Membership Without Belonging?

Hungary into the European Union: A Historic Step Passively Approved

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Due to historical consequences of World War II, Hungary spent more than forty years as a ’member-state’ of the Soviet bloc. Hungarians had to learn how to live and maneouvre in informal networks under the icy structures of forced formalities. The „system”, imposed on them by external forces, was above their heads, they were not asked whether they preferred it or not. People learned how to *survive* in the first place. Double structures of formality and informality created systematic lack of trust in the relationship between society and the oppressive system, and those structures also made people’s behavior dishonest in many respects. The country was part of the Soviet bloc without any sense of belonging to that.

It was a membership without belonging. People felt they had belonged to ’Europe’ and not to an empire of ’Asian despotism’.[1] They had developed deeply skeptical and cynical attitudes to the then existing ’membership’ (just as to Communist Party membership on individual level), and they tried to keep hopes, respect, and semi-utopian beliefs alive toward an imagined Europe, a place they ’truly’ belonged to.[2]

The regime was totalitarian in the 1950s and part of the 1960s but became relatively more ’relaxed’ post-totalitarian rule from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s. It is particularly important to keep these historical facts in mind when investigating rights, policies, voters behavior, and the ’mental map’ of communities living in Hungary. Authoritarian political systems do not usually allow much room for groups of civil society to explore and organize themselves freely in a spontaneous way. The most important consequence of the non-democrartic rule was the lack of ’formal trust’ in the society. By ’formal trust’, I mean impersonal, institutionalized ways of trust.

People were ’members’ in different organizatons without a feeling of being part of them in any sense. However, this is not to say that Hungary was a trust-less society. Trust, indeed, existed on an informal level only, while institutions were seen as alienated, oppressive, and non-trustworthy bodies. Peole in informal, friendly circles of civil society were trusted while the official organs of the state were taken as enemies.

In the late 1980s, the emerging political pluralism in Hungary was based on cultural pluralism, so party elites bound together very closely. There was an increasing gap between leadership of the democratic parties and the rest of the society. Ordinary voters, again, often felt that new parties were operating above their heads without asking them about the most relevant issues. The political agenda did not always reflect to everyday issues. The bloodless, negotiated, elite-driven constitutional revolution of 1989, peaceful as it was, did not particularly offer an opportunity for active social participation.

The emerging new capitalism of the 1990s, and the large-scale privatization of state assets, again, reinforced the popular perception that those who were ’above’ in the social hierarchy should not be trusted. It was near to impossible to reconstruct formal trust in the period of ’gold rush’ in a new, ’lawless’, wild capitalism, because formal rules were subject to change all the time. That helped informal trust to survive and prevented the reconstruction of trust towards institutions. Elite-driven democratization in the politics went hand in hand with ’expert-driven’ privatization in the economy. Sometimes there was no difference seen between political and economic entrepreneurs. The former accepted the minimalist conception of democracy while the latter advocated the neoliberal ideology of ’spontaneous’ privatization. The interpenetration between these two groupings was high. The whole process of double transition was based on the patience of the poor. Ordinary people tended to see the change of the regime, as just another trick of the ruling class, in which pioneers of the *nomenklatura* managed to reposition themselves as the vanguard of the new bourgeoisie.[3] Shock-therapy measures made sure that, by keeping average salaries low, the country remained ’competitive’ in the global market, but it also fixed high social inequalities between the ’winners’ and ’losers’ of economic transformation. What Hungarians learned was that institutions did not matter. What mattered for most of them was, and remained, the informal practices. They could not rely on the institutions because, as they had experienced, those were largely operating against their interests.

The challenge for Hungary, and for other countries of East Central Europe, in the past decade was historic: To transform the social, political, and economic regime and to complete the process of return towards Europe. These changes in such a short period of time were quite unprecedented even in international comparison. No doubt, Hungarians wanted to complete these processes because these belonged to their historic dreams to be realized. But, ironically, when the moment of 'catching-up' finally arrived for the country, many Hungarians did not feel to support it actively and enthusiastically; they just approved it, passively and reluctantly.

Thirteen years after the regime change, in April 2003, a referendum was held in Hungary on joining the EU. Low turnout might suggest that people sensed: This referendum was held on 'membership' and not 'belonging'. Perhaps, most people thought, that Hungary's EU accession would be just another trick of the ruling elite. As they had seen the process of transition, and judged it quite negatively, they saw the process of the so-called 'Eastern enlargement' in the same fashion. People saw those as two interlinked processes which had been 'designed' and controlled by the local and global elites, and not by them.

Some analysts might think, Hungarians are euro-skeptical, but it is not true. They are just skeptical, in general, concerning any 'membership'.

High support, low participation: A regional or national pattern?

In the following, we compare voters turnout and the proportion of 'Yes' votes in various European referenda from many different European countries. The international comparison suggests a certain pattern of voting and participation which puts the Hungarian case into context.

As Table 1 shows, voters in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe supported the EU accession very much: Estonia, with its 66.9 per cent 'Yes' vote proportion, presented the lowest, and Slovakia, with more than 92 per cent, the highest rate of support. Countries of Western Europe did not show such high support toward the EU, not to mention the Scandinavian states, where voters of Norway, for instance, refused EU membership two times. On the other hand, the newly joining Central and Eastern European countries produced the lowest rates of participation.

Table 1. Results and turnout in European referenda compared (1972-2003)

Voters' turnout (%)		*Yes votes (%)*	
Malta (2003)	**91.0**	**Slovakia (2003)**	**92.5**
Denmark (1972)	90.1	**Lithuania (2003)**	**91.1**
Norway (1994)	89.0	**Slovenia (2003)**	**89.7**
Sweden (1994)	83.3	**Hungary (2003)**	**83.8**
Austria (1994)	82.3	Ireland (1972)	83.1
Norway (1972)	79.2	**Poland (2003)**	**77.4**
Latvia (2003)	**72.5**	**Czech Republic (2003)**	**77.3**
Ireland (1972)	70.9	United Kingdom (1975)	67.2
Finland (1994)	70.8	**Latvia (2003)**	**67.0**
United Kingdom (1975)	64.0	**Estonia (2003)**	**66.9**
Estonia (2003)	**63.4**	Austria (1994)	66.6
Lithuania (2003)	**63.3**	Denmark (1972)	63.2
Slovenia (2003)	**60.0**	Finland (1994)	56.9
Poland (2003)	**58.9**	**Malta (2003)**	**53.6**
Czech Rep. (2003)	**55.2**	Sweden (1994)	52.7
Slovakia (2003)	**52.1**	Norway (1972)	47.8
Hungary (2003)	**45.6**	Norway (1994)	46.5

Source: compiled by the authors.

Hungary had 45.6 per cent (in one-day referendum), while Slovakia had 52.1 and Poland had 58.8 (both referenda lasted for two days). It seems that there are two consistent 'models' produced by old and new members. In the former, say, 'Western', case, it was high participation combined with lower support, which means political activism and social divide. In the latter case, say, in the 'Central European way' to EU, it was low participation and high support; that is, passive citizenship and a high virtual support of a less politicized, less articulated (therefore, less

divided) society. Hungary by no means stood alone with this pattern, although it represented the lowest figures of participation. This latter phenomenon begs for further explanation.

No wonder that the results of the Hungarian referendum on EU-membership caused mixed feelings for the supporters of the 'Yes' vote in the country. On the referendum that took place on Saturday, 12th April, 2003, 83.76 per cent of the voters supported Hungary's membership, a result that was 20 points higher than that shown in the last opinion polls, where those in favor of EU integration were forecast with 64 per cent of the vote. Despite the overwhelming majority of 'Yes' voters, turnout was far lower than it had been expected. The 45.6 per cent turnout was not only much lower than 60 per cent, a figure „predicted" by opinion poll institutes, but it was lower than the 49 per cent turnout of the NATO referendum (conducted in November 1997) as well.

There are several questions concerning the surprisingly low participation, some of them left unanswered. It is difficult to find out whether this negligence was due to internal political reasons (to bad campaigning, to alienating political games between government and opposition, to electoral legislation which allows low participation, or the feeling of a „done" thing), than to the EU membership in itself.

Table 2. Referendum results in Hungary, 12th April, 2003.

Participation: 45.62%

Question submitted to referendum	YES in % of the number of votes cast (the N of votes is in brackets)		NO in % of the number of votes cast (the N of votes is in brackets)	
Hungary's membership to the EU.	83.76%	(3,056.027)	16.24%	(592,690)

The answer to these questions is not easy. It is well-known that electoral participation in Hungary has usually been lower at referenda than at parliamentary elections, and both were lower

than those in most European countries. Passivity at the EU referendum was particularly surprising in the light of feverish electoral activity of 2002 parliamentary elections. Polling institutes overestimated popular participation at the referendum because they supposed that the experiences of the 2002 elections had had a long-lasting impact on social norms concerning voters' turnout. As it turned out, it was not the case. People might have felt that there were strong social expectations to participate at the referendum, so they gave positive answers to questionnaires regardless their real motivation. They wanted to correspond to presupposed social needs. This became clear in a poll, prepared by Szonda-Ipsos Survey Institute a day after the referendum. In this survey, 71 per cent of the respondents „remembered" that they had participated in the referendum.

Perhaps most people thought even a few weeks before the referendum that they would have participated in it on 12 April 2003. The reason why only two-third of those who had promised their participation did actually participate can be found in their conviction that the referendum was to conclude in a sweeping victory of the 'Yes' vote. In the meantime, international empirical data suggest that participation is motivated most when relevant differences exist in the competing viewpoints which are reflectd in party politics as well. Since there was no serious representative of the 'No' vote, just like at the NATO referendum in November 1997, those who were against the admission probably stayed away from the referendum. Despite of the early activism of supporters (indicated in different pre-referendum surveys), in reality, supporters and opoositionists to EU membership participated at the referendum in equal proportion. By April 2013, there was a strongly united 'Yes' both in party politics and the media. The expected sweeping victory of the 'Yes' vote became so unquestionable that representatives of both sides could feel that their votes did not really count.

This phenomenon also means that, although less than half of the voters participated in the referendum, the final results showed the opinion of the whole Hungarian population accurately. According to data (available since 1996) surveyed by the Median Public Opinion Poll Institute, pro-EU voters were always in majority in the Hungarian society, although, their proportion were slightly decreasing. Most people supported EU in April 1999, just a month after Hungary joined NATO. Although fresh NATO-membership coincided the period of airstrikes on Yugoslavia it still increased support for both NATO and the EU. There was no significant change in the support rate towards the EU until June 2002, but then came a sudden decline which reached its lowest

point in January 2003. Many observers explained this decline with the euro-skeptic rhetoric of the political opposition (the Fidesz-MPP, first of all). Data from Median, however, did not fully support this view since the number of supporters declined in both the Fidesz-camp (being in opposition) and the MSZP-camp (in government).

Table 3. The proportion of supporters of Hungary's membership to the EU (%)

	All respondents (%)	Voters who promised participation (%)	Voters who promised participation and able to choose (%)
April 1996.	68	84	89
April 1999.	82	92	93
April 2001.	75	87	91
June 2002.	76	86	89
November 2002.	69	79	84
December 2002.	63	73	80
January 2003.	62	72	79
February 2003.	65	75	81
March 2003.	70	80	85
April 2003.	70	80	85

Source: Medián, 2003.

The reason of the decline was that, by 2002, joining the EU became a widely discussed topic of political life so it was removed from its former 'freely floating' status. People could start to think about the potential disadvantages of the membership as well. This was the period of telling half-truths when even political dailies spent time on focusing on some minor issues in a shallow way. As long as more people started to think about the aspects of accession at all, naturally, support for EU slightly declined. The previously unreflected 'Yes' turned to be a more conscious 'Yes' (and sometimes conscious 'No').

In February 2003, when the government campaign started and even the leader of the opposition, Viktor Orbán, stated that there were more reasons to join than not to join the EU, citizens faced increasingly supportive official voices from the political elite. In March 2003, already 93 per cent of the respondents expressed positive attitudes toward Hungary's accession to the EU. The growth of supporters was largely due to the government campaign beacuse Fidesz voters showed constant attitudes to the referendum. Among those who had surely promised their participation in the referendum 86 per cent of the governing socialist party (MSZP) voters and 68 per cent of the opposition neoconservative (Fidesz) voters indicated their commitment to the 'Yes' vote. Thus, by the time of the last pre-referendum polls, there were significant differences among the voters of the two big blocs, left and right. Although pro-government voters always supported EU accession in higher proportion both under the Horn government and the Orban government, there was never before such a big difference between the two political camps.

Advantages and disadvantages as judged by issue

Although political sympathies and commitments increasingly shaped the opinions over EU membership, the strongest correlation concerning its approval or disapproval was found with the positive or negative expectations related to Hungary's EU accession. Not so much about the immediate effects of Hungary's membership rather about hopes and fears related to general social and economic consequences. Hungarian public opinion was quite unified in judging the immediate changes of the future. Among the commitments it was only the foreign ownership of Hungarian lands which received general rejection. Among the advantages, however, most people were very positive about the expected implementation of the EU agrarian policy. Concerning the indirect and longer term effects, we can find a more colorful variety of opinions.

To sum it up, Hungarians expected positive changes in healthcare, in tackling corruption, in higher salaries, and in almost all relevant segments of everyday life. A month before the April referendum, 60 per cent of Hungarians believed that salaries would be higher after joining the EU. This figure was ten times higher than the one which showed those who expected the opposite effect.

Table 4. What is going to change in Hungary due to EU membership, and to what extent? (%)

	Getting worse (%)	Getting better (%)
HEALTHCARE		
April 1999.	5	63
April 2001.	3	57
January 2003.	7	53
March 2003.	5	59
SECURITY		
April 1999.	16	33
April 2001.	16	40
January 2003.	17	41
March 2003.	12	43
LAW AND ORDER		
April 1999.	5	56
April 2001.	5	47
January 2003.	6	46
March 2003.	5	55
OFFICIAL BUREAUCRACY		
April 1999.	5	49
April 2001.	3	46
January 2003.	5	43
March 2003.	5	43
JOB SECURITY IN GENERAL		
April 1999.	20	40
April 2001.	22	35
January 2003.	27	27
March 2003.	24	30
OWN JOB SECURITY		
April 1999.	11	40
April 2001.	9	19
January 2003.	14	19
March 2003.	11	23
WORKING CONDITIONS		
April 1999.	5	62

April 2001.	6	53
January 2003.	7	50
March 2003.	8	52

OWN WORKING CONDITIONS

April 1999.	5	50
April 2001.	5	27
January 2003.	6	27
May 2003.	6	32

SALARIES

April 1999.	5	69
April 2001.	4	69
January 2003.	9	60
March 2003.	6	60

PERSONAL INCOME

April 1999.	6	51
April 2001.	4	52
January 2003.	10	44
March 2003.	7	46

CORRUPTION

April 1999.	7	45
April 2001.	7	38
January 2003.	7	35
March 2003.	8	40

Source: Medián, 2003.

Although it is always risky to judge the ’real’ or ’unreal’ nature of public opinion, still public expectations concerning Hungary’s EU admission seem to be exaggerated. Even if, most probably, people expect development on the longer run only. It is known from international comparative surveys that Hungarians are very much dissatisfied with their salaries. By the same token, people expect not only rising salaries but rising prices as well: 86 per cent of them expect higher price of real estates, 80 per cent expect the same for energy, 76 per cent for the services, and 53 per cent for the consumer goods (although experts predict lower prices for the latter category).

On the other hand, Hungarian public opinion not only expected higher prices together with higher salaries, but people predicted bigger competition in the labor market as well. Among the social shocks of the regime change unemployment was found as the most dramatic. Independently of changes in unemployment statistics, Hungarians always found unemployment as the most important social problem in the last decade. The security of workplace was the only theme where people's expectations declined significantly. In January, in all issues on average, people expected development in four times higher proportion than decline, but in the case of unemployment equal number of respondents expected both possible outcomes. Therefore the lowest point in the support of Hungary's EU membership was reached in January 2003, when the media reported a number of closing factories.

Expected 'Winners' and 'Losers'

The fear that unemployment would rise can be seen as rational reaction, because entering the EU would probably restructure the Hungarian labor market. This restructuration will undermine the positions of the less educated employees.

According to early 2003 surveys, among the socio-demographic characteristics the level of education (and employment status) showed the strongest correlation with support of EU membership. Managers and professionals supported EU membership much more than average: more than 25 per cent than average Hungarian voters. They supported this actively, that is they promised their participation for sure and their Yes vote as well. As we see other social strata it is clear that support towards EU membership has been declining parallel with less prestigious positions in the social hierarchy. Looking at different social groups we found the most anti-EU voters among the entrepreneurs. On the other hand, in this group, active supporters are also above average. This finding suggests that probably small entrepreneurs fear the most from the effects of EU accession. The most opposition vote and the smallest number of supporters are found among those who work in the agrarian sector full time. Although their proportion in the adult population is only 3 per cent, tohether with their family members this circle strech out to 17 per cent in the population. But even in this rural environment twice as many people voted for EU accession than those who said 'No'.

Table 5. Proportion of supporters and opposition to EU membership in different social and demographic cohorts in the percentage of all respondents.

	ACTIVE OPPOSITION (%)	ACTIVE SUPPORTERS (%)
GENDER		
Male	12	53
Female	10	46
AGE		
18-29 years	11	53
30-39	14	52
40-49	10	52
50-59	12	52
60 and older	10	41
RESIDENCE		
Budapest	11	50
Countryside town	9	54
Village	13	44
EDUCATION		
Less than 8 years	11	30
8 years elementary school	12	42
Skilled workers certificate	13	47
High school certificate	10	60
University diploma	8	70
PROFESSION		
Leading professional	9	74
Other professional	6	73
Freelance	10	62
Educated blue-collar	11	50
Non-educated blue-collar	16	41
Entrepreneur	17	52
Pensioner	11	42
Student	4	68
Other non-active	14	44
RELATIONSHIP TO AGRARIAN SPHERE		
Full time job in the agrarian sphere	18	45
Part time job in the agrarian sphere	16	48
No relationship	10	50
PARTY PREFERENCES		
MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party)	9	60

Fidesz-MPP (Fidesz-HCP)	17	49
SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats)	2	67
MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum)	7	55
Other	12	46
No party preference	8	34
AVERAGE	11	49

Source: Medián, 2003.

Although it can probably be the case that losers will come from agrarian groups. According to public opinion polls people expect agrarian producers, small entrepreneurs and non-skilled workers to be the losers of the accession. A month before the referendum 58 per cent of people felt that advantages and disadvantages of the EU accession will unequally touch the different social groups. Public opinion is even less heasitant in its prediction of probable winners: half of the population think that people with university degree and the youth will rather enjoy the advantages. Potential winners and losers themselves feel the same way. Young people and people with university degree are confident about their advantages while small entrepreneurs and agrarian producers are much more worried about the expected negative impact of the accession on them.

Table 6. Will some groups rather share the advantages or the disadvantages? (In the percentage of all respondents.)

	Disadvantages (%)	Advantages (%)
UNIVERSITY EDUCATED		
January 2003.	4	50
March 2003.	3	48
YOUTH		
January 2003.	10	46
March 2003.	8	47

LARGE ENTREPRENEURS		
January 2003.	7	46
March 2003.	7	41
SMALL ENTREPRENEURS		
January 2003.	38	12
March 2003.	35	10
AGRARIAN PRODUCERS		
January 2003.	45	11
March 2003.	39	12
BLUE-COLLAR LABOR		
January 2003.	42	10
March 2003.	40	7

(Source: Medián, 2003.)

Party Preferences and Voters' Alignments

It is a most frequently mentioned commonplace in the Hungarian public opinion that young people will be the real winners of Hungary's EU-membership. First, majority of Hungarian population understand joining the EU as long-term investment, so its benefits will be realized in the long-term future only. Second, people suppose that only the youth can be flexible enough to utilize those opportunities which will open up immediately. Although young people themselves tend to think the same, they still do not support joining the EU more than average. The reason for this is that future expectations are largely overshadowed by current political commitments. According to international surveys people living in EU-countries judge the chances of European integration on grounds of utilitarian arguments which are shaped by human capital, income, and the geographical distance from the 'newcomers'. At the same time, significant differences are found between citizens of 'founder' and 'newcomer' countries in their political opinion. In the latter cases political affiliations, voting intentions, and the effects of popularity of the current government had larger impact on opinions on EU accession.

To explain these phenomena researchers use the notion of cognitive mobilization. To put it simply that means the political adulthood of voters. Most of the West European party systems have been developed along classic social cleavages in which roughly all significant social groups

had their own political parties. From the 1960s onwards, due to several social factors (as the development of welfare state, the expansion of higher education, and the dissemination of mass media), this initially direct link between social groups and political parties became far more indirect. Group-based decisions have been increasingly replaced by issue voting: People tended to vote certain political parties because those formations represented their view the most. Voters 'liberated' themselves from the guardianship of political parties and became able to form their own opinion on important public issues. Today, it seems that levels and processes of cognitive mobilzation differ in the old and (near to become) new EU member states.

In Hungary, it is widely felt that people tended to follow the political stance of their favourite party. It is not opinions which shape preferences toward political parties but just the opposite: citizens' opinion formation is usually following their party's opinion. In a basic, fundamental level, ideological options influence party preferences strongly, while in other cases voters follow their party position more or less automatically without questioning the existing cleavages. In Hungary, 13 years after the transition, relationship to the Communist past is still the most important cleavage in politics. This is well represented by the fact that voting blocs are largely shaped by the generational division. (People under 40 voted for Fidesz, above 40 voted for MSZP.)

Changing opinions about the European Union can be demonstrated by two surveys: The first survey was done in April 2001, the second in March 2003. Already in April 2001, two factors contributed to the formation of standpoints concerning the EU: future expectations and political preferences. Only the importance and structure of these two factors have changed. It was presupposed that by approaching the referendum expectations would dominate decisions on the support. In reality, trends were moving just the opposite direction. Although expectations had showed the strongest correlation with support of EU accession, the role of that factor decreased while political preferences increased before the referendum. Once someone was satisfied with the performance of the current government, he or she tended to follow the government's positive messages concerning the EU accession.

High expectations have been cooled down by March 2003 because the impact of expectations on participation decreased. By that time, willingness to participate in the referendum was determined more by education and age rather than profession. The impact of political opinions has changed too, because opinion on government performance became less relevant than

party preferences. The differences between left and right voters' participation rate cannot simply be explained by the differences in their general political satisfaction.

Empirical findings of surveys, reveal, indeed, important contradictions. In the 'euro-realist' (or, euro-skeptic) Fidesz camp, young people have been overrepresented. Both the public and young people themselves predicted that they would be the winners of EU accession. However, their more-than-average support of the anti-communist Fidesz made them still possible to oppose EU membership. The two effects contradicted and neutralized each other in the cohorts of people under 30. The opposite is true for pensioners (who make up 40 per cent of MSZP voters), who do not expect much from EU membership due to their age and economic inactivity. Still they tended to vote the EU accession, following their favourite political party. Tensions stemming from party affiliations and generations might have contributed to political uncertainty. Many people have not felt their opinion sure enough to go out voting. It is still a question whether Hungary's EU accession will justify the fears or hopes. It will surely be one of the most important political questions whether the largest part of the population feel as 'winners' or 'losers' of the EU accession.

The substance of regime change and the tasks of democracy in the light of EU accession

In order to understand popular expectations concerning Hungary's belonging to the European Union we should return to our original issues which were related to the lack of trust and the alienation of political class from the rest of the society. We finally need to put the problem of EU accession into the context of decade-long transformation. What did the Hungarian society expect from regime change? What was and was not part of this regime change?

While politically, regime change meant that one-party dictatorship was replaced by multi-party democracy; economically, it brought about the replacement of state socialism based on the dominance of state-ownership with capitalism, that is, market economy based on private ownership. The central question is, however, what has remained after the realization of this minimum. Is there any tasks related to the expectations of regime change? The following table summarizes our questions.

Table 7. The substance of regime change and the social problems connected to it in Hungary

	Old Regime	**Expectations**	**Results**
Content of Regime Change			
Politics	dictatorship	democracy	*achieved*
Economy	state socialism	capitalism	*achieved*
Nation-state	lack of sovereignty	national sovereignty	*achieved*
International Consequences of Regime Change			
Cultural orientation	'ferry-state'	back to Europe	*achieved*
Alliance	Warsaw Pact	NATO	*achieved*
Social Problems Connected to Regime Change			
Economy	poverty	prosperity	*not achieved*
Public Morals	injustice iniquity autocracy	justice compensation legal security	*disputable* *disputable* *disputable*
Elite Change	ex-communist elite	new elite	*disputable*
Participation	passivity	activity	*disputable*

Political Regime Change

Participants of the 1989 Roundtable negotiations were concerned with the institutional transformation of the political system, that is, with creating a lasting and stable institutional system. This goal was pursued by the comprehensive amendment of the Constitution, namely, the establishment of a constitutional law that was based on the rule of law. It was, however, the voters who decided about what political forces should govern the country and they voted, as usual, for the 'quiet force'.

The first post-communist legislature deserves credit in the operation and practice of democracy as well as in passing the bills that politically brought the regime change to an end. In the political sense the regime change ended by the early 1990s: the country regained its sovereignty, the new local and national institutions of political power as well as the institutions serving to defend civil liberties came into being. The whole of the political elite committed itself to 'returning to Europe,' which was regarded as the international and broader cultural agenda of the regime change.

The foreign policy and cultural consequences of the political regime change were the fulfillment of the prolonged desire of the Hungarian society to land the 'ferry state' home into the Western 'harbor' where it always felt to belong culturally. In the 1990s Hungary became a member of the relevant political (Council of Europe), military (NATO), and economic (OECD) institutions of the West. In 1998, Hungary was invited to open the accession negotiations with the European Union that were closed at the end of 2002. If after the successful referendum on EU accession in Hungary, the legislatures of the EU member states ratify the accession treaty, Hungary's integration to Europe becomes complete in an institutional sense. The most important issues have already been settled and the process is close to the completion of all those aims that the Hungarians fought for since 1956. In other words, Hungary's cultural and foreign policy orientation to the West and its membership in Western political and military institutions, especially in the European Union, was the consequence rather than the content of regime change.

Economic Regime Change

Compared to the above political processes, the story of the economic regime change took a different way. The outgoing communist political elite created the legal conditions of change before the beginning of the Roundtable negotiations by enacting the Transformation and Company Laws. Although the reforms of MSZMP excluded the opposition from the process of creating these laws, the opposition finally accepted these steps for it was more important for them to institutionalize the switch to market-economy as soon as possible than to take part in naming the new owners. At that time this seemed to be the political price and social condition of a peaceful transition. Hence, it was the company directors and managers linked to the MSZMP that profited from this 'spontaneous privatization;' thus the first capitalists were recruited from the technocratic reformer wing of the Communist Party. This move did not make the MSZP more popular and it was what created its 'capitalist' and 'manager friendly' image.

The first, democratically elected, MDF-led government was unable to 'conduct' the transition crisis adequately, and thus, the Right quickly lost its popularity and after the next general elections the MSZP came into power. The important economic laws were born under the MDF government, but privatization was stumbling and the Hungarian state came near to financial collapse as it became insolvent and nearly lost its financial credibility. It was the MSZP's task, which came to power in 1994, to make the state operational again: to preserve financial

credibility, make the economy competitive, increase state revenues and stipulate economic growth. The infamous 'Bokros-package' achieved this by accelerated and cash-based privatization, keeping salaries low, increasing foreign direct invest in Hungary by granting tax exemptions to multinational companies, devaluing the Forint, and by taking several other restrictive measures. This was the 'golden age' of the generation of economic reformers of the MSZP that prided itself in establishing 'a cabinet of experts' as it came to power. In those years, MSZP had little chance to become a leftist party that could credibly represent the values of classical social democracy. Privatization in Hungary under the Horn government was historically unmatched both in its size and speed, something that Margaret Thatcher could not have even dreamed of.

Between 1994 and 1998 the MSZP-led government accomplished the economic regime change: privatization was almost complete and the economy, for the first time in the twenty years, was growing due to the quick arrival and settling of multinational companies. The MSZP's often emphasized values of the time were modernization, pragmatism, expertise, and competence. By contrasting professionalism and politics, its message was that it despised democratic politics, that only experts should interfere with high politics and that the others were not equal members of a democratic political community. This elitist message could not be ameliorated by the friendly, post-Kádárian citizens' forums of Prime Minister Gyula Horn. It was natural that the populist Smallholders' Party and the Fidesz-MPP, which took a U-turn and appealed to right-wing voters with a nationalist and republican discourse, became very popular. The right-wing Orbán government that took power in 1998 tried to balance the country's dependence on multinational capital by initiating a program to help small- and middle-sized enterprises. Soon, however, it became clear that this dependence could not be eliminated. From then on the slogan of assisting small-sized enterprises served only to satisfy the needs of entrepreneurs linked to Fidesz-MPP.

Nation-state, Sovereignty, and Political Community

The success of the Right at the 1998 general elections was due to the fact that the realization of the minimal requirements of regime change did not fully satisfy the voting population. The population was not satisfied with the attitude of the elite executing the regime change, namely, that these people considered institutions more important than people. People

were upset by the corruption that was going on within these supposedly democratic institutions. Recognizing this, the Fidesz-MPP were speaking of the community of citizens, aimed at speaking a language that everyday people could understand, and promised to consolidate democracy, increase the economic role of a state committed to the public good, and remedy the defects of regime change. It sensed that many citizens understood the rehabilitation of such phrases as political community and political participation, the carrying out of elite change, and the restoration of social justice (through equal opportunities, compensation, calling those responsible for the past to account, and so forth) as part of the concept of regime change. Referring to these demands, the Fidesz-MPP could claim that its coming to power meant "more than a change of government, but less than regime change."

By recognizing the demands that the Left failed to take into account, the Right automatically accepted that these belonged to the questions of regime change beyond doubt. In reality, however, only the sovereignty of the nation state could be regarded as a problem of regime change, but this had been achieved under the Antall government when, in response to popular demand, Soviet troops were withdrawn from Hungary in June 1991 and when Hungary left the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, the Right not only recognized these questions, but also exaggerated them, put them into a new dimension, and finally, answered them inadequately. During the reconstruction of the political community it confused its own values with that of the whole nation and forced them upon the whole population. It did not understand that the democratic political community was based on pluralism, that is, the various norms and cultural communities could be part of. The Right questioned the rights of belonging to the Hungarian nation of those who did not identify with the values of the governing parties. During the debates over the Status Law it became clear that the Right confronted the country with its own idea of the 'nation' which included the Hungarian minorities of the neighboring countries, but excluded those Hungarian citizens who did not share the government's values. The 'New Conquest' of the Orbán government was exclusionary and divided the Hungarian nation.

All those people who had expected Fidesz-MPP to remedy the early elitist policy-making through republicanism were disappointed by its populist, 'majority democrat,' and conflict-oriented domestic and foreign policy by the Spring of 2002. These people returned to MSZP that promised to be a 'quiet force' and to bury the trenches. It became clear that the question of the national political community was an important issue of democratic politics, but it could not be

treated as a problem of regime change in an ethnically homogenous country that had regained its sovereignty ten years earlier. Indeed, the majority of the electorate did not treat it as an issue of regime change. This issue that is going beyond the traditions of a politics of grievances, was not seen as the task of a government, but that of the whole nation. Although it is true that no government can be indifferent to the vital questions that concern the destiny of the entire nation because the existence of the political community is strongly connected to democracy, but no government can afford being aggressive or impatient over these issues. A government is indifferent to the vital questions of the nation when it calls its compatriots, who do not share its opinion and ideals, 'foreign-hearted' or being 'devoid of national feeling,' because then it communicates the message that this government is ready to exclude certain compatriots from the democratic political community. In other words, those who do not respect democracy do not respect the nation, either.

While the Right has been concerned with vital questions of the nation, liberals have been worried about the state of the republic: the moral defects of democracy, the occasional violation of the constitution, and the lack of activity on the part of the citizens who were committed to democracy and the rule of law.[4] These are also vital problems: it is problematic if the prime minister does not inform the electorate about him formerly being a member of the intelligence agency, if the new government majority carry on the practices of its predecessor that is in conflict with the spirit and practice of democracy, or if the citizens do not actively stand by the defense of the public good, public affairs, and the republic. Yet, these questions, that is, the problems of political culture simply cannot be considered as issues of regime change. These rightly contested issues belong to the consolidation of democracy and to the problem of self-esteem and cannot be solved in the near future.

During its history, socialist democracy in Hungary often confronted the national question and was often insensitive toward it and failed to attempt for a comprehensive solution. Classical social democracy made the national question secondary to the problems of the class struggle. However, in those times democracy did not exist in Hungary, and therefore it could not be unanticipated that national identity and the democratic political community would coincide. Consequently, the Medgyessy government formed after the 2002 elections needed to base its understanding of the nation on encouraging the political community's growing demands of participation.

Elite Change and Social Mobility

The Fidesz-MPP handled the accomplishment of elite change as an issue of regime change. The strong anticommunist propaganda of the leading party of the government served this purpose. With József Antall, Hungary's first democratically elected prime minister, one could say, "You should have made a revolution!" More than one decade after the political regime change the strong anticommunist rhetoric was increasingly anachronistic. Moreover, it only served to justify the Right's intensifying claim to power. Furthermore, elite change significantly advanced in the economic and political – and many other – spheres of life. If, as it turned out, former intelligence agents and members of the MSZMP were present in both sides of the political arena, and in each post-communist government, there remained no argument that could justify the moral superiority of any one political force. The 'agent' dispute of the summer of 2002 made it obvious for all the voters that it was not a very efficient weapon of political rivalry that backfired on the Right.[5] It was a mistaken strategy by the MSZP to respond to these critiques by idealizing the Kádár regime, because this reinforced its image as a post-communist party since no convinced democrat would call the Kádár regime a democracy that was based on the rule of law. They could not blur the differences of the two regimes and could not revitalize the importance of the events of 1989.

The existence of social mobility is important in every democracy for this assures the openness, flexibility, justice and self-renewing ability of a system. Raising and debating this question is fully legitimate. However, as the general and local elections of 2002 demonstrated, the most effective way of facilitating social mobility is not calling one's enemies communists for any longer. Moreover, speaking about communists was designed to take attention off the efforts of a new elite's effort to secure the latest *status quo* by the slogan of social mobility. The maintenance of social mobility is not simply a question of regime change, but the permanent task of every regime; thus presently it is the task of a society based democracy and market-economy. It could have been an issue of regime change in 1989, but it was not for Hungary was experiencing not a traditional revolution, but a peaceful, democratic regime change of revolutionary importance. The dissatisfaction originating form the incomplete nature of elite change should be remedied not by a 'second revolution,' since a 'second revolution' could only be started to overrun democracy. Therefore, democracy should be spread all over society to make

it more open and accommodating because if only the upper castes 'enjoy democracy,' then we must talk about a caste-system that entirely lack social mobility.

It is fundamental for a democracy to facilitate social mobility in order to assure equal opportunities and human dignity within the society. The devaluation of the labor force and education does not further the attainment of these goals. Increasing economic competency by these measures is acceptable only in extreme situations, that is, in economic crises. The goals that the various Hungarian administrations have set for the country and for themselves means not that Hungary should be the country of unskilled labor and of assembly lines based on cheap labor, but a country where it is the skilled, educated, intelligent and innovative work force – which could not be found in other continents and is worth paying good salaries to – that attracts foreign investors.

The Public Good, Public Morals and Social Justice

The problem of social justice arose together with that of elite change in the last decade. Many imagined democracy as making justice by compensating their old and undeserved grievances and injuries. They identified democracy with justice. Although democracy is obviously more just than dictatorship because it is better equipped to remedy individual and group grievances, it cannot be identified with the system of 'one truth.'

The Constitution means the moral minimum, – the smallest common denominator – of democracy and its common law is shaped by the emerging democratic political culture. Social justice can be contested within a democracy, because our understanding of justice is formed through debates. There is, however, a minimum in states that are based on the rule of law, that one cannot violate in the name of seeking justice: one cannot assure the rule of law by violating the rule of law.[6] Every system is unjust for some, because only ideal systems, that has not yet been attained, can be just for all. Considering that democracy is a pluralistic system, parties that seek the 'absolute truth' not only hurt the sense of justice of some, but also strains the tolerance of democracy. A democratic system cannot give an inflexible response to critics based on the criteria of justice, for that would lead to system-level injustice. A system can be made more just, if those seeking the truth convince the majority of the society about the need of the revision of certain provisions and then the majority changes those provisions. At the same time, the new provisions have to be in accordance with the constitution.

During its endeavor of a 'new conquest' the Right often acted in the name of a social justice, that was seen historically justified against the 'forces of the past.' It seemed as if two 'Hungaries' faced each other: the country of the 'embourgeoisement' and that of the socialist. The first was supposed to represent the truth and the second, falsehood. The government acted with the belief that truth could only be on one side, that is, on its side. In other words, it acted as if the question of truth and justice would still have been an issue of regime change. If it had been so, then the 'Civil Cold War' of the Orbán government' would have been justified, because it would have meant that democracy had not existed in Hungary. However, in a pluralist democracy truth and falsehood exists at all sides. This is why Timothy Garton Ash called democracy 'the system of half-truths.'[7] Democracy can be a 'discoursive system' where conflicts appear within a regulated framework, because no one owns the philosopher's stone.[8]

Remedying the injustice, unfairness and arbitrariness and flagrant cases of the past system is one of the many tasks of a democratic regime. The solution, however, cannot be 'absolute,' because those principles – such as justice and legal security – which serve as the basis of the solution are in conflict with each other. Popular disappointment on these 'unsolved' issues made the regime change of 1989-90 less accepted. It has been seen as an elite game and this affects the approach to the EU accession, which is frequently judged as 'just another trick of the elites'. This did not prove to be enough motivation for a 'no' vote (because these skeptics basically support the EU accession as well), but it was enough 'to punish' the political class by abstention in the referendum.

Concluding remarks

The fundamental issues of regime change have mostly been solved: the sovereignty of the nation-state and the institutions of democracy and market economy have successfully been created. Hungary became an independent state, and thus, it was free to decide to join the European Union. Market economy has been put into place even if to the contrary of earlier expectations it did not mean the equal and automatic growth of the living standards for everyone. People longed for capitalism for itself, but because they hoped that it would bring prosperity for them. Certain early illusions should be put aside. The crisis of transition turned out to be longer

and deeper than it had been expected, market economy was not introduced in a 'just' way – if such a thing can be expected at all – and goods could not be distributed 'adequately.' However, the task of its correction arose within the system and not as a question of regime change. Even though critiques of the capitalist system appeared Hungary, no attractive alternative system emerged. The program of 'regime change in prosperity,' with which the Hungarian Socialist Party – perhaps not accidentally – could win the general elections of 2002, was born out of the recognition of the deep inequalities present within the Hungarian society. The idea of 'regime change in prosperity' in 2002 and that of the 'embourgeoisement' that was formulated by the Fidesz-MPP in 1998 were similarly successful political messages. Despite their different ideological environment, rhetoric and tenor, both tried to respond to the same demands of the general public.

Nevertheless, it became clear that the problems of 'regime change in prosperity' and 'embourgeoisement' as well as such other problems as elite change, social mobility, compensation, crime, justice, the political activity of the people, and the constitutionally required task of caring for the Hungarian minorities of the neighboring countries are not or only partially can be treated as system specific issues.[9] These are such social problems that demand solution in every political system, and that are often linked to (the lack of) regime change. Yet, these cannot be considered as the integral part of the process of regime change, rather these are the consequences of regime change and require long-term solutions. Solving these problems does not necessarily lead to regime change, just as regime change does not necessarily lead to the automatic solution of these problems.

While the questions of 'dictatorship or democracy' and 'socialism or capitalism' are exclusionary, the questions of elite change, social mobility, legal security, justice and political participation are qualitative ones. Hungarian society decided in 2002 that they did not consider these as issues of regime change any longer, and dismissed the new Right that defined these as the tasks of regime change. Paradoxically, antagonistic contradictions can be occasionally solved just like the Gordian knot, but the 'non-antagonistic' problems linger on in every system.

By treating these as issues of regime change, the outgoing government of 2002 presented the problems of democracy and capitalism as system-level contradictions, and suggested that these can be answered by exclusionary choices. By this it arouse such expectations that it could not fulfill. That led to the change in government. Many substantial social problems cannot be

solved either by a ‘second revolution,’ or a ‘new conquest,’ – at best, they can only be eased by making the permanent prosperity of the democratic system felt in everyday life.

This is exactly what Hungarians expect from the successful accession to the European Union: To ease the pain of the still disputed, non-antagonistic, but never fully solvable issues, listed above. A fair society, based on institutionalized trust, but first of all, better life. They see the process of integration to the European Union as a move to that direction but also as a goal which will not be reached very soon. Perhaps, not in their life. It is, therefore, an investment to the more distant future, a historic step, which will be enjoyed by their children, rather than they themselves. On the other hand, Hungary’s accession to the EU is also seen as an endpoint of a more-than-a-decade-long, painful transformation process which caused as much disappointment as hope. People should again trust to their own political elite which is not easy. They are united in their wish to follow the fundamental steps toward the European Union, but at the same time, they are unhappy that the ’road-map’ for these steps were precalculated by the political elite. The European Union is a popular destination but people are simply too tired to do further steps at the end-phase of a long, marathon-like transformation.

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Abbreviations

Fidesz	-	Federation of Young Democrats (renamed as Fidesz-MPP in 1995)
Fidesz-MPP	-	Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party (renamed as Fidesz-MPSZ in 2003)
Fidesz-MPSZ	-	Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance
MDF	-	Hungarian Democratic Forum
MSZMP	-	Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party
MSZP	-	Hungarian Socialist Party
SZDSZ	-	Alliance of Free Democrats

Endnotes

[1] Mihály Bihari, a leading Hungarian political scientist of the 1980s, called the Soviet system this way, which intended to be a pejorative description.
[2] Cf. Ervin Csizmadia (1995), *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék.* [The Hungarian Democratic Opposition] Budapest: T-Twins Publishers
[3] Gil Eyal, Eleanor Townsley & Iván Szelényi (1998), *Capitalism without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe.* London: Verso
[4] Cf. Péter Rauschenberger (2002), "Miért múlt ki – ha kimúlt – a köztársaság" [Why Did – If It Did – the Republic Die? *Élet és Irodalom*, October 4.
[5] In June 2002 it turned out that Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy was a top secret intelligence agent between 1977-1982, but considering this activity as state secret he did not reveal this before the general elections.
[6] This view was most often expressed by the 'First Constitutional Court' headed by László Sólyom.
[7] Timothy Garton Ash (1997), "Rómeó Európája" [Romeo's Europe] interviewed by András Bozóki. *Beszélő* 3(4):5-12.
[8] Cf. János Kis (1995), "Vitatkozó demokrácia" [Discoursive Democracy] interviewed by István Javorniczky. *Világosság* 33(4): 14-24.
[9] Cf. Nándor Bárdi and Zoltán Kántor, eds. (2002), *A státusztörvény* [Status Law]. Budapest: Teleki László Institute