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ANALYSIS

Barring surprise, Viktor Orban is due to win a third consecutive term as the head of Hungary

On 8th April next nearly 8 million Hungarians are being called to ballot to renew the 199 members of the Országgyűlés, the only house of parliament. This date is not a random choice since on 8th April 1990 the second round of the first free elections organised in Hungary took place after the communist dictatorship over the country came to an end. The legislative election will almost be without surprise, such is the degree to which outgoing Prime Minister, Viktor Orban (Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union, FIDESZ-MPP) dominates the country and the impotence of the opposition

According to the most recent poll by Nezipont, published at the beginning of March FIDESZ-MPP will easily win the election on 8th April with 52% of the vote, ahead of the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), a nationalist party led by Gabor Vona, which is due to win 17% of the vote. On the left, the Socialist Party (MSZP) is due to win 10% of the vote and the Democratic Coalition (DK), the party of former Prime Minister (2004-2009) Ferenc Gyurcsany, 6%. Doing Politics Differently (LMP), an ecologist party led by Akos Hadravszky and Bernadett Szel, is due to win 9% of the vote.

"NO" TO MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, AS WELL AS THE DEFENCE OF HUNGARIAN IDENTITY ARE THE MAJOR THEMES IN VIKTOR ORBAN'S CAMPAIGN

"We need four more years to consolidate our results and make them irreversible," said the outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orban. As of 13th December 2015, the day he was re-elected to lead the FIDESZ, the Hungarian leader said he wanted to continue serving Hungary if his fellow

countrymen re-elected him to office. "In my opinion the issue at stake in these elections is simple: do we want to become a country of immigration?" declared the head of the Magyar government. He would like to see himself as the defender of Hungarian identity ("Hungary First" is his tag line) and is against Brussels' commitment to relocate 160,000 Syrian, Iraqi and Eritrean refugees within the 28 Member States, speaking of an "offensive by Islam", qualifying the refugees as "Muslim invaders". For the outgoing Prime Minister who maintains that "Christianity is the last hope for humanity", "the European Union is trying to undermine Europe's Christian foundations and to transform the societies of each Member State into multicultural societies."

Viktor Orban has called on his European counterparts to join him in a global alliance against mass immigration, notably from Muslim countries.

In July 2016 Budapest approved a bill on asylum requests and illegal immigration that enabled the police to deport immediately any illegal immigrant

intercepted within an 8km area behind the Hungarian border, a measure which was then extended to the entire country. In 2015 it is estimated that 391,384 people entered the country illegally – a year later there were only 18,236 illegal entries.

Another of Viktor Orbán's obsessions is George Soros. The outgoing Prime Minister accuses the Hungarian born American billionaire, Chair of the Open Society Foundation of conspiring against Hungary with a plan to Islamise Europe via forced immigration. George Soros accuses Viktor Orbán of using him as a scapegoat to turn public attention from the "Mafia State" that the Prime Minister is now in the process of establishing. In his speech to the nation on 18th February last, the Hungarian leader accused George Soros of financing power centres in the EU and the UN to act against Hungary. Five days prior to this a draft bill was put to the Hungarian Parliament entitled "Stop Soros", which aims to oblige any NGO working in the humanitarian area and any NGO financed from abroad to justify periodically its activities so that checks regarding the funds it receives can be made to ensure that these are not being used to fund immigration. In the event of infringement, NGOs might be obliged to pay fines of up to 25% of the total funds they have received from abroad.

Viktor Orbán likes to repeat that after the election on 8th April the Hungarian government will be formed by himself or by George Soros, meaning that in the event of victory by the opposition the government will be so weak that George Soros will de facto be man to lead the country

The FIDESZ has not presented a programme in these elections and is using as its support the results of the last 8 years (two consecutive mandates) leading the State, with sound GDP growth (which lay at 4% last year), increases in the minimum wage (6% in 2016, 15% in 2017, 8% planned this year) and low unemployment at 3.8%, the lowest rate since the collapse of communism in 1989.

ON THE LEFT, THE OPPOSITION MADE IMPOTENT DUE TO ITS DIVISIONS

On 25th February last Peter Marki-Zay, an independent candidate supported by all of the opposition parties, won the local by-election in the town of Hodmezövasarhely (47,000 inhabitants), that lies on the Serb border and the stronghold of Janos Lazar (FIDESZ), Minister of the Chancellery and loyal to Viktor Orbán, with 57.49% of the vote. Turnout totalled 62.45%, and was twice that recorded in the local elections of 2014.

This success led to hope across the opposition, both on the left and the right. "This win is a turning point that shows that FIDESZ can be beaten anywhere in the country," declared Gabor Vona, leader of Jobbik. "This win has come just in time for the opposition to choose to cooperate together, just as it comes in time to allow FIDESZ to adjust its campaign," stressed the director of the think-tank Political Capital, Peter Kreko. "54% of the electorate want a change of government. FIDESZ leads, but the dislike of this party is strong and our studies prove that those who are against Jobbik and FIDESZ want a united opposition. They would vote for any personality who might beat Viktor Orbán," indicated Andras Pulai, an analyst at the pollster Publicis. "The opposition no longer plays the old game in which it had no chance of winning, but the situation is new, and no longer hopeless, if we adopt an intelligent strategy," stresses Gabor Torok, a professor of political science at the Corvinus University, Budapest.

Convinced that the opposition has no chance of winning the election on 8th April the Hungarians are not very motivated to vote. More aware than before of the need to stand together to win in the ballot-box, the parties on the left are still divided however, unable to form a single list or agree on a candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

The Socialist Party (MSZP) led by Gyula Molnar has however joined forces with Dialogue for Hungary (PM), a social-democratic, ecologist party led by Tímea Szabó and Gergely Karacsony. The latter is the candidate of both of these parties for the post of Prime Minister.

The socialists say they are prepared to widen their cooperation but do not see any possible alliance with Jobbik, a party whom they have asked to withdraw their candidates in which an independent candidate would have more chance of winning.

If they came to office the Socialist Party and Dialogue for Hungary want to re-allocate European funds, which in their opinion are being misused or misspent on projects of no interest. Both parties are promising to reduce petrol, electricity and heating prices as well as increase the wages of people working in healthcare by 50% (a sector in default, many doctors and nurses have left the country in quest of better pay). Both parties on the left want to double retirement pensions of the poorest and guarantee that no pensioner will receive below 100,000 forints (320€) per month. Finally, they will increase investments in healthcare, education and will do away with the flat tax rate on VAT, income and businesses, set at 16% and will organise a referendum on the abolition of the Constitution[1].

The Democratic Coalition (DK) led by former Prime Minister (2004-2009) Ferenc Gyurcsány, is promising to increase teachers' wages by 15% (and that of young teachers by 30%). Doing Politics Differently (LMP), an ecologist party led by Ákos Hadházy and Bernadett Szel, also supports an increase in teachers' wages and more widely those of civil servants. The LMP takes a strict stance on migrants. "We do not support the migrant quotas established by the European Union, we shall not take down the wall (built on the border with Serbia and Croatia as of July 2015 to prevent migrants from entering the country) and I shall re-introduce border controls," declared Bernadett

Szel, who is also standing for the post of Prime Minister.

ON THE RIGHT THE MOVEMENT FOR A BETTER HUNGARY IS STRUGGLING TO FIND ITS PLACE

Over the last four years Gábor Vona has changed the political orientation of the Movement for a Better Hungary. "I decided to break away from the racist, anti-Semitic environment" he explained. Vona dissolved the Magyar Guard, a paramilitary militia belonging to the party and gave up advocating Hungary's exit from the EU. With the tagline "With a Hungarian heart, common sense and clean hands", Jobbik is campaigning on social issues (health, education) and notably on the defence of wages and retirement pensions, as well as the fight to counter corruption. The party accuses Viktor Orbán of authoritarian excesses. The change set by Gábor Vona does not seem to have been accepted by supporters of the movement who do not necessarily appreciate the development of their party, which is struggling to attract new voters, who are not convinced by this change. Jobbik has also been pushed to position itself differently by the radicalisation of FIDESZ, which has clearly swung to the right over the last few years and which has hardened its narrative regarding questions such as immigration and the European Union.

"Jobbik has not been able to respond to the demand for radicalism that has been expressed in society since the historic migration crisis of 2015. It has blurred its image by trying to delete its xenophobic leanings in a bid to diversify its electorate," maintained analyst András Pulai.

THE HUNGARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Országgyűlés, the only house in parliament, has 199 MPs elected for four years: 106 of them are elected according to a single list in constituencies and 93 by proportional representation from a national list. Voters have two voting slips, one to choose

1. The Hungarian Constitution entered into force on 1st January 2012. The text in which the word « Republic » was deleted, introduced a reference to God, and made the forint the national currency, it established the golden rule (inclusion of a limit – of 50% of the country's public deficit). The European Union and the Council of Europe have protested against several of the articles in the Fundamental Law which has been modified several times since its adoption.

General elections in Hungary

8th April 2018

a political party, the other to vote in support of a candidate.

Voters who belong to a national minority[2] vote for the lists of their minority and not for the national parties. Only one quarter of the votes required by the national parties is necessary for a list representing a minority to win a seat. The national minorities that do not win seats can delegate a spokesperson in parliament.

Only the parties running in at least 27 constituencies spread amongst at least 9 counties and Budapest can put candidates forward in the proportional vote. The parties that put forward candidates in 106 constituencies receive 2 million €; those running in 80 to 105 constituencies receive 1.5 million €, those with candidates in more than 54 constituencies but fewer than 79 receive 1 million € and finally those presenting candidates in 27 to 53 constituencies receive 500,000€. Each candidate receives 3,200€ for his/her electoral campaign.

To be able to sit in parliament a party has to win at least 5% of the votes cast; an alliance of two parties, 10% of the vote and an alliance of 3 parties or more, 15%. The seats covered by the national lists are distributed proportionally to the votes cast; votes that do not enable a party to win seats, as well as the votes for a party having achieved the seat which go beyond the electoral threshold are then redistributed according to the d'Hondt method.

Any party that wants to put a list forward in the general single list vote must collate at least 500 voter signatures. In the single list constituencies

candidates can be presented either by the parties or by the citizens.

Finally, party political broadcasts can be made on TV, if the channel accepts to give the parties free air-time. In this case they must then grant the same time to all of the electoral lists running.

8 political parties are represented at present in the Hungarian parliament:

- Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPP), created on 30th March 1988 led by outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orban, with 117 MPs;
- the People's Christian-Democratic Party (KDNP), founded in 1944 led by Zsolt Semjen, 16 seats;
- the Socialist Party (MSZP), founded in 1989 and chaired by Gyula Molnar, with 29 MPs;
- Together. A party for a new era (Együtt), a social liberal party created in 2012, led by Peter Juhasz, has 3 seats;
- Democratic Coalition (DK), a social-liberal party led by former Prime Minister (2004-2009) Ferenc Gyurcsany, with 4 MPs;
- Dialogue for Hungary (PM), a social democratic, ecologist party created in February 2013, led by Gergely Karacsony and Timea Szabo, 1 seat;
- The Hungarian Liberal Party (L), led by Gabor Fodor, 1 seat;
- Movement for a better Hungary (Jobbik), a nationalist party created in October 2003 and led by Gabor Vona with 23 seats;
- Doing Politics Differently (LMP), an ecologist party founded in 2009, led by Akos Hadrassy and Bernadett Szel, with 5 seats.

2. Hungary recognises 13 national minorities :Germans, Armenians, Bulgarians ; Croatians, Greeks, Poles, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Ukrainians.

Reminder of the elections results on 6th April 2014 in Hungary

Turnout : 61,73%

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		Proportional vote			Single list vote		TOTAL		
Coalition	Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats	No of votes won	No seats	Total % of votes won	Total seats	
FIDESZ-MPP KDNP Alliance	Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPP)	2 264 780	44,87	30	2 165 342	87	66,83	117	
	Christian Democratic Party (KDNP)			7				9	16
Unity	Socialist Party (MSZP)	1 290 806	25,57	21	1 317 879	8	19,10	29	
	Together. Party for a new Era (Együtt)			2				1	3
	Democratic Coalition (DK)			3				1	4
	Dialogue for Hungary (PM)			1					1
	Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP)			1					1
	Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)	1 020 476	20,22	23	1 000 637		11,56	23	
	Doing Politics Differently (LMP)	269 414	5,34	5	244 191		2,51	5	
	Others	201 887	4	0	424 750	0	0	0	

Source : <http://www.valasztas.hu/48>