of the National Election Office of Hungary, 122 638 of the 128 429 valid postal votes supported Viktor Orbán and Fidesz in the election of 2014, when

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<sup>62</sup> Ganczer, Mónika: Hungarians outside Hungary – The twisted story of dual-citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe. Verfassungsblog, 2014.

<https://verfassungsblog.de/hungarians-outside-hungary-twisted-story-dual-citizenship-central-eastern-europe/>, (last accessed on 18.07.2020.)

<sup>63</sup> Euronews: Hungarians in Limbo: The Voting Rights of Romanians in Hungary, Euronews, 2018.

<http://www.euroviews.eu/2018/2018/04/06/hungarians-in-limbo-the-voting-rights-of-romanians-in-hungary/> (last accessed on 20.07.2020.)

the new system debuted. This means a support of 95 per cent among communities in mostly the neighboring countries. This ratio was similar in 2018, when 216 561 out of 225 471 votes supported Orbán, which means 96 per cent. On the other hand, 51 854 people voted on embassies or consulates. Unfortunately, there are no official results of them, only from the European elections of 2019, when 7222 out of 17749 votes supported Fidesz.<sup>64</sup>

These data is enough to show the difference between the political orientations of the two groups of Hungarians voting from abroad, and giving the right to vote for people, who would most likely support Orbán's party, was polarizing a factor influencing the elections by people, who do not live and pay taxes in the country, and the consequences of their votes will not have an effect on them. In 2014, this support earned a mandate for FIDESZ, which was the decisive one over gaining the majority of two thirds in the second time in the row.

By extending the range of citizens allowed to vote, is not the only, but one of the important factors of the changes in the electoral system. It cannot decide an election on its own, but can be the edge of the sword in very tight results by the votes of around 100-200 000 people. Other changes were much more significant, which forced the parties of the opposition to cooperate to even challenge the power of the government.

As I wrote before, the hybrid nature of the electoral system in general remained intact, the mandates of the parliament are elected both from the party lists and from the individual districts, however the weight shifted towards the latter one. In the first step, the size of the legislation was reduced from 386 to 199, 106 of them are elected individually. This number was in the beginning lower, counting with only 90 districts, but the size of Budapest and the 19 counties did not allow to create districts with similar populations without crossing the borders of administrative units. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011, the bill about 106 districts was presented by János Lázár, MP of FIDESZ, which was not changed anymore until the final vote on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, the same year. The smaller number of individual electoral districts mean, that each of them represent an average of 76 000 people instead of 46 000 from the previous system, theoretically. In practice, there were massive inequalities among the populations: the Venice Commission states, that the difference between the districts cannot be higher, than 10%, and absolutely lower, than 15%, but in Hungary, this number was higher in 91 of them. This was unconstitutional, and after the petition of the Political Capital Institute

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<sup>64</sup> National Election Office Of Hungary: Results of the elections of 2014, [www.valasztas.hu](http://www.valasztas.hu)  
<https://static.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv14/szavossz/hu/levjkw.html>, (last accessed on 19.09.2020.)

to the Constitutional Court for review, the result was the electoral map to be removed and the right to create the voting districts was given to the actual governments. The new borders of the 106 units were drawn by looking the less strict, 15% margin of the Venice Commission. However the population between them can change due to the inner migration, the new order obligates the legislation to make adjustments if the rate is higher, than 20%.<sup>65</sup>

The problem with the new layout of the electoral units is, that they need a majority of two thirds to be modified in the future. The case of the electoral districts belongs to the same category. The picture of the basically unchangeable districts are very threatening. There are examples from the other end of the spectrum, like the United Kingdom, where an independent institution, called the Boundary Commissions is responsible to review the districts and to adjust them by very strict conditions. A similar model was most likely never an option in Orbán's Hungary. The right to adjust them is in political hands. If the necessary majority is there, the districts can be changed without any control for the current political motivations.<sup>66</sup>

This phenomenon strengthens the system of Orbán by having more and more rights within the hands directly in the government and the parliament, or practice it indirectly by party loyalists handpicked to lead strategic institutions. Although, the complicated way to modify the districts is not the only problem with them. If we take a closer analyzes on them, there are clear signs of the political motivations behind their borders. The birth of the current concept was already shady and undocumented. Despite being the planned changes of the electoral system published, the new borders of the personal districts were not, until the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011, when János Lázár presented the bill to the legislation for acceptance. The fact, that the procedure was not transparent, and only an unknown circle knew about the plans, creates the worries of gerrymandering. This cannot be proven on a 100% accuracy, but the closer analysis on the borders, and even the lack of transparent negotiations seem to justify the suspicion. The politicians of FIDESZ most likely used the databases of the previous elections. The most suspicious adjustments are in Budapest, where the neighborhoods known to traditionally vote for the Socialist Party were split by borders, and other leftist parts of the city were united, probably to reduce the number of potential mandates won by the opposition. Outside of the capital city, there are multiple districts, where traditional rightist towns were added to former swinging districts raising the chances of Orbán's win. For example, the district of the town of

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<sup>65</sup> László, Róbert: Új választókerületi térkép, in Félúton a választási reform, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2012, p. 4-5.

<sup>66</sup> László, 2012., p.8.

Várpalota was unified with the region of Upper-Balaton, or the traditionally rightist voters in the city of Debrecen decide over three mandates, while the usually leftist city of Miskolc over two ones, while its population is only lower about 50 000 people, than the formers. The areas, where the left-wing is traditionally strong, the districts usually have a higher population, resulting, that the all-time right-wing parties need less votes to win a mandate, than the left one. According to a calculating model of Political Capital Institute from 2012, the new borders and number of mandates would result 58 mandates for FIDESZ, and only 48 for the Socialist Party at a theoretic equality among their popularity. However gerrymandering is known to compensate only in the case of tight results. According to models and calculations, the new borders are enough to help FIDESZ to compensate a disadvantage of 2 per cents.<sup>67</sup>

The combination of the new elements makes the electoral system a not purely fair one. The more weight of personal districts, and their new borders not just give an advantage to the all-time right-wing parties, but also for the all-time ones with the relative highest popularity, and the one being the current governing party. These are already enough not just to decide an election, but to help gaining a supermajority and to seize power for a long term, making possible to create a new political order. These changes help the current government to be unchallenged on an election and to preserve their power quite easily. The whole electoral system works in the principle of helping the relative larger party to have an absolute majority.

There are other factors helping the relative most popular party as well. In 2014, the heavier weight of the individual mandates helped FIDESZ to retain two thirds of the mandates despite receiving less votes on the party lists, then before. The case was also partly caused not just by the districts, but also by the compensation of the winning candidate, and the removal of the second turn-round of the electoral system in general.

The second turn-round was a measure which was not easy to analyze and understand. The presence of that does not actually deepen the democratic values in the given countries, and even for Orbán, that institution made it possible to win the elections in 1998, because it gave him time to make a coalition-deal before the second round, and in 2002, it also almost helped him to turn the results around. However, the structure of the party, and the landscape of the Hungarian politics changed significantly. The doctrine of the central space of power- which will be described in a later chapter – makes the system with only one turn-round logical, but the emergence of the right-wing party of Jobbik was an argument for the two turns. The

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<sup>67</sup> László, 2012. p. 10.

decisive factor for the single-round system could have been the weakened and polarized state of the traditional left wing, and the second vote would give them more space to navigate, but it also fits into the general structure of the new electoral system: it helps the party with the relative highest popularity to gain an absolute majority. This factor was strengthened by the unique element of the compensation for the winner. The new rules kept the list of fragmentary votes, but instead of compensating only the party, whose candidate lost in the individual district, the winner's party also receives fragmentary votes. In this way, the compensation even strengthens the winner further. The best example, if an individual candidate gets 11000 votes, but the second most popular one only 10000, it means, only 10000 votes are enough for the mandate, and the rest of the 1000 of the rest will be added to the fragmentary lists. The phenomenon creates a paradox situation, because instead of compensating the party losing in a given individual district, the winner's party receives an even higher boost.<sup>68</sup>

The analyzed aspects of the new electoral system have many flaws, which could be reconsidered, but as I mentioned before, this is against the interests of the government. Despite of that, I will make an attempt to explain, what could be changed to make the system more democratic.

However, the new rules help the relative most popular party to gain even a supermajority, it was not necessary according to the results of all of the elections since 1990. The winning party had never been in question, so there are no precedents justifying the move of the electoral system towards the direction of overrepresentation of the most popular party, so the reasons behind that must be politically motivated, and if we see the changes in the past 10 years under Orbán from a wider perspective, the statement can be true. Although, the larger ratio of the mandates coming from individual districts, the overrepresentation of the winning party due to fragmentary votes and the removal of the second round-turn does not make the changes illegitimate. The changes favor strongly to FIDESZ, but if the political landscape changes significantly, and another party would take over their relative higher popularity, they would also have the given advantages. The current power wrote the rules under the current situation and to favor themselves, but theoretically, other parties also have the opportunity to enjoy them. That is another topic, how Orbán is able to maintain the status quo.

If we compare the two major electoral principles, we cannot make any statements about the

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<sup>68</sup> László, Róbert: Két választási rendszer között, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2015, p.6.



systems using party lists are more democratic against the ones using the principle of majority. Both of them are legitimate methods to convert votes to mandates, making the Hungarian system a regular one from a technical point of view. The only worrying element is the compensation of the individual winners by fragmentary votes, but the change in that field is not in the sight, because it's against the interests of FIDESZ, and they will not change that, until their positions are by far the strongest among all the other parties.<sup>69</sup>

The other major weakness of the new system is the already analyzed map of the individual electoral districts. However, the borders are most likely gerrymandered to favor the all-time right-wing parties, currently FIDESZ, but the bigger problem is the complicated method to change them in case of the ratio of their populations changes. Due to inner migration, this is a real scenerio, which could make a future election unconstitutional.

As I explained before, this could have been prevented by the foundation of an independent institution responsible for supervising the electoral districts, similarly to Boundary Commission the United Kingdom, instead of politicians practicing that right. The fact, that two thirds are needed to change that, a political consensus in such a sensitive topic is not likely, making the parliament unable to react to the demographic changes within the country. Because of the strong migration is going on in the recent years, the future need for adjustments is likely, but being the right for that in the hands of the government with no control, the worries for another turn of gerrymandering will stay there, and the borders will not only adjusted, where they are necessarily needed, but in in other regions as well, giving further advantages to the current governing force.<sup>70</sup>

After all the analyses we made about the electoral system, it is clear, that Orbán's government is strongly favored, making it easier to stay in position with a decisive majority over multiple cycles, and these are only the administrative measures featuring in the new electoral system. There are however even more aspects pushing the opposition into a more difficult situation. The overwhelming media presence in favor of FIDESZ disfiguring the equal chances of all of the sides will be analyzed in the next chapter, but besides that, there are other aspects making the coverages legally differed: the changes in the constitution had influence on the market of political adverts in the media. The political commercials of the government, and other parties were separated, more specifically in the sector of commercial media. The all-time governing

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<sup>69</sup> László, 2015, p.6.

<sup>70</sup> László, 2015., p.10.

party is allowed to create “informing” campaigns within and outside of election campaigns, but other parties have no right to do so. The original plans were to ban any political contents on the broadcast of commercial televisions and radio stations, however the Constitutional Justice, and later the Commission of Europe forced it to be corrected. The government did so, but the most important part of the measure remained the same despite of the legal adjustments: broadcasting political slots in commercial media has to be free, making the given TV and radio stations not interested in that field. The motivations behind that was probably to make the reach of apolitical voters more difficult.<sup>71</sup> This is logical in the point of view of Viktor Orbán: FIDESZ’ supporting base is very active and stable. That is why the governing party aims to keep the already existing base of the votes together, instead of attempting to widen this layer. This is currently – according to the polarized state of the Hungarian society – enough for them to stay in office, even with supermajority. Besides limiting the opposition’s appearance on commercial media, there were regulations in the state one as well: opposition parties need to share 470 minutes of coverage annually.<sup>50</sup> But on the other hand, the all-time government has no regulations. Even outside of election campaigns, the understanding of “informing” is a very grey area, which does not prevent Orbán’s party to do constant campaigns for years. It is not necessary to say, this measure significantly restrict the competition between the political actors, because one of the privileged side has a drastically higher volume of media coverage.

A solution would probably be to treat the governing and the oppositional parties as equal, and not to ban one if the side’s adverts, where the other one is allowed to create campaigns constantly. The commercial platform, where most of the people could be reached, should be made interested in political content again. The lack of that would result an apolitical society, which would mean, that the governing, or in wider scale, the whole political elite would have even less control.

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<sup>71</sup> László, 2015., p.17-18.

## 4 The Central Space of Power

I have written lots of drastic changes in the electoral system favoring Orbán's party to maintain his power. The new rules combined with handpicking own loyalists to lead critical institutions, and changing the constitutions are enough to establish a new political order, which is much more, than governing for one-two terms, and it cannot be easily redone by any oppositional coalition by defeating Orbán in an election in 2022, or 2026, because the institutions led by party loyalists would be able to block any attempts to change the order, not mentioning the exceptional infrastructure and hinterland behind FIDESZ. This is however, a theoretic scenario, because the analyzed electoral system, which was perfectly written for FIDESZ to preserve their power, makes it very complicated for the opposition to defeat the current political order. The situation combined with the precisely composed balancing policy of Orbán made any significant changes in the foreseeable future unexpected.

The already analyzed measures are all responsible for the one-sided situation, but the nature of the system combined with the doctrine of "central space of power" are the ones putting the other parties into a very difficult state: because the electoral system favors the actual largest party, it is in general suitable for a two-party system, and until Orbán's party has such an advantage in case of resources, money and media coverage, they will remain the relative strongest party. The opposition in general could be bigger, but because of the fact, that it's polarized between multiple parties with a wide range of ideologies, FIDESZ's relative strongest position will be strengthened by the rules of the electoral system makes them into a force with a constant supermajority.

As this thesis was being written in 2021, there were held two national elections under the new electoral system. The governing party won the two thirds of the mandates at both of them. This is undoubtedly the result of the new rules of the elections: however more, than half of the mandates are won by individual districts, the party lists still tell us relevant information about the actual popularity of them. In 2014, FIDESZ' list won 44,87 per cents of the votes, while four years later, in 2018, the ratio was 49,27 per cents, the rest of the 51 was divided between four parties alongside the high participation of 70,22 per cents, meaning, that none of the sides have voters staying away, as protesting.<sup>72</sup>

These results mean, that Orbán's advantage is groundbreaking, without the changes in the

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<sup>72</sup> National Election Office of Hungary: Results of the elections on 2018., <https://www.valasztas.hu/ogy2018>, (last accessed on 16.09.2020.)

electoral system, his party would have won only by relative majority at both of the times, and without that, their current supermajority would not have been possible. The new rules of the elections treats the sides as two large groups: FIDESZ, and the opposition.

Because of the higher ratio of individual mandates with adjusted borders of the districts, the polarized opposition has a very difficult task to break the system. There is a similar rule in the presidential elections of France, but the institution of the second turn-round serves as a balancing force, so the parties can make deals between the rounds to cooperate in support of a common candidate, successfully avoiding the election of extremist candidates, and the winners legitimacy could be accepted more. It is very much a democratic practice. On the other hand in the case of Hungary, the removal of the second round-turn means, that the relative largest party has a significant advantage of winning most of the individual mandates, securing an even larger majority, than the popularity would suggest according to the party lists.

In a system designed to support one of the sides so strongly, the opposition has only chance, if all the major parties nominate only one candidates in each of the districts, to challenge FIDESZ's nominee in one on one. In theory it can work, but the opposition is split between parties on very different sides of the political pallet, with different values and views. To nominate only one candidate to challenge the governing party, liberal, green, socialist, and former far-right politicians need to agree in a long series of negotiations. This is, what Orbán's one of the most important doctrine in domestic politics is about: maintaining the "central space of power", which means, there need to be parties on both of the political right and the left of FIDESZ, who are unable to cooperate under the current electoral system, resulting his party to be unchallenged on a long term. Until it is there, technically, due to the uneven distribution of resources and media coverage, only Orbán's party is able to win all of the elections, and the status quo is conserved for years ahead.

The former anti-Semitic and far-right party, called Jobbik, and the Socialists, Gyurcsány's party would all need to cooperate in the election campaigns, which is a very difficult task not because of the different views of the parties, but because of their voters too. There is the risk of the opposition losing a visible amount of votes by cooperating with others, because they would be discredited by their voting base. Moreover, the media empire of FIDESZ also has an easy task to discredit the whole opposition.

According to Csaba Tóth and Gábor Török, two political analysts in Hungary, the current condition of the parties form a central party-system. After the first democratic elections in 1990, the relation of the parties were to be described as a constant concentration, what became a system of two blocks by the 2000's. This relation ended in 2010 by after the fall of the left-

wing and the groundbreaking win of Orbán. Then, there were still three alternatives for the future of the party system: one of them was the return of the two blocks, the central domination of FIDESZ, and the less likely rivalry on the right-wing between Orbán's formation and the then radically nationalist Jobbik.<sup>73</sup>

In 2012, the two blocks of parties were still a realistic scenario, because the government's popularity –similarly to the previous parliamentary terms – shrank, and the support of the different left-wing formations were higher, than the governing party's, but the process was reversed by 2013, and the national elections a year after made it clear, that the dominance of one central party will be the reality for the foreseeable future. One of the reasons were Jobbik, who started to move towards a more central position, softening the radical rhetoric, while the Socialists and the other smaller formations on the Left took the voters away from each other, and the support of the Left Wing in general went below one third for the first time after the democratic transition.

As described, by 2014, the popularity of the parties on its own created the new dominant order, the combination of the phenomenon with the constitutional and electoral reform helped to preserve the status quo, and a stable political order for at least the mid-term future was born. After 8 years into this system, we can admit, that the centralized power of Viktor Orbán is more stable, than ever.

I am making an attempt to describe the major aspects of the central space of power, and the possible end of that doctrine, according to the scholar written after the elections of 2014 by Tóth and Török, see under footnote 72. The condition of the parties can be described under five main points.

#### 1. One Party has realistic change to lead the government

Since 2010, all of the election results surprised nobody in the country. The support of the parties of the opposition did not taken FIDESZ' dominance. Unlike in a two-party system, like in the United Kingdom, where there are at least two competing parties, or the multi-party systems, where there are multiple possible scenerios after the elections, in Hungary, the only question before them was the extent of Orbán's victory. The stake of the elections can still be high, but it could make the society apolitical. Although, there had always been elections where the winner's person was not questioned, for example CDU/CSU in the past 15 years in

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<sup>73</sup> Török, Gábor – Tóth, Csaba: Az új pártrendszer, in Tóth, István György & Kolosi, Tamás: Társadalmi riport 2014, Budapest, TÁRKI, 2014. p. 512.

Germany, or the 2008 Presidential election in the United States, the biggest difference is that the winning party does not strengthen the process by administrative tools. In the case of the System of National Cooperation these are also not necessary, because FIDESZ would be the most dominant political formation, even without constitutional reforms.

## 2. The central party has the support of the median voters.

The dominant party does not occupy a side of the traditional –left-right political scale, but attempts to keep the opposition on both of the wings. According to the authors, there are also countries in Europe where one of the parties is more dominant, for example the Social Democratic ones in Scandinavia, or SMER in Slovakia, but unlike in Hungary, they are successful after monopolizing one of the wings, so they do not have significant competition on their own wings. Because of that, they are not necessarily median parties. In the case of Hungary, there are multiple leftist and liberal coalitions, and there is the formerly anti-Semitic and extremist party Jobbik on the other wing. Both of the forces of the opposition have a significant presence, but none of them are in the position to be a potential election-winner to replace the current government. Viktor Orbán was able to navigate in the middle in this unique political landscape.

## 3. The difficultness of creating a majority on the wings

The central party does not necessarily need to be the strongest one by getting more votes, than the opposition in general. The secret of the policy written under the previous point, is to balance between the two blocks of the opposition, and not to let any of them to gain too much power, or to lose too much of that. As long as the central dominant party is the relative most popular one, the opposition will not be able to create a majority on the wings, and the other parties are not able to cooperate or to form any coalitions because of the ideological differences. Technically, Jobbik would have a potential ally in the government, more than in any other parties on the left.

However, the more and more rightist acts and rhetorics of Orbán are, the more he pushes his party towards the far-right. Gábor Vona, the former president of Jobbik realized the limits of being an extremist party, and has positioned his political formations more towards a centrist, conservative people's party. There have been signs of a possible cooperation between Jobbik, and the parties on the left wing to nominate common candidates against FIDESZ, endangering anecdote of the current system.

## 4. A majoritarian electoral system is a necessity

My chapter about the changes in the electoral system underlines this point. In a central party-system it is a possibility, that the dominant formation does not have an absolute majority. In fact, this condition is only possible, if the electoral system prefers the principle of majority. That is why the changes in the electoral rules were designed that way. Individual candidates win over half of the mandates in one turn-round, it is already enough to maintain the dominance. As I mentioned before, Orbán would be in the dominant position without the changes on a short to mid-term range, but to maintain it, the reforms were needed to be done. The system allows the candidate to win the mandate until the point, when the oppositional parties are separately weaker. If the left wing and Jobbik each has a popularity in a district of 30%, while FIDESZ's candidate has 35%, this is enough for the place in the legislation, while representing only the will of a little more than a third of the population in the given district. This could not happen in a proportional system. Without the changes, FIDESZ would have needed to start coalitional negotiations in 2014 instead of winning with a supermajority. The polarized opposition is only able to challenge the governing party by nominating one common candidate, but the ideological differences make a consensus a more difficult task, not mentioning the possibility of losing voters by cooperating with other parties. These potential lost voters could go to the base of FIDESZ, or abstain from voting.

#### 5. A central party has the administrative tools

The first parts of the thesis also underlines this statement. If the all-time political elite consolidates his position by excluding the others from the political space, it can be called as political cartel. This can be done by multiple tools, for example making the founding of new parties more bureaucratic and complicated, regulating political adverts and campaigns, and possibly the most important one, by transforming the market of the media. In a central-party system however, only the dominant party in governing position possesses these tools instead of the political elite in general.

In the current Hungarian system, I can mention a high number of examples for these cartel-tools, like the oppositional parties having five minutes of air-time in the national television to share their program before the parliamentary elections of 2018. There is a significant factor, where the Hungarian system is different to other political cartels: instead of being victims the

acteurs willing to break into the politic scene, in Hungary, Viktor Orbán is the only person deciding, whom to exclude from the political arena, and whom he gives more space.<sup>74</sup>

The central party-system came into existence and was consolidated by both the preferences of the voters, and as the result of a very much of conscious political strategy. According to the above mentioned points, it can be stated, that the current domination of a central party did not just came into life, but FIDESZ knowingly formed it and is constantly attempting to maintain this status quo to cement its power.<sup>75</sup>

There has been a question in the recent years, if the classic left-right split is still relevant. However FIDESZ took over a central position within the political landscape, still remained a right-wing party. First, as a conservative one, later around 2015 went further towards the far-right positions, but that will be only relevant in a later part of the thesis. In my opinion, despite the modern formations trying to leave the classic orientation behind and to build a stronger centrist role, the left-right comparison still must not be ignored, especially in the former socialist countries of the CEE region. This opinion is underline by the study of András Körösenyi in 1993, who defends the classic line between political parties. He stated, that, it still orientates both the parties and the voters. Apolitically active citizen is able to rank himself in a coordinate system, and he can identify the parties in the same dimension, choosing the closest one to his values. The left-right line also dictates the conditions of coalitional negotiations. However in Hungary, the comparison has a different understanding in the collective minds of the voters, than in the democracies of Western-Europe.<sup>76</sup>

This statement is still relevant under the current conditions of Orbán's new order. The new dominant party-system did not affect the left-right division, and the new parties on the horizon settled in the current system instead of creating new dimensions, although, there were promising attempts, no formation has been able to overcome the status quo. Orbán understands it well, that the society is thinking in the left-right division. These statements are underline by various political research institutes.

According to the study of Török and Tóth, the whole party-system moved to the right with FIDESZ and Jobbik. The latter one is closer to the far-right, but the difference is not very significant. This phenomenon has of course a social background, since the Hungarian society

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<sup>74</sup> Török-Tóth, 2014. p. 517-519.

<sup>75</sup> Török-Tóth, 2014, p. 519.

<sup>76</sup> Körösenyi, András: Bal és jobb. Az európai és a magyar pártpaletta, Budapest, Politikatudományi szemle, 1993, vol 3, p. 94-109.



in general became more right wing orientated after 1989. The median voter and average voters are both on that side. These researches shows, that the majority of the Hungarians still looks the political landscape from the classical point of view. It is underlined by the secondary preferences of people: despite being FIDESZ and Jobbik being political opponents, their supporters are much closer to each other than to any of the formations of the left. Around 20 percent of their supporters would pick the other party as a secondary option. This ratio is similar on the left between the Socialist Party and Democratic Coalition (Gyurcsány's formation split from the Socialists). This data proves the relevance of the left-right division around which the Hungarian party-system and society could be described, but a very important topic is, that this relation is understood differently, than in Western-Europe. Instead of economic aspects, this division mostly mean ideological and rhetorical differences.<sup>77</sup>

As Török and Tóth wrote in 2014, their analysis took the political debate of that year as an example, but is perfectly able to prove specific nature of the left-right division. There are aspects when the rhetoric is similar to the western trends, for example the Left supports the distribution of social benefits on a basis of material needs, while on the other hand FIDESZ and Jobbik stood for laying down conditions for them, for example working and schooling. The debates over the personal income tax also confirm this pattern: MSZP supported a progressive tax-rate, while FIDESZ pushed the simple one, which is a classical left-right debate.

However, the governing party's main economic measures are typically not right-wing actions, for example reducing the overhead expenses, which was a main campaigning slogan in 2014, and the regulation of commercial banks. These typically leftist actions made the government to behave, like a real force on the center, which did put the opposition into a difficult situation. The Socialists were pushed out of their comfort-zone, and needed to support classical rightist ideas, for example strengthening the market. On the other hand, they also tried to overtake the government from the left, which made them inconsistent and unable to present a stable and consequent vision for economic and social benefits. On the right-wing, Jobbik managed to become more coherent in their policy, because in general, they presented similar ideas as FIDESZ. These examples underline the statement, that the left-right division in Hungary does not necessarily mean economic policies, although by analyzing the party-system from an ideological-cultural perspective, the standpoint of the parties is much sharper and more

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<sup>77</sup> Török-Tóth, 2014, p. 522-523.

consequent. For example, the rights of minorities, the adjudication of liberal democracies, or the questions about the European Union can place the formations to either side of the sharp line. The sides divided by this line could be called the progressive-traditionalist, or the authoritarian-libertarian axis. Although extend of the radicalism and the relative support has changed in the past three decades, the most significant features of the sides remained intact:

The cultural left has represented the tolerance towards the different groups of minorities (ethnic, sexual, religious), separation of power and secularism, while the all-time right-wing focused its policy towards standing up for national interests and identity, supporting churches, and they traditionally have closer ties to the ethnic Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries. These aspects played a role in the debates over their voting right, the relation to the socialist and nationalist past, the state of the minorities, and even the discussions about the Hungarian coat of arms in the early nineties. This cultural-ideological dimension allows us to describe the Hungarian party-system, for example Jobbik always campaigned for more radical acts than FIDESZ. These statements are underlined by the main critiques of the left-wing opposition and the international political community: they are mostly about ideological topics instead of economic policies.<sup>78</sup>

As I wrote before, this central space of power has its origins in both legal and administrative aspects, and from voting preferences as well. The political environment, and the dominance of FIDESZ in every way of the publicity makes it very challenging to change the status quo. The voting base of the governing party is very homogenous and stable, while the opposition is very much polarized, and due to the one-sided environment, they are not able to increase the numbers of their supporters. In addition to this already unfavorable situation, the opposition has failed in the past ten years to create a convincing alternative vision of the system.

The Socialists and the Left received a historical defeat in 2010, when their popularity went below 20 per cents for the first time after the democratic transition, and their all-time partner in coalition, the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) failed to get 5 per cents, and were. In 2010, LMP stepped into their place, whose rhetoric is to create a centrist force to offer an alternative of the former duopoly of the two large parties. It soon turned out, that they will not be able to gain a large support with their centrist-green policy. This problem was strengthened by several

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<sup>78</sup> Török-Tóth, 2014, p. 525-526.

splits and too many personal changes within their lines.

Since then, the Socialists failed to offer any alternatives to replace FIDESZ, and their focus was positioned to stay the leading force in the opposition and on the Left in particular. This power play pushed them into a downward spiral, which led to a split: the platform led by the former Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány quit to found his own party, the Democratic Coalition (DK) in 2011. This was the point, when the status quo of the Left ended, because the various formations focused their resources to compete with each other instead of creating an alternative vision against FIDESZ.

MSZP did manage to maintain its leading position, when the parties held a pre-election to choose their common candidate for the elections of 2014. This was necessary because of the new electoral system, and the leftist formations cooperated for the establishment of a common party list to maximize their votes against the government. This however was a double-edged sword, which put them into a lose-lose situation: all of the new political entities needed to create their own image the voters can identify with, while the system forces them to work together with their rivals which has the danger for smaller formations to be faded out by more known sides, causing them to become meaningless. Besides the above mentioned problems with the leftist cooperation, there had been an additional factor decreasing the chances of the Left: the person of Ferenc Gyurcsány. After the scandals in his former government, which partially led to Orbán's system, he was still a very unpopular politician in general, and this is enough for large groups of voters to stay away from voting for this formation. On the other end however, Gyurcsány had a very active voting base, which was the 15 per cents of the leftist society back then, meaning, his formation was too strong to be left out of the cooperation.

At that point, the pre-election within the Left was won by the candidate of the Socialists, however, their popularity did not rise significantly, and all these parties took the potential votes away from each other, instead of weakening the government, helping Orbán to maintain the central space of power and his dominance.<sup>56</sup> The power struggle within the opposition potentially had a turning point in the European elections of 2019, when MSZP managed to win only one mandate, while DK did four, and Momentum, a liberal-centrist founded in 2017 won two of them. After that result, the political dynamics among opposition changed, especially on the Left, where these two parties will be the dominant forces. DK is popular within the former voters of the socialists, while Momentum is successful within the range of the young and urban voters. It means a shift on the left, and the current weak polls of MSZP are close to the parliamentary threshold of 5 per cents.

Because of the current central party-system and the new rules of the elections made clear, that if the oppositional parties are competing with each other for the leading role within their own lines. This means, they are taking potential votes away only from each other and they will not be working on alternative visions in order to replace the current system. These internal power-struggles on the opposition make Orbán's position unchallenged, so he can continue preserving his power.

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## 5 A Change of Strategy

Despite having new dynamics on the left the emergence of some new actors, this is still not enough to even challenge the power of the dominant governing party. The doctrine of the central space of power builds on the balance between the two wings of the opposition. However, in the past six years there were more movements on the Right, than on the Left which ended up in a situation, when the formerly far-right party, Jobbik made a turn into the political center, navigating themselves closer to the Left, calling themselves a “people’s party”, and the radical and nationalist rhetoric was left behind. With this positional play, the formation is closer on the pallet to the left-wing than previously, meaning, that the cooperation of the whole opposition is not an unimaginable scenario anymore, putting Orbán’s doctrine in his internal policies in danger, if FIDESZ moves away from being the party in the middle.

Jobbik’s political change started according to the analysts around 2016-2017<sup>79</sup>, but I noticed a change in their rhetoric already in the election campaign of 2014. However, the changes took really on after 2015, with the refugee crisis in the European Union. The two processes, movement of the two parties on the Right were parallel: Jobbik was consciously moving to the middle, while FIDESZ was navigating more and more towards the far right, however, the latter’s movement was more of the necessity of outside circumstances.

After the elections of 2014, the government voted for unpopular actions, for example not allowing for shops and malls to be open on Sundays, planning a high tax over internet data. It stepped back from those plans after mass demonstrations, and when the United States announced, that they ban the entry of six high ranking servants of the government from entering their territory, due to accusations of corruption violating US interests.<sup>80</sup> The actions in 2014-15 were also forcing the government’s communication into a defensive state, which is very unusual in Orbán’s tenure of more than ten years. This caused a significant drop in the popularity of Viktor Orbán’s party, while Jobbik was on an all-time high at that point. The fact, that these voters moved over to support the then still more radical party, could have made FIDESZ realize, that they will need to get them back from the right, forcing them to move

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<sup>79</sup> Juhász, Attila: Az átrendeződés éve – A populista jobb és szélsőjobb a mai Magyarországon, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2017., p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Dunai, Marton: U.S. calls ban on entry by six Hungarians a warning to clean up, Reuters, 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-hungary-idUSKCN0I921220141020> (last accessed on 26.09.2020.)

towards a more extremist rhetoric. These ambitions received a boost, when the increasing number of immigrants started moving to Europe, pushing Orbán's circle to act quickly and put the plans into reality. In my own understanding, this move was rather forced by outer circumstances, and the strategists of the party were forced to react and adapt, pushing them to an unknown field, instead of their usual methods of dictating the pace of publicity, keeping it under their control.

The rise of the migration in the summer-fall of 2015 triggered and reinforced, when the nationalist and populist policy of Orbán. The government reacted very quickly to the circumstances, and put migration into the central rhetorical element of their policy, putting them into a picture of enemy by demonizing the refugees and migrants in the media on the highest possible intensity. By using the topic of international migration, they created conspiracy theories, and the main images of enemy were George Soros, NGOs of human rights, and the European Union, accusing all of them of supporting immigration, planning to settle foreign people to destroy nation states.<sup>81</sup>

So FIDESZ decided to change their rhetoric to the direction of the American-style alt-right and the new right of Europe, putting the question of migration into the perspective of an international ethnic, national and religious Kulturkampf. They put Muslim immigrant in the place of "invaders" organized by a global government, wanting to destroy the traditional values of the Christian and white continent. These changes in the communication show an obvious move towards the far right.<sup>58</sup> Although Jobbik was trying to keep up, the government's sudden turn made them visibly confused. Orbán's party took the central elements from Jobbik's rhetoric and used them for themselves, letting them a narrow space to navigate.

The final point in switching roles occurred on the fall of 2016, when Gábor Vona's party did not mobilize for the anti-immigrant referendum promoted by Orbán. This moment started a long-lasting tension between the two sides, when the media outlets controlled by FIDESZ were constantly discrediting the other party's politicians, even with personal accusations. The news sites and TV stations owned by government-friendly oligarchs also started to promote newly founded extremist movements to confuse Jobbik's old voters from the extremist past, this tendency still lives on in 2020, when the government attempting to maintain the central space

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<sup>81</sup> Juhász, 2017., p. 7.

of power by keeping far-right movements in spotlight.

The climax of the rivalry on the Right came in 2017, months before the elections, when the State Audit Office led by László Domokos, a former high ranking FIDESZ official indicated a record-high fine of 2 million Euros for Jobbik. The accusation was illegal campaign-funding, despite not fining any parties before that, creating suspicious circumstances along resisting the attempts of anti-corruption organizations to check the institution. Despite the limitations of the opposition since 2010, there had not been any attempt in Hungary for attempting to undermine political competition with administrative and legal actions. This however helped Jobbik's policy towards the center. The governing party took the step, because they falsely believed, that no organizations and other parties would identify themselves with a former racist formation.<sup>82</sup>

This was the time, when Orbán began to become afraid of the opposition. When Jobbik publicly stated, that they want to represent every voters against the regime, even the leftist one, after their parties failed to coordinate for the elections, and the Socialist candidate for prime ministry stepped back in the middle of the campaign. At this point, the tendencies on the Right were irreversible. Orbán was rightfully afraid: if the Left collapses, the former radical party moved to the center could be able to unite the opposition, representing a significant force, and ending the doctrine of the central space of power. This was however not the case at the latest elections in 2018: although the electoral system forces the parties to cooperate to challenge the government in the personal districts, Orbán knew, that the wide ideological differences of the opposition will prevent them to have their candidates step back in order to support the other one from a different party. As I wrote, the parties of the left had been struggling for a leading role among themselves, and were not willing to strengthen Jobbik on the other side to be the most potent challenger of the power. They often stated their unwillingness to cooperate with a (former) far-right party.<sup>83</sup>

The factor most significantly showing the failure of the opposition, is the phenomenon of tactical voting. Although the opposition is very fragmented, 52 per cent voted for them in the election of 2018, which means, that they could beat FIDESZ in one on one contest, yet, it is still a tactical dilemma, since not all of the voters of Jobbik would vote for the candidate of a

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<sup>82</sup> Juhász, 2017, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Juhász, 2017, p. 10.

left-wing party in order to achieve a regime-change. The need however in the society is definitely there, and the significant amount of the tactical votes from the results of 2018 underline that.

Because of the parties failed to agree in any substantial form of cooperation - only some leftist parties made pacts about stepping back in order the support the other ones candidate in the given districts -, the rest of the work was done by different non-governmental organizations, activists and civilians, who had been doing research in each of the 106 district to measure the support of all the candidates of different oppositional parties, urging the voters to vote for the one with the highest possible chance against the one of the government. This method was about to maximize the votes of the opposition. These initiations campaigned for voting for the list of the preferred party, but to pick the second x for the individual candidate who was picked as the most popular. For the latter one, the personality was the most important factor by measuring the chances: they urged to vote for the support of people, who are locally popular and well-known of their deeds among the local community.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the efforts of the civilians to urge people for tactical voting, it is clearly not the most ideal solution. They were forced to make these researches because of the parties' failure of reaching a consensus, but they do not have the necessary resources to reach the most people with the campaign of tactical voting, and of course, it was not enough to change the government. The results however are clearly visible:

According to the article of Átlátszó, the impact of tactical voting is visible on the results in 2018. In comparison with the election of 2014. There were more people voting for the lists of the parties, then for their individual candidates. Jobbik's candidates for example received 180 000 more votes, than their list, and the tendency was similar among the larger parties. But the smaller formations did lose on the tactical votes: the lists of LMP and Momentum got significantly more votes, than their individual candidates. LMP's list go 80 000 more votes for their list, than for their candidates in general.<sup>85</sup> This phenomenon is the result of the unique nature of the electoral system. It supports the larger parties, and makes it for small and new ones more challenging to get a visible result, and seats in the legislation.

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<sup>84</sup> Átlátszó: Without 'tactical voting', Orban's party would control ¾ of seats in Parliament, Átlátszó, 2018 <https://english.atlatszo.hu/2018/05/04/without-tactical-voting-orbans-party-would-control-34-of-seats-in-parliament/>, (last accessed on 14.11.2020.)

<sup>85</sup> Átlátszó, 2018.



As I mentioned, tactical voting was not a game-changer in 2018, if we analyze the elections from a wider perspective, it is clearly seen that it played a marginal role. If we adjust the votes and re-calculate them, we would get a result, that FIDESZ would have 148 seats, so in other words we can admit, that tactical voting cost the government 15 mandates.<sup>86</sup> These numbers speak for themselves. Without the tendency among the voting citizens, and the efforts of the civilians, the government would now have a 80 per cent of the mandates, and would seize power with even less control.

Needless to say, all of the power struggle in the rows of the opposition benefitted Orbán's chances, and the electoral system, along with the central space of power and the conscious polarization of the other parties worked exceptionally well. As every elements of Orbán's system, this was also carefully designed by the masterminds behind the System of National Cooperation, but we must not forget to mention the role of the opposition, who is very much fragmented, not able to create an alternative vision to offer the society. These elements are all helping to maintain the system. Orbán and his advisors are interested in keeping the status quo, because as long as it remains, his power is not in danger.

The doctrine of the central space of power was in danger, when Jobbik started to move to the center, while FIDESZ swang more towards the far-right. However the governing side made attempts to compromise the move of its counterpart by promoting new extremists movements, or simply attack their rivals in the media on the maximum capacity, they realized, that the process is done, and FIDESZ is on the end of the political spectrum. The doctrine is not valid anymore, and the chances for the real unification of the opposition might be a real scenario they need to count with. The events shifted to a higher gear after the elections of 2018. After the disappointing results for the opposition, all the parties needed to rethink their strategy, including Jobbik, whose all-time president, Gábor Vona, resigned and retired from politics. He was the most influential mind behind the policy of "becoming a people's party", but his resignation put the future of the formation in question. Just days later, an intense power struggle started, which ended up at a division, where FIDESZ took the opportunity to further polarize the opposition, especially on the Right.

Days after the elections in 2018, Gábor Vona officially resigned as the president of Jobbik, and decided not to take over his mandate won, instead, he as the leader of the party's list,

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<sup>86</sup> Átlátszó, 2018.

retired from active politics instead. This action caused internal conflicts within the party after losing the person, who managed to turn the formerly radical formations into a moderate, conservative people's party. However the rhetoric took a moderate direction, strongmen who still preferred the radical narrative were still there, and Vona's resignation gave them the opportunity to fill the internal power vacuum and return to the roots of their movement. It was determined, that the supporters of the two different narratives will have conflicts, even potentially causing a split.

One of their Vice-President, László Toroczkai, who made his name among radical nationalist circles during the riots in 2006, stepped up and was willing to take over the party and to bring back the radical policies. On the other hand, the most influential politicians, who even had strategic positions in the legislation, for example being leaders of committees and the vice-president of the parliament remained the supporters of the moderate line.<sup>87</sup>

As it was to be expected, Tamás Sneider became the new president of Jobbik, who was determined to follow Vona's moderate policy, however the results were surprising in a way: Sneider managed to win by 54 per cents, while Toroczkai's support was 46 per cents. The situation showed the internal polarization of Orbán's strongest rival. After the election, Toroczkai was touring the media outlets supporting FIDESZ openly criticizing his party, and announcing, that he is planning to found an internal platform for the supporters of the radical narrative. He founded it on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, which was claimed to be against the party's rules by the leadership.<sup>88</sup>

As I wrote before, FIDESZ was interested in weakening Jobbik, because they see their rival to be the largest threat to their power, this is why it is a perfect example to demonstrate Orbán's internal policy to reserve his party's relative leading place in the country, especially after Jobbik's move further from the far-right putting the "central space of power" in danger. FIDESZ was and is basically the biggest winner of this power struggle. They saw a possible split in Jobbik as the most favoring scenario, which would make the opposition even more polarized, while their most potent rival would be significantly weaker. Toroczkai was given the opportunity to speak out in the media outlets openly supporting FIDESZ, where were

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<sup>87</sup> Benza, Málna & Horváth, Kristóf: A Jobbik válsága – Szélsőjobbmonitor 2018. Május, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, 2018

[https://www.politicalcapital.hu/hirek.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2266](https://www.politicalcapital.hu/hirek.php?article_read=1&article_id=2266) (last accessed on 08.03.2021.)

<sup>88</sup> Benza, Horváth, 2018.

trying to present the situation as an unavoidable split in the party. In parallel, Tamás Sneider and his person was constantly under attack in the media.

In June, the tensions with the help of the governing party peaked, and Torockai, along with multiple politicians, including elected MPs announced, that they are leaving Jobbik. They founded a movement, then party called Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland). However the quitting MPs were elected, as candidates of Jobbik, they refused to give up on their mandates, and started to represent the narrative of their new party in the parliament. The legitimacy of their action can be questioned, because they were not elected, as a candidate of Our Homeland. The new party however allowed FIDESZ to open a new possibilities in the balance between them and the opposition, and can be used for their advantage.<sup>89</sup>

In comparison with Jobbik, Our Homeland managed to bring in their own topics in the publicity, and by October, it had more, than thirty local organizations having the potential to grow further. Its presence in the parliament (with questioned legitimacy however) gave them the opportunity to gain popularity among the radical nationalist circles. At that time, further MPs in the fraction of Jobbik also quit their old party in order to join the new formation, which had a curiously more screen-time in the media, more, than most of the parties on the opposition. Their main topics were the criticism of liberalism and progressive political views, and they started an anti-immigrant and anti-roma rhetoric. They used the advantage of the moment, that Jobbik did not manage to outcome their inner crisis, which made them unable to focus on actual political and social issues.

On the other hand, the emergence of the new radical movement created various ways for the policy of Viktor Orbán to use the situation to his advantage. I already mentioned the factor of weakening the then strongest party in the opposition, but it gave them the sudden opportunity to reestablish the doctrine of central space of power. FIDESZ' move to the far-right, and Jobbik's one to the center made them switch positions on the political landscape. The governing party suddenly found itself on one end of the spectrum. At that time, months after the elections did not play a significant role, but on a mid-run, the theoretic scenario of the

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<sup>89</sup> Gebei, Tamás, & Molnár, Kristóf: Emelkedőben a Mi Hazánk Mozgalom – Szélsőjobb monitor, 2018. október, Budapest, Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute, 2018.  
[https://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2332](https://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2332), (last accessed on 12.03.2021.)

cooperation between all of the relevant parties in the opposition became a real threat. Toroczkai's movement on the far right created an ideal situation for FIDESZ' communicational staff to adjust their rhetoric in order to not appear as the most radical party, that is why the radicals were given the resources to gain popularity in a relative short-time.

His party and especially László Torockai was given not only air-time in the media, but less than a year after the foundation of his movement, they already had 150 large city-posters on the streets in the campaign prior the European elections in 2019. Beside of that, they managed to hold a high number of forums in various locations throughout Hungary, while producing a 34-pages long campaigning book. This made them seen like a party with a professional background and high income. This is an unusual situation for a less than one-year old organization. This is a strange situation, because the distribution of these campaigning tools is in the hands of the government, and Our Homeland, without any financial support of the state, did not have the money for such adverts.<sup>90</sup> They claimed, that they had financial support from individual donations. If their public finances of 2020 are analyzed, it can be seen, that they get the most amount of income from the membership from all of the other parties in the opposition, and this party received the highest individual donations in all of the Hungarian politics. Other media outlets claimed, that the approximate costs required for all these resources are around 60 million Forints (167 000 Euros), while the party consequently refused to answer the question, what the sources for this income are, but there are, pieces of information, that they are not legal. János Volner, a former member of the party underline it in a statement, what the online news site, 24.hu published:

“I never received any concrete explanations, how much this money really is, and for what is it spent, and exactly where does it come from.” He also said, “There was a lot of money to work with during the foundation of the party, and at the European campaign.”<sup>91</sup>

These statements support the suspicion that there are interests of a third side in the existence and the success of the party. However this is not proved, the interests of the government are justified by all the aspects I analyzed in my work. Our Homeland's existence simply gives

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<sup>90</sup> HVG.hu: Óriásplakátokra is futja a Mi Hazánk, HVG, 2019, own translation  
[https://hvg.hu/itthon/20190409\\_Oriasplakatokra\\_is\\_futja\\_a\\_Mi\\_Hazanknak](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20190409_Oriasplakatokra_is_futja_a_Mi_Hazanknak), (last accessed on 14.12.2020.)

<sup>91</sup> Nagy, Gergely Miklós: A Mi Hazánk mögött lapul a magyar politika legnagyobb adományozója, a párt titkolózik róla, 24, 2020.  
<https://24.hu/belfold/2020/12/03/mi-hazank-adomany-titok-penz/>, (last accessed on 10.02.2021.)

them the opportunity to reestablish their central domination in the political spectrum, which was put in danger after FIDESZ' and Jobbik's switch of positions. Orbán's party still remained the dominant force, but their more rightist policy opened some possible scenario, where they would not necessarily be able to dictate the processes. The first signs are already there, which could define the chances of the opposition at the elections of 2022.

## 6 The Fourth Power

The foundation of the new political system after 2010 was based on multiple processes, while the governing party focused on creating the relations to preserve that power. I have already analyzed the administrative changes in the new constitution and the electoral system, which makes it very complicated to replace the current political elite. There is also the putting of strategic institutions under direct political control. On the other side, the consciously constructed power policy of Viktor Orbán and FIDESZ made the other parties unable to form any major coordination which would endanger their power.

These elements of the carefully constructed and complex system make it more difficult for the opposition to win the elections, and if they would do so, the administrative institutions under direct political influence would theoretically inhibit the work of a possible new coalition. There is however another critical element, which was only mentioned briefly before, but plays a major role in the survival of the regime: the systematic takeover of media outlets.

The colonization of the media to reduce critical voices and to give more coverage for the given party is not a specific phenomenon in Hungary, or any other post-socialist country, but in the case of Orbán's new system, this colonization was pushed to the highest level. Few months after the elections in 2010, the parliament passed a regulation to establish the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) to supervise the private radio and television stations, printed and online media outlets. This institution is also responsible for the distribution of frequencies and is free to define the allocation criteria. The new regulations also established a Public Service Foundation to manage the public institutions, for example the state media and the Hungarian News Agency (MTI). These new offices are the basic principles of the new relations in the media. The NMHH is headed by a Media Council of four members, and similarly to the other strategic institutions, like the Constitutional Justice or the Highest Court, all of them are nominated and elected by two thirds of the parliament. Their chairman has a formerly unprecedented power and influence to supervise public and private media.<sup>92</sup>

These actions caused an immediate international concern and were criticized by multiple

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<sup>92</sup> Bajomi-Lázár, Péter: Party Colonization of the Media: The Case of Hungary, in: *The Hungarian Patient, Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2015. p. 60.

organizations of human rights and free speech, and already in 2011, Hungary's press freedom index fell by 7 per cents according to Freedom House.<sup>93</sup>

Before analyzing the takeover of the media, we need to understand, that it was not a process FIDESZ started, but the result of a multi-decade long struggle, which can be sorted to three different periods.

## **6.1 The Media War and Multiparty Control over the Media (1990-2010)**

After the first free election in 1990, all of the media was in the hands of the Socialist party, which managed to survive the transition. The new parties failed to agree on any regulations, and because of the lack of commercial outlets at the time, the governments competed for the influence over the state media, firing hundreds of journalists at every change of governments until 1995.

After 1996, the situation started to become more consolidated, actually, it reflects the then status of democracy, which was on the way towards being consolidated. At that time, the parties were able to agree on the media regulations, which allowed the foundation of nationwide private broadcasters. At this period, the media outlets were supervised by multi-party committees. This resulted, that the party representatives were mutually able to restrain the other one's efforts to spread influence, however the all-time governing bodies had always a larger word, and the news programs had always slightly more pro-government view. Despite of the minor swings, the system was well balanced most of the times, and the media freedom according to Freedom House significantly improved during this period, from 31 points in 1996 to 23 points in 2009.<sup>94</sup>

## **6.3 One-party Control over the Media (2010 to present day)**

With the election of Orbán in 2010, and it was the period, when the media freedom stopped improving, and suffered a massive setback. The prime minister used his supermajority to pass the acts about "Freedom of the Press and the Fundamental Rules of Media Content, and about "Multimedia Act". These regulations allowed the governing party to totally control all

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<sup>93</sup> Kovács, Balázs Áron, & Hevesi, Flóra: „Hungary”, in Freedom House: Nations in Transit 2011 – Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia, Washington DC, Freedom House, 2011

<sup>94</sup> Mádl, András, Szabó, Dávid: A kormányok mennek, a média marad, Jel-Kép, No.1,1999, Budapest, MTA-ELTE Kommunikációelméleti Kutatócsoport, 1999, p. 24-28,

platforms and outlets. NMHH distributed 35 local radio frequencies, including 18 ones being pro-government only in their first 18 months of their mandate, while they refused to renew the frequency of Klubrádió, which was a liberal and oppositional station in the air.

NMHH is also responsible for content monitoring and is allowed to fine stations who break the law up to approximately 716000 Euros. However, breaking the law in this field is very much the matter of subjective judgement. The state televisions and radio stations were united into one foundation managed by a board of loyalists, consisting of seven members and a chairperson. The latter one and one member are nominated by the Media Council, three by the governing party, and three by the opposition. This lineup favours the all-time government, because of the polarized opposition, and the fact, that the Media Council is under the strong influence of Orbán's party. Summarizing all the institutional changes in the Hungarian Media market after 2010, FIDESz created a pyramid-shaped institutional structure. On top is the chairperson of the Media Council, who is appointed by the prime minister, which reflects a direct political control. This system allows the governing party to control all media outlets.

After 2010, Orbán's party created this system, which meant structural changes in the media sector, but then soon began to shutting down oppositional outlets, or oligarchs close to the government purchasing them one by one. However the dominant party managed to get their hands on countless newspapers, televisions and radio stations, they had already had a well-built infrastructure of media outlets supporting them, functioning as the fist of the party. Shortly after the elections in 2010 they managed to add the state media to this line of outlets supporting their politics, and after that, the critical or independent outlets were to be taken over. "Ownership relations in the media became inextricably intertwined with political relationships, and ownership of the media was overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of oligarchs working in close cooperation with the powers that be. FIDESZ and more than 90% of the media concerned with issues of civic life and politics was directly or indirectly in the hands of owners linked to the party... Viktor Orbán and his colleagues have understood well the nature and workings of the media and quickly learned that the way to cripple the operation of open democracy and press freedom is not by re-regulating the legal framework but rather by crudely restructuring the ownership relations that have developed in the media and



advertising market.”<sup>95</sup>

After 2010, the first stage of the takeover of the media was the institutional change with the establishment of MNHH. Similarly to the other institutions, it was a method to create the legal circumstances to spread influence and power. However the control over the media has another side, which is a more practical one: turning the then critical or independent media outlets to their side to support their own narrative. After creating the legal environment, the strategists realized, that putting economic pressure on the TV and radio stations, or other forms of media. This method through government-friendly oligarchs was also safer in another way, that the international judgement would be much more negative towards the conscious changing of the legal environment. These kinds of takeovers are easier to hide from international organizations, or from the standards of the European Union. The media empire within the economic infrastructure of FIDESZ is similarly to other elements of the system, for example the doctrine of central space of power, is well constructed, and is made of different pillars.

The state media was pushed to support the narrative of the government. Alongside the already mentioned legal institutions, the state media is annually given an unprecedented amount of funding from the state. In 2011, this financial support was 72 billion HUF (30 million Euros).<sup>96</sup> This however is an annual rate, and with this background is it impossible to compete on the market. In 2021, the MTVA group (the holding company of the state media) operates from 118 billions of public money.<sup>97</sup> This support is paid off. The state media play their part in manipulating, distorting and suppressing news. The intense rate of this financial support is on the other hand does not seem a profitable move. The summarized viewing statistics of the five TV stations in the group did not reach 20 per cent of the whole population together. An uninitiated person would see it, as a pointless waste of intense amount of public money, but in the government’s perspective, it is a key part of their plan to stay in power. Despite the interests in the state media is low, its influence on the public opinion is still strategic: an important part

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<sup>95</sup> Vásárhelyi, Mária: The Takeover and Colonization of the Hungarian Media, Aspen Review, 2017. <https://www.aspen.review/article/2017/the-takeover-and-colonization-of-the-hungarian-media/>, (last accessed on 05.03.2021.

<sup>96</sup> Vásárhelyi, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> 24: 118 milliárdnyi közpénzből működhet jövőre a közmédia, 2020.

<https://24.hu/belfold/2020/10/19/kozmedia-kozpenz-koltsegvetes/>, (last accessed on 22.03.2021.)

of FIDESZ' voting base has the state media, as their main source of information. Especially in villages and smaller settlements, where the average population do not have access digital media, or a wide variety of TV channels about politics and public affairs. These people do not have the opportunity to double-check the information they receive, and they basically only know the narrative of Viktor Orbán and the government. The evening news of the main channel of the MTVA group attracts 500 000 people daily. The state media in its current form exists for this layer of the society, which is a part of FIDESZ' voting base. The second pillar in the process of the monopolization of the media was the homogenization of the service content. The key element of this act was the decision to make MTI (Hungarian News Agency) into a monopoly. It became the only free source of news, which made an amount of media outlets who struggled with financial support to consider the MTI, which is under the influence of the governing party, so the suppression and distortion of the content, and even the creation of fake news became a serious reality.<sup>98</sup>

The third pillar of the monopolized media is from a point of view a parallel process. The establishment of NMHH, and taking over the state media and MTI were elements of the creation of a pyramid-like system, which is controlled by Orbán and his party. The institutions of the media were centralized, but the market itself needed a decentralization, however the latter one was a partial result of a political power-struggle.

As I mentioned, FIDESZ had already had an established media background by 2010, but after that it was clear, a diversification and further extension is more than necessary to create and maintain a new system. At that time, Lajos Simicska, a former friend of Orbán was the number one oligarch. He was responsible for the establishment of the economic hinterland of the party, and he was also the owner of the main media outlets (TV and radio stations, daily and weekly newspapers, street advertisements) supporting the party. In that time, nothing in the hinterland of FIDESZ, and on the media market could happen without the approval of Simicska, who was known to be the mastermind behind the party's success since the nineties. However the ambitions of the prime minister to extend and to diversify the media empire out of the influence of his former friend led to tensions, which ended up in a messy split between the sides in early 2015. As Mária Vársárhelyi wrote in his article about the media colonization in Hungary: "Viktor Orbán is making his oligarchs, fattened on public funds, establish new media organs

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<sup>98</sup> Vársárhelyi, 2017.

and making them buy up the opposition media that they had ruined earlier, turning them into mouthpieces of the government or degrading them into tabloids. Andy Vajna, controversial entrepreneur and Viktor Orbán's film czar who has made vast profits from gambling, will have the task of constructing the party's new radio and television services, while the prime minister's other favorite, Árpád Habony, is investing the surplus profit gained from the overpricing of public utilities and EU procurements in the printed and Internet media."<sup>99</sup>

In the process of the takeover of the different media outlets, FIDESZ also put the oppositional of independent ones into a serious minority, and leaving them on the brink of financial hopelessness or being dependent on donations by cutting off the highly profitable adverts of different state owned companies. In this field, there were two crucial points to silence most of the critical voices, there was the already analyzed case of the state media, and the local and regional daily newspapers. According to Attila Bátorfy, a researcher at the Central European University's Center for Media, Data and Society, these newspapers are critical, because they offer a cheap and efficient channel for broadcasting the government's message for the widest possible audience. Despite being two of the four major national newspapers are under the direct control of FIDESZ, but they do not sell a significant number of copies outside of Budapest, so according to this fact, they are not the main source of information for the average Hungarian citizen.<sup>100</sup> In fact the only paper, that many people on the countryside read are the local ones. 18 out of the 19 counties of Hungary have newspapers, writing about local affairs. Especially older people are the consumers of these sort of information, who have no access, or affinity the online news sites, or other independent news shows.

Prior the System of National Cooperation, they were owned by a wide range of organizations, from larger conglomerates to local family businesses until 2014, when the Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH) allowed the merger of the Hungarian branches of different organizations, for example the Swiss Ringier and the German Axel Springer under the condition to sell some of their newspapers to prevent the formation of a monopoly. This is how the then largest national paper, Népszabadság and a number of regional outlets were sold to Mediaworks, which was owned by the Austrian businessman, Heinrich Pecina, who is

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<sup>99</sup> Vászárhelyi, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Bede, Márton: Orbán completes takeover of Hungarian regional media, Budapest, International Press Institute, 2017.

<https://ipi.media/orban-completes-takeover-of-hungarian-regional-media/>, (last accessed on 02.04.2021.)

known of controversial business activities in various countries. The process advanced in 2016, when he and Mediaworks bought another group of regional papers from the German Funke Mediengruppe, and in the autumn, the sudden shutdown of the oppositional *Népszabadság* was announced, which caused a wave of demonstrations, even the journalists were not informed about the plans of the owning organization. Days after that, Pecina sold Mediaworks to Optimus Group, owned by Lőrinc Mészáros, who is a childhood friend of Viktor Orbán, who grew the richest person of Hungary within few years from being a gas fitter. The deals were authorized by the Competition Authority, and the two remaining regional papers were bought by Pecina in 2017, who sold them later to Andy Vajna, a film producer getting rich in Hollywood, then became a member of Orbán's inner circle until his death in 2019.<sup>101</sup> It means, that the process was closed down just months before the elections in April, 2018, allowing FIDESZ to reach more people with their narrative.

Taking over the regional papers had two goals: first of all, they are cheap to produce and have massive consumers. The media outlets close to the party always get highly profitable advertisements of state-owned companies, and were extended to the regional ones as well. This allows to create a large amount of profit for the businessmen close to the government. On the other hand, similarly to the case of the state media, these papers reach those people, who are the main base of Orbán's power: rural, and elder groups without access to double-check the information are consuming.

However, the printed national newspapers are not that relevant anymore, the economic hinterland behind the governing party put their hands of that sector too. As I mentioned, *Népszabadság* was bought and then resold by Heinrich Pecina before being shut down, the largest oppositional daily paper disappeared. The unexpected events came with the split between Simicska and Orbán. The former favored oligarch was the owner of *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation), the largest national right-wing paper, publicly supporting FIDESZ. Between the split in 2015 and the elections of 2018, the outlet functioned as an independent and critical medium, even publishing uncomfortable scandals about governmental politicians, and started to support Jobbik in the campaign. To counterweight the loss and fill the void of the most influential supporter in the printed scene, the circles near the government announced the establishment of *Magyar Idők* (Hungarian Times). It was financed by public funds, and

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<sup>101</sup> Vászárhelyi, 2017.

received revenues from state-owned advertisements.<sup>102</sup>

The new pro-government daily was despite short-lived. The reasons for that were the results of the elections in 2018. The next overwhelming victory with two thirds of the mandates for Orbán caused Simicska to give up his fight. Just days after the election, he announced, that he will not continue financing Magyar Nemzet, and managed to settle with an agreement, that he gives over his interests and goes to exile to the countryside. Months later, Magyar Nemzet was resurrected, by rebranding Magyar Idők.

Similar was the case with the daily newspaper, called Metropol, which was freely distributed on public transporting stations. After the split between the prime Minister and his former friend, the income from state advertisements started to be reduced, and the public transformation companies started to terminate the contract with the outlet.<sup>73</sup> It was soon replaced by Lokál, owned by Árpád Habony, a close advisor of Orbán. The last copy of Metropol was published in 2016, although, it was also resurrected in 2020, but this time, it belongs to the hands of Mediaworks, like many other pro-governmental papers.<sup>103</sup>

Another market completely taken over by the circles of the government is the radio broadcasting sector. With legal restrictions and with the help of the hand-controlled institutions, two countrywide commercial radio stations, who were active since the privatization of frequencies in 1996 were shut down. These positions were given to oligarchs loyal to the system, first to Lajos Simicska, but after their split between him and Orbán, the frequency of his stations were not renewed, then it was given to the late Andy Vajna. In today's condition, there are not any independent or critical commercial radios in Hungary. The last liberal station was called Klubrádió, but after 2010, their local frequencies were slowly taken over. However with the help of the already taken over Media Authority, there were attempts to shut Klubrádió down, but the then still relative independent judiciary refused to assist the forced bankruptcy. In a parallel process, the smaller, local and regional radios were also taken over step by step by not renewing their frequencies after ending the current term. Without exceptions, all of them were passed into the hands of businessmen or churches with close ties to the governing elite, and the independent presence in the market became minimal.<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> Vászárhelyi, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Mediaworks: Újraindul a Metropol, 2020.

<https://mediaworks.hu/cikkek/ujraindul-a-metropol-2521/>, (last accessed on 14.04.2021.)

<sup>104</sup> Vászárhelyi, 2017.

radio market similarly to the regional newspapers, got completely into the hands of the governing party, and their content changed to serve the current narrative of governmental communications. However the influence of the radio market is overwhelming and symbolic, it is not that relevant anymore, as the Television and online media.

In the case of Television, Orbán's plan in 2010 was to have at least one national frequency in the hands close to the party. This came into reality in 2015, when Andy Vajna used a credit from a state bank to purchase TV2, the number two commercial channel in Hungary behind RTL. Since then, TV2 is a forum of the governmental propaganda. Their daily news program openly supports the political direction of FIDESZ, discredit any attempt of the opposition, and the already usual technique of suppressing or even manipulating news. Due to the owner, the channel has received a large amount of income from state-advertisements, and Vajna expanded it into a television concern, and launched 10 more thematic channels as parts of the TV2 Group. Summarizing the conditions on the Hungarian television markets, alongside the state-media, FIDESZ reaches a significantly larger layer with the help of having the second largest commercial channel, than with the constant group of people with the state and the old party media. Besides these, there are multiple news and talking broadcasters in the media empire, while on the opposite end, the Left has only one thematic broadcaster publicly supporting them.

The large-scale attack on media outlets have had two main purposes. The takeover of the state media, the regional and national daily newspapers were supposed to keep the already existing base of voters together and to make it easier to mobilize, but on the other hand, to reach those, who do not have access or will to double check the information they consume from the mentioned platforms. While the spreading of influence on the TV market, including the purchase of TV2 was a necessary step in the attempt to widen the layer of voters, reaching as many people as possible. These were two different purposes, but in a natural way, there is a transit between them. The state media launched its fourth channel, called M4 Sport, a national sports channel. Because of the high income MTVA Group receives from the state, they managed to purchase the broadcasting rights of such popular tournaments, as UEFA Champions League, Formula One, Olympics, football World Cups and Euro tournaments, alongside broadcasting the games of the Hungarian national football team. These sports events are very popular among the population, and the short news spots in the commercial breaks with the news of the state media reach far more people, than the news channels would do on their own. The high amount of funds the state media receives has a serious impact on the

competition on the market. Other commercial sport channels are not able to compete with M4 to get the broadcasting rights for the most attractive competitions, and this process makes the prices of these rights higher. In a similar case, the two sport channels belonging to the government-friendly TV2 Group, Spíler 1 and two share the broadcasting rights of the UEFA Champions League with M4 Sport, while having two of the most popular football leagues, the English and Spanish ones within their rows. These contents attract a wide range of people, and besides generating income for their owners, the news spots in the commercial breaks reach those people too, who usually are not interested in the narrative of the government.

The attempt to reach more people with the narrative of FIDESZ can be seen on the market of online media. The oligarchs close to the government made efforts to restructure that too. After 2010, new websites began to appear, but it was not clear who financed them. Even the employees had no information about that. In late 2015 however it turned out, that the National Bank is behind them, and directly or indirectly finances them from the reserves. That was the source also for the purchase of Origo, Hungary's then biggest news portal, which was bought by the son of György Matolcsy, the president of the National Bank. Since then, the outlet became one in the row of tabloids, whose task is to spread the governmental rhetoric and to compromise the political opposition. Nevertheless, the online news site is financed with state advertisements, as the most of the other media sources supporting FIDESZ.<sup>105</sup>

The most recent act in this process, causing a large-scale displeasure was the takeover of Index.hu, the largest and most popular independent online news portal. The background of the story is, that the foundation owning the company and the one responsible for the advertisements were taken over by oligarchs close to FIDESZ. After months of uncertain situation, the management fired the chief editor in the summer of 2020. Because it was taken by the journalists, as a direct intervention to the independent work of the site, about 70 journalists announced their resignation in one day, creating an intensive media coverage of the story of the largest independent online media being shut down.<sup>106</sup> The publicity made many people following the former journalists on the social media, where they announced that most of the 70 people are creating a new, independent outlet, called Telex.hu in September, the

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<sup>105</sup> Vásárhelyi, 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Novak, Benjamin & Santora, Marc: Hungary's Independent Press Takes Another Blow and Reporters Quit, Budapest, The NewYork Times, 2020.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/24/world/europe/hungary-poland-media-freedom-index.html>, (last accessed on 26.04.2021.)

same year, while their former workplace, Index hired new journalists attempting to continue the work, but on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2020, it was announced, that the media companies close the government officially took over the then most popular website in the country.<sup>107</sup>

At the time this thesis is being written, on the turn of 2020-2021, the circles in media politics came to a close. The governing party in Hungary managed to take over a very wide range of media outlets, and they dominate the majority of the market, and independent or critical ones have by far worse opportunities to stay relevant in the distorted environment. The pro-government media on the other hand receive a high amount of funds from either the owner, who is an oligarch, or from the advertising of state institutions. This phenomenon on the other side has multiple benefits for the circle in power: multinational and private companies became interested in building good relations with the government because of the access to the high value advertisements. This state advertising budget from the state distorts the structure of the whole media market. This is done by billions of public money through unseen channels.<sup>108</sup>

In 2017, 80 per cents of the advertising money from the state ended up in the media owned by oligarchs close to Orbán. This benefit does not exist for the independent media. They struggle more and more for revenues from the market, because the high volume of state advertising inflated the marketing prices. That is why, the non-friendly outlets become more and more dependent on donations of the consumers, in order to preserve their independent status for the future. This process could also potentially push even more media into the hand of government-friendly businessmen, because the owners would sell their unprofitable properties.

By 2020 the critical and independent media was occupied only small places. The peak of the colonization process within the Hungarian media relations was the born of the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA, in Hungarian), a holding group for all the media outlets close to the party, including the state media, and all the private ones owned by oligarchs or businessmen, who have economic interests in supporting the current system. The Foundation's aim is the promotion the sections of the Hungarian media, which serve to build

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<sup>107</sup> Rényi, Pál Dániel: Vége a színjátéknak: az Index hivatalosan is a NER lapja lett, 444, 2020. <https://444.hu/2020/11/23/vege-a-szinjateknak-az-index-hivatalosan-is-a-kormany-lapja-lett>, (last accessed on 04.05.20.21.)

<sup>108</sup> Vásárhelyi, 2017.



values and strengthen the Hungarian national consciousness.

Shortly after the establishment of this new holding entity, most of the media owners, who are close to the Hungarian government transferred the rights of ownership of their media outlets to CEPMF, without any financial compensation. At the beginning, 13 media groups joined the holding, which basically covered the whole pro-government segment of the Hungarian media with the exception of TV2, and Rádió 1, the largest commercial radio station in the country, owned by the late Andy Vajna too at that time. The number of different outlets within the group is more, than 470. Alongside Hungary, CEPMF, as its name shows, attempted to spread its influence in other countries in the region too, by purchasing Slovenian and North-Macedonian media companies too, and there was in interest to acquire then in Croatia too. They also have 57 per cents of interest in V4NA, a news agency registered in London, which is strongly pro Orbán and pro Visegrád Group.<sup>109</sup>

This volume of concentration of power would in a normal situation be a case for the National Competition Authority, which was in fact bypassed in the establishment of the media holding. Orbán and his government graded the whole foundation of a centralized conservative media agency as a national strategic interest. This Decree had made the Media Authority and the Competition Authority powerless.<sup>110</sup> The move to put the pro-government media outlets into a holding foundation was a step to centralize that empire behind the party. The political independence was never a serious point among them. The majority of the income of these mediums still come from state advertising. Further strengthening the political influence is the lack of editorial freedom and self-regulation. And because of these media outlets are loyal to the government, their contents are very one sided. There is no balance in the representation of political viewpoints and news. Politicians or activists close to the opposition are invited as guests into the studios very rarely.

“The indicator that seems to be directly affected by the establishment of KESMA is access to media for local/regional communities and for community media. Based on interviews conducted with Hungarian media experts, it is safe to say that the regional and local market is now largely in the hands of KESMA though it is difficult for the CMPF to assess this specific

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<sup>109</sup> Brogi, Elda & Nenadic Eva & De Azevedo Cunha, Mario Viola & Parcu, Pier Luigi: Assessing certain recent developments in the Hungarian Media market through the prism of the Media Pluralism Monitor, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, Florence, European University Institute, 2019, p.1-5.

<sup>110</sup>, Brogi, Nenadc, De Azevedo Cunha, Parcu, 2019., p. 16.

indicator with full precision given that studies and official data on the local media market are not available.”<sup>111</sup>

However the new holding established to put the already pro-government media outlets under one single roof did not change the content of them significantly, it did raise the already high risk of Hungary’s media freedom into another level. Also the legal position of the Foundation, as a national interest pulled it out of the minimal control, what the Media Authority with handpicked leaders could practice. CMPF with its more, than 470 mediums in all of the areas from written papers and online news sites to radio and TV stations is a force impossible to bypass.

The most serious concern with its existence is after all the consolidation of the political influence in the media sector. The problems with the takeovers of all the regulating authorities able to supervise the processes, the irrational inflation of the advertising market and the turning of the state media into a propaganda empire were significantly deepened even more with the Foundation. Moreover, the contents are very much one-sided. To underline that statement, I have to take a look at the example of the state media again. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, each parties of the opposition had five minutes of screentime to share their programs in the final weeks of the election campaign in 2018. On the other hand, the politicians of the governing party, and their policy in general have a constant presence in their news shows and studios.

During the more than one decade-long prime-ministry of Viktor Orbán, the already significant media infrastructure behind his party became a real empire taking a majority of the Hungarian media sector into their influence, and through KESMA, they have already made attempts to expand their interests into various other countries in the region. Despite of the efforts to incorporate the majority of the market, it is still questionable, if that is a move worth the efforts. The new system reaches after 2018 far more people, than it did in 2015, when the split between Orbán and Simicska resulted in the loss of important media outlets for FIDESZ. Despites of that, there have never been that many people, whose only accessible source of information comes from the government’s side. The most fanatic voters consciously consumed the old outlets belonging to the circles close to the party, but with the purchase of Origo, TV2, and Bors (a boulevard magazine), the strategists took a critical step towards a wide layer of the

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<sup>111</sup> Brogi, Nenadc, De Azevedo Cunha, Parcu, 2019., p. 16

society, who does not get information the state media of from the regional newspapers. This was probably the key factor in winning the elections in 2018. Despite of the optimistic expectations of the oppositional parties and their supporters, FIDESZ managed to win more voters than four years before and the advanced infrastructure behind the party's political propaganda played a crucial role in the consolidation of the voting base.<sup>112</sup>

It is a legitimate question to ask, when his constant process of taking over as many media outlets as possible might end. Since the electoral victory and the foundation of KESMA in 2018, the only major event on the media market was the takeover of Index.hu, the leading online news website. Index was a long-time target of Orbán. These ambitions were put into light, when Lajos Simicska purchased it in 2016 by triggering an optional buyout clause. The showcase, that even without the split, the government—friendly oligarchs had taken over the news site already, but after the prime minister's former friend took over all of his interests in 2018, Index remained extremely vulnerable, after the foundation responsible for the income changed owners, which resulted the journalists to work independently until 2020, when all of them announced their resignation within a day. After that takeover, the only other major independent media company is RTL Klub, the leading commercial television group. RTL's presences is however too big to be taken over by one oligarch, and despite some attempts to put the group into a difficult situation by creating taxes over commercial income directly aiming on RTL, their position never changed.

In my opinion however, a further advance of the governing party is not expected anymore. After taking over every single regional newspapers, the state media, and some key players in the commercial, online and boulevard fields, it is not likely that they would move on to buy the remaining smaller websites and papers.

"Fidesz clearly intends to leave some opposition media in place, it does not want to be confronted with the charge that it has completely strangled all opposition outlets. At the same time, it wants to exert a high level of control over what type of information reaches audiences, and the current system is designed to broadly meet this requirement of controlled dissent. What level of dissent is tolerated or deemed too much depends on the eye of the beholder, but arguably Index is too much, especially if it keeps unearthing corruption scandals. If Index would not be allowed to survive another four-year term, for the battered Hungarian realm of

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<sup>112</sup> Bíró-Nagy, András: Hungarian Politics in 2018., Budapest, Friedrich- Ebert – Stiftung and Policy Solutions, 2019, p.67.

public discourse, the blow would be tremendous.”<sup>113</sup>

This statement is underlined by the takeover of Index in 2020. Because of the journalists and other employees demonstrated by resigning together from the company, the affair received an intensive amount of media coverage, and the plan of the takeover to be silent failed. In my opinion, this is the reason, why the website has not become one in the line of the other media outlets and preserved some elements of its old identity, and the owners will turn it slowly into a propaganda medium slowly by the campaign of 2022.

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<sup>113</sup> Bíró-Nagy, 2019, p. 68.

## 7 Conclusions and Possible Scenerios in the Future

### 7.1 Orbán's System

If we compare the two main periods of Viktor Orbán as the Prime Minister of Hungary, it seems, like there would be two different people. Between 1998 and 2002, his moderate conservative reign put Hungary into a very progressive and promising path. Under his term there were such achievements, that joining the NATO and the European Union. Although at the date of the official joining of the latter institution the prime minister was already Péter Medgyessy, the term and the negotiations were done by Orbán's government. Despite the achievements, he lost the elections in 2002, and it is a popular opinion about that point being the one major turning point in both Orbán's career, and personality. After being the leader of the largest party in opposition throughout the next two terms in the parliament, his next period as the prime minister brought groundbreakingly new times for Hungary.

When the socialist regime was officially ended by the first free elections in 1990, none of the experts, or anybody in the society would have expected, that after two decades of democratic development and western integration the country would turn back into the state of a restricted democracy. Ten years into the reign of Viktor Orbán, as Prime Minister, the Democracy Index of Freedom House put Hungary into the category of transitional, or hybrid regime with democracy percentage 49 out of 100 units and democracy score of 3,96 out of 7, which categorizes the country into the Semi-Consolidated Democracies.<sup>114</sup> Even after a number of already anti-democratic measures, the same ratios were higher in 2015, when the Democracy Percentage showed a score of 63.69, while the Democracy Score was 4,82, which was then enough to stay in the category of a consolidated democracy<sup>115</sup>. The difference is significant. In my thesis, I assigned to answer those questions, how was it possible to get such a power to restructure a state within the European Union, and to analyze those elements, which made these changes possible, turning a democratic state into a stable system, where the values of the rule of law and the democratic institutions are there, but their roles and meanings are emptied.

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<sup>114</sup> Freedom House: Nations in Transit – Hungary, 2020., Freedom House, 2020.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/nations-transit/2020> (last accessed on 16.05.2021.)

<sup>115</sup> Freedom House: Nations in Transit – Hungary, 2015, Freedom House, 2015.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/nations-transit/2015>, (last accessed on 16.05.2021.)

There had been two major questions in my research. The first one is, what made it possible for Orbán to gain such a supermajority, allowing him to fundamentally change the structure of the entire state from top to bottom. Secondly, what had been those crucial elements in his reign consolidating his power, turning it into a state, where it is very close to be unchallenged. His self-proclaimed system of “System of National Cooperation” brought such fundamental changes, that in case of a government-change would not be enough anymore to turn the country back into the standards of a consolidated democracy. This is why the at least decade-long period is most likely be mentioned in the Hungarian history books in the future, because his impact on the development of the country, especially in the very turbulent nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the so called “Orbán-era”, or “Orbán times” may be equivalently remembered, as the Kádár times or Horthy times.

To the question of what made the constitutional majority of Orbán possible, the answer also needs to include the two parliamentary terms of the Socialist Party governing the country. Their scandals, especially Gyurcsány’s infamous Ószöd speech made them lose a large part of their voting base. The brutal handling of the mass demonstrations as the aftermath of that scandal made their situation and popularity even more serious. These events were the turning point in the downfall of the democracy in Hungary. The scandals in the autumn of 2006 were followed by the economic crisis of 2008-2009, when the Socialists needed to make serious and unpopular measures in order to balance the performance of the economy. Both of the economic meltdown, and the scandals caused by the Socialist Party, especially the aggressive response against the demonstrators, resulted the popularity of the party to free-fall.

The party system, which consisted of two main large parties and a number of smaller ones changed with the collapse of the Socialists, and FIDESZ suddenly lost their only real and potent competitors, who would be able to seriously challenge them in order to win the all-time national elections. To underline the state of that party system, two of the four formations in the legislation between 2006 and 2010 did not made the minimal limits of five per cents, and were dissolved soon after. This phenomenon combined with the collapse of the Socialist Party, FIDESZ’ takeover, even with the majority of two thirds of the mandates was never in doubt before the elections in 2010. Without these antecedents, the System of National Cooperation would not have come into life, because without the collapse of the opposition, Orbán would have been unable to gain such a supermajority allowing him to modify the constitution, the election system and the right to nominate politically motivated loyalists into the leading

positions of strategic institutions, giving him free room to reorganize the structure of the entire state.

A second reason behind his rise into power with an unprecedented popularity is his natural political talent and strong ability to notice the changes on the political horizon and to reflect the evolution of the society. As a young and liberal politician in the late 1980's and early 1990's, his values are the opposite of his current ones. The overly optimistic social environment after the fall of the socialist regime in 1989/1990 was not aware of the difficulties of such a political and economic transition. The meltdown in the early 1990's made the society disappointed, and the first governing party after the elections Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) did not manage to stay in office after 1994, by not materializing their promises. Their loss in support caused a power vacuum on the right. Orbán was aware of the opportunity and started to navigate his party towards a more conservative position to fill that void. Because they were a similar liberal party with a similar rhetoric, as the Free Democrats, this move to the right allowed them to be the main pillar on that side. Without that move in particular, there would be the possibility, that the party would not even exist anymore.

The decision to reposition the party made some politicians to leave FIDESZ in order to join the Free Democrats, while others, who left the fallen MDF joined Orbán, whose group gained some intellectual background, but because the new members joined an already established party, they became more and more dependent of Orbán. Since then, his leadership is unquestionable and FIDESZ can be seen, as Orbán's own party, where nothing happens without his approval. After losing the governing positions in 2002, FIDESZ left the elitist and conservative rhetoric behind, and started a narrative being closer to the masses with popular national policies. However his move to the right remained a crucial step in order to stay relevant by being aware of a power vacuum, but his second major shift on the political spectrum was the analyzed move towards the far-right to adopt a more populist and nationalist rhetoric.<sup>116</sup> This was however, as I mentioned, a strategic move. The emergence of the radical Jobbik, and the refugee-crisis in the middle of 2015 offered Orbán and FIDESZ an opportunity to move towards a more nationalistic narrative in order to control the actualities and to keep up with the ongoing events. On a short-term basis, it gave them a political advantage, but when

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<sup>116</sup> Rajcsányi, Gellért: Viktor Orbán's Hungary: Orbanist Politics and Philosophy from a Historical Perspective, in Echle, Christian & Kliem, Frederick & Sarmah, Megha: Political Change – Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs, Singapore, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2018. p. 127-128.

their most potent rival, Jobbik started to move towards the center, Orbán's party found itself on the end of the political spectrum, and the consciously constructed dominant party system was put in danger, while the theoretic scenario of all the opposition uniting against the current government became a more realistic scenario.

After analyzing the decade of Viktor Orbán's reign, we can clearly say, that he built up a system very different of the western type democracies, and however it is very complicated to change the government within the new rules of the politics and relations in the media, it is still not an autocratic regime like in Russia, or Turkey, despite Orbán being constantly compared to Vladimir Putin or Recep Tayip Erdogan. We can also answer the second main questions of my research: what are those elements in the new political system of Hungary, making Orbán's rule consolidated and allowing him to build up the System of "National Cooperation"?

The main concept behind the system of preserving power is the doctrine of central space of power and the consciously constructed party-system. The idea behind that is, that a large people's party (FIDESZ) needs to occupy the central space of the political spectrum. This central party although needs to be strongly organized and deeply rooted in the Hungarian social reality. The opposition of the left there are the small socialist and liberal parties after lost most of their support, while on the other end, there is the radical right-wing. This relation does not allow the opposition to get strong on any of the wings, and the central party can use a "divide et impera" strategy to balance. This can be supported by the media empire built up under the ten years of the system, and the outlets under the control of government-friendly oligarchs and businessmen, and they are able to focus on the current most threatening opponents by discrediting them in the media.

Being the largest party in the central position, FIDESZ is always able to dictate the rhythm of politics and has an enormous advantage on the national elections. The other main advantage of the central space of power, that the divided opposition on both ends of the spectrum are very far away from each other in the view of rhetoric and vision. Because of the restructured electoral system, the whole opposition needs to cooperate with each other in order to support one candidate in the individual election districts, but because of the carefully constructed party system, it is in practice very hard to materialize among socialist, liberal and far-right parties.

This phenomenon is not that unique in the history of Hungarian politics, actually, there had been multiple times, when a centre-based, strongly directed governing party ruled the country for decades. For example, the Liberal Party governed Hungary for 30 years during the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while a similarly centrist party did the same during the Horthy



era between the two world wars. “These strong and pragmatic center right parties with far right and left wing opposition on both sides were able to create balanced and stable political periods. The majority of Hungarians bruised by historical cataclysms were willing to accept this deal for the sake of political stability. Besides the Monarchy and the Horthy era the final decades of the Kádár era were built on this deal in some sense, even if at that time there was no political plurality and capitalist system based on private property.”<sup>117</sup> According to this observation, Orbán’s understanding of a stable but in some ways restricted version of democracy is not unique in the history of the country, and the comparison between his and Horthy’s system is a capable one, if we strictly analyze the political structure of the 1930’s, and leave the ideological backgrounds out of subject. This can be underlined by the fact, that under Orbán’s reign, there have been discussions about the period before World War Two, attempting to describe it in a more positive way, creating ideological debates and tensions.

After answering the questions about what political processes made Orbán’s rise into power possible, the second important topic to discuss is the fundamentals of the system, and what are the key elements, maintaining his power.

The most important element probably comes from the political talent of Orbán himself: the reflexion on the political and social history of Hungary. He was aware of not to repeat the same mistakes the Socialist Party made before 2010, while on the other hand he found the key policies and rhetoric potentially gain a wide layer of supporters. His political success can be summarized under five major points according to the publication of Gellért Rajcsányi, titled Viktor Orbán’s Hungary: Orbanist Politics and Philosophy from a Historical Perspective

### 1: Strong Government and Stability

A strong government and state is an important topic due to the fact, that the previous near two decades were turbulent, bringing political instability and economic crisis.

### 2: Strengthening National Sovereignty

A government policy with a rhetoric to strengthen national sovereignty after various international crises is a topic able to reach a wide layer of supporters.

### 3: Strong and active State

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<sup>117</sup> Rajcsányi, 2018, p. 129.

A strong and active state aiming to give benefits for the middle class is probably one of the main social policy of Orbán's government. Making this class satisfied is a key, because they are the widest layer in the society, and they play a crucial part in maintaining the other ones and in the growth of the economy. The state consciously helps the middle class with tax benefits and family policy.

#### 4: Strict fiscal Policy

Strict and tight, but still a sustainable and balanced fiscal and monetary policy. It is a significant contrast to the previous socialist government and their unbalanced and unsustainable economic measures. Orbán's unorthodox economic policies make also a strong contrast towards the neoliberal consensus. Its main elements are, just like in the previous point, sustainability, and sovereignty. It is an important point too, because the society feels much safer, when they do not hear constantly about the lack of financial reserves and the need of restricting measures.

#### 5: Nationalism

The most visible element in FIDESZ' rhetoric is probably nationalism and patriotism aiming the protection of ethnic-Hungarian minorities living in the neighboring countries, and maintaining national pride. This topic was also able to reach new voters, while also weakening the opposition on the right of the central space of power.<sup>118</sup>

These strategic points in Orbán's policy in the last decades, we have an explanation on what makes him successful. We can say that his most important goal is the creation of a stable and effective state, while at the same time regaining national sovereignty in international and EU politics. This international direction is complemented by the creation of a strong national economic elite, and the support of the middle class. However this seems a positive progression in a point of view, but in reality, the corruption and the quick rise of oligarchs is often justified in words by the need of a strong national concentration of capital.<sup>119</sup> Alongside the corruption, the populist and the illiberal elements, Orbán's policy can still be considered as conservative and right-wing. The new model of the state was however a success in multiple fields, and Orbán's goals could be considered as justified. The active and strongly centralized state offered

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<sup>118</sup> Rajcsányi, 2018, p. 130.

<sup>119</sup> Orbán, Krisztián: A nemzeti tőkéosztály és az illegitim tulajdon ördögi köre, 444.hu, 2016. <https://444.hu/tldr/2016/05/24/a-nemzeti-tokeosztaly-es-az-illegitim-tulajdon-ordogi-kore>, (last accessed on 16.05.2021.)

an alternative to the people, who were disappointed under the reign of the Socialist Party. The failed economic policies and the inactive, or de facto weaker state caused rising debts, and the government was often forced to make restrictive measures, to raise taxes and cut expenses. The lack of stability directly affected many people in the country, and even the public security was in a very low state.

Orbán's efforts to strengthen the state led without a doubt forward and the steps were justified, especially on the fiscal field. The national debt was out of hand between 2002 and 2010, and the deficit was also drastically reduced alongside the inflation as well by the disciplined fiscal actions. Other actions included creating jobs and establishing a community work system, giving work for the lowest layers of the society in mostly rural areas. These drastic stabilization processes led to the appreciation of the markets and the raising popularity of Hungarian state bonds.

The social-ideological elements were also typically right-wing ones, including supporting the historical churches and promoting the traditional family models by giving cheap credits for young families to buy houses or apartments and to encourage the start of families. The Hungarian minorities are also supported. Their case is a dramatic contrast with the Socialist government prior 2010, as I already analyzed that case in the extension of voting rights for citizens in the neighboring countries by offering them dual citizenship. This however plays a role in the process of stabilizing the power of the government, because these new citizens from the other sides of the borders almost exclusively support Orbán's party, and shows the other side of his reign, of making measures to consolidate his position making himself more complicated to replace.<sup>120</sup>

Despite the undoubted achievements of Orbán's governance, I spent the majority of my work to analyze the aspects that stabilized Orbán's regime. From the very first days of his reelection in 2010, Viktor Orbán has made more and more fundamental changes to the whole political system.

The most significant one was the new fundamental law from 2012 on. FIDESZ was the first party after the democratic transition gaining control with over two thirds of the mandates allowing them to change more fields. Their rhetoric was about to finish the transition started in 1989, when there was no new constitution adopted, and the paragraphs of the 1949 Communist

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<sup>120</sup> Rajcsányi, 2018, p. 130-131.

constitution were rewritten according to new and democratic principles. The Fundamental law includes the basic requirements for a liberal democracy, but there is a political agenda of the governing party within the lines, of official patriotism, Christianity and traditionalism. The most recent example of these is, when Orbán's party amended the constitution with a paragraph about the definition of the family. According to that, the base of the family must be marriage, and the father is a man, and the mother is a woman. This is a serious discrimination of the LGBT communities, and excludes them and even single people from adopting children, while also makes same-sex marriage legally invalid.<sup>121</sup>

Alongside the constitution, probably the most important factor making it more difficult to replace the current government is the complete reconstruction of the electoral system. The fundamentals of the pre-2010 system, which was a mixed one remained the same in general, but it was pushed more towards a majoritarian system. It was achieved by reducing the number of mandates in the legislation by more than a third, and the balance between the mandates won by the party lists and the individual electoral districts was moved in favor of the latter ones. The new system is without a doubt a democratic one, but it takes away a possible element of the checks and balances. Because of 106 out of the 199 mandates are won by individual candidates in the electoral districts, it is the more important part of the elections. And because the relative majority is enough to win the mandate and with the lack of a second-turn round, the candidate of the relative most popular party is able to win the mandate with even less than 50 per cents. This makes the system favoring the relative strongest party by giving them a stable majority, even without the need of starting coalitional negotiations. It makes to gain a supermajority also more achievable. FIDESZ was able to construct the new rules in order to achieve their own goals to strengthen their positions. They were and still are the strongest party, and they created an electoral system to conserve this status on a longer term.

Not just the basics of the electoral system were changed, but the individual districts too. However it is not proved, but there is a serious suspicion of gerrymandering in favor of the all-time right-wing parties. The other problems with the borders are, that they are politically motivated, instead of being drawn by an independent institution, like in the United Kingdom, while the changing of the districts needs a political consensus, further maintaining the status

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<sup>121</sup> Reuters: Hungary government proposes constitutional amendments mandating Christian gender roles, Reuters, 2020.  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-lgbt-constitution-idUSKBN27Q34Z>, (last accessed on 05.16.2021.)

quo. These changes helped Orbán's party to win over two thirds again in 2014 and 2018 as well, despite receiving less votes on their party list as in 2010, proving that the reconstruction of the electoral institutions were a necessity for Orbán to stay in office and continue the transition of the political system. The prime minister is also interested in maintaining the status quo, because the opposition is very polarized, and often they compete against each other for a leading role within the opposition. As long as that is the case, and the opponents take the votes away from each other, Orbán will always benefit by leading the relative most popular party. That is what his doctrine about the central space of power is about, the polarized opposition will not be able to form a majority neither on the right or the left.

## **7.2 Possible future Scenerios**

To achieve their goals, it is enough for FIDESZ to keep the opposition polarized, while their voting base must stay active and stable. They adopted several elements to keep the status quo. The first one is total takeover of the media by handpicking own loyalist to lead the independence media institutions to favor the standards of Orbán, and on the other hand, taking over hundreds of different media outlets. This includes the takeover of every single regional papers and the state media to reach those layers of the society, who do not have the access to sort and double check the information they receive. Orbán consolidated the media empire, by obtaining popular boulevard papers and commercial TV and radio. It is still unclear, where this process will end, but in my personal opinion, the takeover of the media could possibly reach the top after Index.hu fell into the hands of circles close to the government. With all the outlets under the holding of KESMA, they could have reached as many people as possible, and the voters of the opposition, or the people without a stable party preference who have not consumed governmental media so far are not willing to do that even after a further expansion in that field. So in summary, the government reached as many people as possible.

Being the leader of the relative most popular party by far, Orbán reached the peak of his support, but as I mentioned before, he is interested in preserving the status quo by keeping his voting base united and active. To achieve that, he needs to be active himself. That is why, he is - in some ways justifiably – accused as being a populist. In fact, he needs to be popular to keep the voting base of millions of people together. He has a history throughout his whole political career of using progressive communicational tools, and since 2010, his staff took it

onto a higher level after obtaining the necessary infrastructure of media empire, street poster distribution and all the necessary resources. The party's survey infrastructure and communication is very professional even in comparison with the international standards. Orbán's key to remain popular however lays in his own political talent:

He and his party are able to professionally monitor the flows of the society and they are always able to reflect on that. They are ready to adjust their policy if the majority of the society could be won by that. A good example for that is when the government withdrew the application for the 2024 Olympic Games in 2017, after the necessary number of signatures for an anti-Olympics referendum were collected. They stepped back after knowing, that the majority of the people would not support the project.

Orbán's party is very strong in the constant communicational campaigns, for example street posters and the already mentioned institute of national consultations. This is justifiable a populist tool, and the simplified communication also strengthens this attitude. However, the government always aims to reach the widest possible layers of the society, and the simplified communication is definitely a useful tool to achieve that, because the oversimplified messages address the problems the people feel concerned about. FIDESZ is very strong in analyzing the society's concerns about major problems, and their communicational team has a significant experience in the exploitation of them. The professional and constant communicational campaigns are a key of still being the most popular party after more, than a decade. Despite passing many unpopular measures and controversially downgrading the rule of law and the state of democratic institutions, and the corruption level is high, FIDESZ' popularity still remains unchallenged. Their mastery of monitoring the society's concern and exploiting them with their overwhelming media superiority, many uneducated people from mostly in the rural regions with the lack of resources to double-check the information they consume supports Orbán's policies.

On the other hand, the opposition is not able to have effective against the active and intense communication of the government, and it is possibly fair to say, that the liberal and leftist opposition has failed to reflect on the society, and is unable to reinvent their policies. To underline that, we can clearly notice, that they still are campaigning with the pre-2010 social and welfare benefits, while they did not realize, that the majority of the people lost their faith in that after the economic crisis started in 2008. At the same time, the Left still has compromised and unpopular characters from the previous system, which makes the reach of further people not possible. The good example for this is Ferenc Gyurcsény, who is now the

leader of the leftist opposition, while his former scandals as prime minister makes his person unacceptable for a fair amount of people. He makes the whole opposition an easier target for the right-wing media, and the cooperation of the parties can be vulnerable during a campaign because of Gyurcsány's person. This is why, Orbán is interested in maintaining the status quo, where the political spectre of Hungary can be simplified to a narrative, where Orbán and Gyurcsány are the two axes. The reason for that is, that the current prime minister has the moral superiority after the socialists' scandals in the fall of 2006, and he knows, that the comparison between him and Gyurcsány will always favour for Orbán. This is why, the future cooperation of the oppositional parties favours FIDESZ, because the media can compromise the parties for working together with Gyurcsány.

In summary, the leftist opposition is not able to create a narrative to challenge the government, while on the other side of FIDESZ, the formerly radical Jobbik trying to show a moderate profile is constantly confronted with their previous extreme statements weakening their credibility. In the meantime after Gábor Vona's resignation as the party's leader and retirement from party politics created internal power struggles resulting other leading politicians to leave the formation, or to found Mi Hazánk, whose existence however is seen by the public, as FIDESZ's attempt to put a party to their right to restore the central space of power after Jobbik's change into a more moderate direction. For a second possibility of their existence could likely be as a tool in order to monitor the reactions of the public at more radical rhetorics, and after Mi Hazánk makes an extremist move for nationalism, or against minorities, FIDESZ joins the discussion in a slightly moderate way.

After examining the current political landscape in Hungary, I would like to take a brief look in the near future of the system, as a final thought. As I already analyzed, the electoral system and the general relations in the political environment force the parties of the opposition to join forces against FIDESZ, and the only existing chance to beat them at elections is to support one potent and locally respected candidate against the government's ones in the individual voting districts to challenge them. This strategy however needs the cooperation of all the major parties on the opposition, while Orbán's strategy to polarize them and by keeping his formation in the middle made it politically more difficult for parties to cooperate with those, who are further from their ideologies, than the government itself. This is why there was not any major cooperation in the last parliamentary elections in 2018, except for some parties agreed to have candidates stepped back in order to support the other one's. This was however not a full-scale coordination, which forced civilian movements to create local polls and databases to

encourage people to vote for the local candidate with the most potential chance to beat FIDESZ.

Despite the disastrous loss for the opposition in 2018, the need in one half of the society is still there to create a coalition against the government, and there are already some visible changes for the upcoming elections of 2022. The parties of the opposition will probably form a larger-scale cooperation in the individual district this time. There are already references for this phenomenon in the past, like the local elections of 2019, when the opposition united behind one candidate, managed to take over the seat of the mayor of Budapest alongside several other cities. That must be a warning side of the government. On the other hand however, the nature of the cooperation among the opposition was still a question. Would they focus on the personal districts, or should they unite formally by creating one list as well.

Before the debates were about to intensify, the government decided the questions itself in late 2020. The modification law T/13679 adopted by the minister of Justice, Judit Varga creates the conditions for party lists more difficult, which in practice makes locks the cooperation of the oppositional parties between barriers. According to the act, the formation of a national list for a party the elections requires the nomination of at least 50 individual candidates in at least 9 counties and in the capital city.<sup>122</sup> Because the opposition had a consensus in order to support only one candidate in each of the 106 districts, they are in practice forced to unify their forces to form one common list. Just days later, in November, János Volner, former politician of Jobbik, then Mi Hazánk, then the leader of his own movement presented a further modification of the electoral law, further raising the necessary number of individual candidates in order to create a national list from 50 to 71. The official explanation was to prevent the participation of fake parties on the elections, but other political opinions interpreted the modification, as the government's attempt to force the opposition to establish one common party list.<sup>123</sup> The statement also further strengthened the theories of Mi Hazánk and some independent politicians in practice help the government's goals despite not being in their fraction.

These acts in 2020 basically decided the relations for the upcoming elections of 2022. The oppositional parties are forced to unite all their forces, which has its upsides and downsides as

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<sup>122</sup> Modification Act T/13679, 2020. Parliament of Hungary, own translation, 2020.  
<https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/13679/13679.pdf>, accessed on 05.16.2021.

<sup>123</sup> HVG.hu: Most húzta keresztbe a Fidesz az ellenzék külön listás terveit, hvg.hu, 2020.  
[https://hvg.hu/itthon/20201124\\_Most\\_huzta\\_keresztbe\\_a\\_Fidesz\\_az\\_ellenzek\\_kulon\\_listas\\_terveit](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20201124_Most_huzta_keresztbe_a_Fidesz_az_ellenzek_kulon_listas_terveit), accessed on 05.17.2021.



well. Six parties made a joint statement in December 2020 about the nomination of one candidate in each of the 106 electoral districts, and also create a common list against the government, and the national elections will be a completely two-sided event. The parties agreed on organizing informal elections within their lines to choose the most potent and most popular local candidates, and also the common prime minister competing against Orbán as well.<sup>124</sup>

Despite maintaining the policy of central space of power for a decade, it is hard to understand, why Orbán's party suddenly forced the opposition to challenge the system one against one in 2022. Before the modification of the law, the relevant parties of the opposition had already agreed on the way of the cooperation of the 106 districts and were willing to choose one candidate, like they did on the regional elections in 2019, when the government lost major cities including Budapest, so the consensus had already been there. The question was, if they unite the forces and create one joint list, or the cooperation will only take place in the 106 districts.

In my opinion, the way the opposition would maximize their potential votes is the idea of separate lists. Despite agreeing in the forms of cooperation, the parties do still have ideological differences including liberal, socialist and formerly far-right parties, whose voters potentially would not support a list, when their preferred politicians participate alongside those, who the voters would distance themselves from. Each of the parties are in a more difficult situation in this environment, because their voice is harder to validate, while it is a real scenario, that some parties will lose their identities. For FIDESZ, it is also easier to handle the opposition, as one block, and their focus will not be split. The negotiations and informal elections in order to choose the candidates will also cause debates and differences because of the multiple participants which would weaken the cooperation, while the government-friendly media would possibly create a talking point out of every differences in the cooperation to discredit the other parties. The hinterland of the government definitely has the resources to dictate the publicity, and when the opposition is campaigning as a block, they are more vulnerable, and the rightist media will not need to split its attention. Meanwhile the parties participating in the cooperation gave up their own identities for a common goal have the danger of losing the votes

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<sup>124</sup> Maximov, Vladislav: Hungarian Opposition forces unite to beat Orban in 2022, Euractiv.com, 2020. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/hungarian-opposition-forces-unite-to-beat-orban-in-2022/>, (accessed on 18.05.2021.)

of the hardliners, who would not tolerate their preferred party participating together with others, whose ideologies are further, the even the government, and this factor could favor FIDESZ. The joint list of the established opposition could lead towards another important factor as well: the national elections could possibly turn into a referendum for or against Orbán. The participating parties are on a wide ideological spectrum, and it is unlikely, they because of these differences, they would be able to create a precise program, so the campaign in my opinion will be a populist one. Without a vision, many could not see a coalition stable and competent enough to be an alternative of a working and established system.

Another aspect not mentioned yet is the case of smaller parties not willing to give up their identities for the case of cooperation. They are an easy target in the media for weakening the cooperation of the opposition, but in the case of participation, the existence of this smaller parties would be in danger, because the already established formations are more influential in the negotiations, and the new parties cannot gain relevant social support by joining the block.

Despite their obstacles of the united opposition their chances for good results in 2022 are definitely higher, than they were in 2018, when there was not the real will for any major form of cooperation. One reason for that is simply the number of potential candidates in each of the districts, and among the lists as well. The conscious voters do not need to rely on the researches of NGOs to vote for the one with the highest chance. With the coordinated nomination of candidates in the 106 individual districts alone could be a key factor preventing another four years for Orbán governing with a supermajority, and that has the possibility to start a sort of democratic discussions within the legislation, because the parties would need to rely on each other to make a consensus, instead of one party accepting every possible acts despite the resistance.

In my opinion, it is probably the likeliest scenario, that FIDESZ wins, but with a low majority. However, the decade-long polarization of publicity, and a high number of radical acts, there is a wide layer of people against the government, and in the turbulent economic environment of 2020-2021 during the crisis management it is a dangerous field for governments, because they inevitably need to take unpopular measures during the pandemic. In this political climate, when all the major acteurs created a two-sided space of power, every scenario could be possible in 2022. This is underlined by the results of the survey company, Závecz Research in March, 2021. According to them, the popularity of the joint list of the opposition was by 1 per cent higher, than the one of the government among the certain voters, which predicts a sharp-

edged and tense campaign for the near future.<sup>125</sup>

The last statement of the government and the opposition being very close made me ask a final question: what will happen, if Viktor Orbán loses, after 12 years? There is the possibility, that the possible coalition formed by today's opposition would not be able to make the state work properly, and their political differences would be critical in the process of policy making. That could potentially result a loss of their popularity, because the people would probably prefer a more stable and working system.

This opinion could be strengthened by the major point of my thesis: the strategic institutions, the bureaucracy critical to keep the state working are under the control of Viktor Orbán, and his economic hinterland. That is a serious factor, because in theory, a theoretic new government could be too weak to even accept the annual budget. This point is the most important element of Orbán's System of National Cooperation and of my work as well: under his reign, a complete system was established too deep to be changed by a new government, in case FIDESZ would lose on an election. Another level of making a new government's work more difficult is the complete shut-down of the country. It is a very radical and in the same time unlikely scenerio, but in theory, it is still possible. Businessmen close to Orbán have purchased strategic companies and infrastructure necessary to keep the economy working, such as power plants, gas distribution, ports, hotel chains, agricultural companies with a visible amount of fields. Although the theoretic possibility is there, it is hard to imagine, that a political force with its economic empire supporting it would act that way within the European Union.

Despite the differences, the united opposition has more chance to beat Orbán this time, than ever. Of course, they would need to make deals with the system to make the state work, but that would reduce the opposition's creditability, and would lead to the potential loss of masses of voters. This is why, the elections of 2022 would be the only chance for the opposition. If they would be able to win, then work efficiently to solve some problems of the economy, the society, and the culture, the country could be put on a way of progressiveness. That would be in my opinion big advantage of the united opposition: it could be a symbolic move towards

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<sup>125</sup> Závecz Research: A Pártok támogatottsága, 2021/02., Závecz Research Piac – és Társadalomkutató Intézet, 2021.

<http://www.zaveczresearch.hu/a-partok-tamogatottsaga/>, (last accessed on 06.20.2021)

uniting the society as well. Returning to my statement in the introduction, Orbán's radical policy successfully polarized the masses of people, which resulted, that there are not debates in the publicity, and the emotions and tensions are high.

Despite of all the realistic and less realistic scenerios, even if Orbán will lose the power either temporarily, or on a permanent basis, his achievements, and the System of National Cooperation will remain to be a determinative factor in the mid-term development of Hungary.

Viktor Orbán will remain. He has already been the longest-serving prime minister in the history of Hungary, who managed to achieve an international reputation and influence. However his morals are questioned, his political performance cannot be bypassed and overperformed within reasonable time. His party on the other side went through a partly natural stage of development over the three decades, and became a catch-all party, where every segments of the society can find an aspect they can support, but because of this, FIDESZ needs to be active in order to keep the voting base together. They had been doing so, that is why they are constantly the relative strongest party. This is in my opinion the most important element of the current system:

Orbán understood the behavior of the majority of the voters. He realized, that egalitarian individualism became dominant in the society, which suffers in a crisis of values after the turbulent decades since the iron curtain fell. FIDESZ reflected on the frustrations of the people and offers them the experience of success, and the voting base of the government behaves, as a community. His communicational staff is able to notice the popular need of the people and often able to dictate the public speech, for example with the analyzed campaign during the refugee crisis in 2015. The simplified messages and constant communicational campaigns are effective, but they extremely polarize the publicity, which played a major role in splitting the society into two parts: agreeing with the government, and the one against it. In the government's perspective however this communication keeps the voting base together active. Because the political decisions of the majority of the voters are rarely rational, Orbán and his staff consciously operate on the emotions while dictating the public speech. There are key elements in their communication. On the positive side, there are family, nation, national interest, while on the negative end of the scale, there is constantly an opponent in the rhetoric, such as the opposition, George Soros, the European Union and NGOs, keeping the supporters in a constant psychotic state. His populism created so many breakpoints within the society, that they will remain even after losing power. For some examples, the already analyzed situation of the ethnic Hungarians on the other sides of the borders against the ones living in

Hungary, government-supporters against opposition, and capital city against the countryside are consciously created contrasts helping the further polarization of the society.<sup>126</sup>

Orbán's abilities can be admired in a point of view. He is willing and capable to sacrifice positive values of the Hungarian culture in order to push his own popularity, for example the traditions of an accommodating nation, and he pushes the concept of nation in an ethnical definition instead of the established vision of the cultural one. Orbán's populism does not come from his own convictions, it is more of a tactical tool. He sees fundamental values, such as the rule of law and democracy and freedom relative ones instead of absolute, and he frequently turns against the mainstream doctrines in his statements, while following his and the voters interests with the strictest political pragmatism. Although Orbán claims, he serves all of the people, in reality, he strongly tematisizes and polarizes the whole society. His most important background is the elderly, less educated and poorer countryside. That is what I analyzed in the chapter about the takeover of the media. This is the layer of the society, who do not have access to double-check the information and they basically only know the narrative of the government.

The main point of his narrative making Orbán and his party so popular, is his rhetoric to strengthen Hungary's national sovereignty. He believes in a strong state, because that is the only institution to compete with the international organizations and interest groups. This is the reason Hungary still uses the national currency, his party does not support the further integration in the European Union, despite Orbán being pro Euro before 2010. Another important element in his populist populism about sovereignty is the economic policy serving the national interests, however, these are often only rhetorical objectives, and in reality, the government offers favoring conditions for the foreign capital. These topics are easy to sell in the media to win the conservative and nationalist layers of the society.

After gaining power in 2010, Orbán attempted to loosen the dependency from the international monetary institutions, paid back credits from the World Bank and the IMF, while keepingt a distance from the Eurozone. As I said, his strict fiscal policy was a significant contrast after the Socialists government's attempts. The people felt more stability which boosted Orbán's support. He preferred the Hungarian investors alongside the German capital, which was partly

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<sup>126</sup> Botos, Máté: Tíz év arra, miért marad velünk Orbán még 2030 után is, Azonnali.hu, 2020. [https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20200216\\_tiz-erv-arra-hogy-miert-marad-velunk-orban-2030-utan-is](https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20200216_tiz-erv-arra-hogy-miert-marad-velunk-orban-2030-utan-is) (last accessed on 20.05.2021.)

a justification of his former views against the international capital, who brings their profit out of the country. This also made him more popular, but behind the words and the openings of new factories and assemblies, the new jobs created do not have a significant added value, which will prevent Hungary's development on a long-run.<sup>127</sup>

In my opinion, this is the main sin of Orbán's system alongside the extreme polarization of the society: he sacrificed the country's competitiveness on a long-run for the current statistics and advantages. The state became much more active. One of the other reasons behind that was, that Orbán realized, his widest voting base is the undereducated people living in villages or small towns. He constantly attempts to reach the middle-class with social benefits, for example cheap credits for young families, and other social benefits. Because of this and the lack of export capital, the country became more dependent on the supports of the EU. Without that, the government would not be able to finance those social benefits. The active role of the state also limited competition became a significant environment for corruption. The nature of the economy, the products with low added value and the profit taken by the transnational corporations resulted the maintenance of the traditional type of society with a narrow layer of intellectuals and the civic society remains to be a utopia.<sup>128</sup>

Orbán's government without a doubt did a lot to further push the future of Hungary into an uncertain direction. It is a question, who will gain power in 2022, but the roots of the system are so deep in the Hungarian economy and society, that a coalition of multiple parties with a too wide layer of identities will not be able to change that even in the mid-term future. That is the most important secret behind the success story of FIDESZ and Viktor Orbán: they were able to realize, how to reflect on the society and the ability to change that in their favor. The damage is done, and scars will probably need a time of more than one generation to heal.

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<sup>127</sup> Botos, 2020.

<sup>128</sup> Botos, 2020.

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## Abstract

Nach Viktor Orbáns Rückkehr an die Macht, erscheint Ungarn wieder häufiger in den europäischen Medien. In den elf Jahren konnte er mit einer 2/3 Mehrheit der Mandate demokratische Strukturen wie die Verfassung, das Wahlsystem und die Medienstruktur grundlegend ändern. Diese neuen Zustände sind äußerst kontrovers und dienen dazu, die Macht Orbáns zu erhalten. In meiner Masterarbeit versuche ich, den Hintergrund und die Vorkommnisse zu rekonstruieren sowie die möglichen Konsequenzen zu thematisieren. Ich analysiere, wie das politische System geändert wurde, und welchen Zielen die neuen Regelungen dienen.

Im ersten Drittel meiner Arbeit analysiere ich, wie die Partei Orbáns die Wahl mit so großer Unterstützung gewinnen konnte. Danach beschreibe ich die Schlüsselaspekte, die einen Regierungswechsel komplizierter machen, wie das neue Wahlsystem, das neue Wahlrecht, und die Übernahme der strategischen Institute, in denen die politische Elite ihren Einfluss üben kann. Obwohl diese Veränderungen per se nicht antidemokratisch sind, wären sie in einer gefestigten Demokratie nur sehr schwer vorstellbar. Das macht Orbáns System zu einem einzigartigen Sonderfall.

Ich analysiere auch, warum die Opposition die Regierung nicht unter Druck setzen kann, in Anbetracht der Übernahme eines großen Teils des medialen Marktes und Orbáns Machtpolitik, die auf seiner parlamentarischen Mehrheit beruht, und wie die Regierung von der Polarisierung der Opposition profitiert. Am Ende erläutere ich, warum das System Orbáns eine Zäsur in der neuen ungarischen Geschichte darstellt, warum das Land langfristig verändert wurde, und warum die Auswirkungen auch für die folgenden Generationen spürbar sein werden.

See in English:

After his return to power, news from Hungary appear often in the European news. Governing with the two thirds of the mandates in the past eleven, he made fundamental changes in the structure of the state, for example the constitution, the electoral system and the relations in the media. These new conditions are highly controversial, and serve the preservation of his power. In my master's thesis I make an attempt to explain the background and the possible consequences. I will analyze how the political system was changed, and how the new rules take place.

In the first third of my work, I analyze the background and the prologue, how Orbán's party won the elections with such a support. After that, explain the key factors making a further change in the government more complicated, like the new electoral system, the right to vote and the takeover of the strategic institutions where the political elite can exploit its influence. Although these acts are not anti-democratic, they are hard to imagine in a consolidated democracy. It makes the system of Orbán unique.

I will also analyze, why the opposition cannot put pressure on the power, for example the takeover of almost all of the media market, and a policy of power, which was built onto the polarized state of the opposition.

At the end I explain within the conclusions, why Orbán's system is a part of the modern history of Hungary and why was the country changed on a long basis as well, where the consequences will impact the following generations as well.