

## POLITICAL EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION IN HUNGARY AFTER THE ACCESSION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Ovidiu Vaida\*

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### Abstract

*After the fall of communism, Hungary was one of the leading country in Central and Eastern Europe to pursue democracy and market economy. In short time, it was praised for its achievement in those areas, and soon Hungary was invited to join NATO, and starting with 2004, the EU. Yet, after 2010, some transformation took place in the political arena, and as a result, the quality of democracy started to decrease and in just few years, Hungary was the main example for illiberal democracy in this area. The current text aims to analyse the changes that occurred in Hungary, to what extent democracy is jeopardised and what are the explanations for the illiberal turn.*

**Keywords:** Hungary, democracy, elections, FIDESZ, illiberalism.

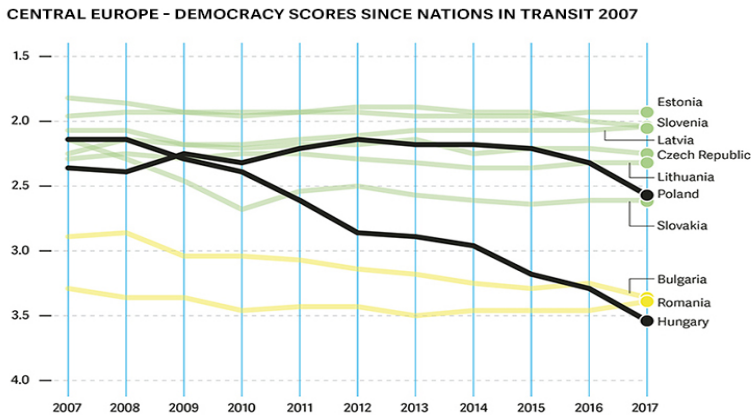
One of the most praised country in Central and Eastern Europe for its democratic transformation and economic transition, Hungary begun negotiations with the European Union in 1998, to join the community in 2004. For a few years, there were no major political events to be mentioned.

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\* Ovidiu Vaida, PhD is Lecturer at the Faculty of European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Contact: ovidiuvaida@yahoo.com.

The economic crises and some political mistakes inside the governing party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, Hungarian Socialist Party) cause social unrest after 2006. After a major victory in 2010, Fidesz<sup>1</sup> came to power not only with the intention to govern, but also to profoundly change the Hungarian society. It did so by amending several times the Constitution, important laws, implementing new economic ideas, etc. Soon, accusation of breaching democratically lines came out in the public opinion. The European Union warned many times the Fidesz led government, without any major success. In all measurements regarding the level of democracy, being the one delivered by Freedom House or the Economic Intelligence Unit, Hungary had the most visible reduction.

**Figure 1. Democracy scores CEE 2007-2017**



Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>, accessed 12.11.2018

The objective of this paper is to analyse Hungarian politics after 2004, to observe some elements that led to the Fidesz domination after 2010, to analyse major changes inside the Hungarian political system and framework and to give some explanation regarding the last decade developments in Hungary.

<sup>1</sup> Initially the party was named *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége – Young Democrats Alliance*. In 1995 it was added the *Magyar Polgári Párt – Hungarian Civic Party* label. Today the official name is *Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Párt*. Yet, only the *Fidesz* tag is used even in official documents, there in this text only the shortened version will be used also.

Although the literature is not quite abundant on this topic, in the recent years several papers tried to analyze the situation in Hungary, but it must be also underlined the fact that it is main story in the newspapers, too.<sup>2</sup> Comparative analysis, electoral and constitutional analysis will be used to find some explanation. Electoral results, surveys and Freedom House Nations in Transit report will be employed in order to gather the necessary data. The text has three parts. First of all, the last years of communism and the first years of transition will be researched. Then, the main part of the article will include the examination of the period after 2004, especially what happened after 2010. Some data grounded but also some empirical explanations and conclusion will end the text.

**Table 1. Democracy score Hungary 2007-2017, Freedom House**

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
2,00	2,14	2,14	2.29	2.39	2.61	2.86	2.89	2.96	3.18	3.29	3.54	3.71

Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>, accessed 14.11.2018

### **From Communism to the European Union**

Hungary had a partly common, partly singular history during communism. The communist regime was imposed as in all other Eastern countries, with the help of the Red Army, controlled elections, then expulsion or arrest of all opponents. There were also some fights among different factions within the Communist party, ended with show trials. Also, as in East Germany or Poland, it had some anti-Soviet movements in the 1950s, a strong regime the next decade and some sort of liberalisation in the 1980s. Yet, opposed to most of the states behind the Iron curtain,

<sup>2</sup> Bojan Bugarič, "A Crisis of Constitutional Democracy in Post-Communist Europe: "Lands In-Between" Democracy and Authoritarianism" in *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 13, 2015, pp. 219-245; R. D. Kelemen, "Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union". *Government and Opposition*, 52(2), 2017, pp. 211-238; Péter Krekó and Zsolt Enyedi, "Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism" in *Journal of Democracy*, October 2018, Volume 29, Issue 4, 2018, pp. 39-51; Laurence Peter, "Hungary Row: EU Party Allies "Back Orban" ", BBC News, 17 April 2013, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22183871](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22183871), 2013; Máté Szabó, "From a Suppressed Anti-Communist Dissident movement to a Governing Party: the Transformations of FIDESZ in Hungary" in *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, no. 2, 2011

Hungary became slowly (starting with the 1980s) the most opened communist regime, contributing to a large extent to the symbolically (and effective) demolishing of the Berlin Wall. Also, it was one of the rare case in which the number one of the communist regime retired peacefully and was replaced by a group of reformists. The mentioned leader, Janos Kadar, was the promoter, as off the 1960s of what was called "Goulash communism", a variety of communism that was more careful with human rights and implemented an economic strategy that paid attention more to the consumers needs instead of the Stalinist, industrialised type of economy.

That being the case, Hungary was better equipped for the transition that started in 1990. In fact, the first movements already started in 1988, among those protesting against the regime being a young university graduate, Viktor Orban. Once Kadar retired, the Communist party accepted the need of some reforms. There were several Round tables and parliaments decisions that completely changed the political system, one of them being the complete change of the Constitution, in September 1989. One month later, the Communist regime was abolished, the country becoming officially Republic of Hungary.

Also Hungary was among those CEE states which managed a negotiated transition and eventually, even the Socialists had (supposedly) a better image, there were the opposition parties that won the first free election in 1990. It is important to notice that as compared to other CEE states, where the major opposition parties were liberal, in Hungary the winning party, the Magyar Demokrata Forum (MDF) was a rather conservative, mild nationalist party.<sup>3</sup>

A rather quiet transition was the path of Hungary, which adopted fast privatisation and opened the economy to foreign investments.<sup>4</sup>

With many political measures already adopted in 1989, the Hungarian political system needed only minor changes. Elections were held regularly every 4 years and no essential crises occurred for two decades.

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<sup>3</sup> Or, according to Gabor Toka, MDF was a "Centre-right strongly patriotic Christian party", Gábor Tóka, "Hungary", in Sten Berglund, Tomas Hellén and Frank Aarebrot (eds.), *Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, 1998, pp. 231-74, p. 244. Years later, this conservative electorate was transferred to Fidesz.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Cox and Andy Furlong, "Political transition in Hungary: An overview", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 10:3, 1994, pp. 1-12.

Yet, even economic situation was good in the 1980s, the transition produced poverty and economic loss. For a few years, Hungary struggled to recover. Nevertheless, it was considered one of the most successful CEE country, in terms of transition and the rewards came soon: in 1996 Hungary was accepted to join NATO and soon opened accession negotiations with the EU.

**Table 2. GDP growth in Hungary after 1989.**

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
GDP growth	-3,5	-12	-3,0	-0,5	2,9	1,5	0	3,3	4,2	3,1	4,2

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=HU>, accessed 29.09.2018

From a political point of view, Hungary display a rather simple ideological structure. Even there have been more political parties since 1989, they are grouped more or less, into two basic camps, left and right.

Somewhere in the center, two parties competed for the same voters, the liberal ones: Fidesz and SZDSZ (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége - Alliance of Free Democrats), the latter being more popular in the first decades of the 1990s. Fidesz was rather “secular but outspoken on freedom of religion, mostly libertarian and always suspicious of authorities”.<sup>5</sup> It seems that Fidesz started to change its views even in 1993. One reason was that SZDSZ was in a better electoral and political position so by joining this party in a supposed governmental coalition after the 1994 elections meant for FIDESZ to be only a junior partner. Therefore, a better strategy was to go closer to MDF, which was declining politically and would allow FIDESZ to become the main party in a possible governmental partnership after 1994. Consequently, the party brought new messages in the political arena, becoming less liberal and more right wing in tone.<sup>6</sup> Yet the move proved as being disastrous. The voters did not enjoy the switch, therefore the party lost some of them by not gaining new ones.<sup>7</sup> The result was that at the 1994 elections the party only received 7%, as much as the Christian Democrats, the future partners.

<sup>5</sup> Gabor Toka, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

It is important to notice that the elections came after 4 consecutive years of economic decline, which led to the high unpopularity of MDF and success of the socialists. The socialists, won the elections with 33%, but due to the electoral system, they received 54% of the seats. Even so, they decided not to govern by themselves, but to invite as coalition partner the liberals from SZDSZ.

It was one of the first event which later started to be an electoral pattern, that is to receive substantially more seats than votes. It happened several time in the Hungarian elections, and eventually became part of the electoral culture.

On the other hand, except MSZP, all the other parties (five of them) which entered the parliament belonged to the centre and centre right and one could predict that in next years one of them could become a leader senior party and absorbing the others.

**Table 3. Electoral result in Hungary, 1994-2018**

		1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Fidesz	%	7,0	28,24	41,1	42,0	52,7	44,9	49,3
	Seats	20	148	188	164	263	133	133
MSZP	%	33,0	32,2	42,1	43,2	19,3	25,6	11,9
	S.	209	134	178	190	59	38	20
JOBBIK	%	-	-	-	HU	16,7	20,2	19,1
	S.	-	-	-	-	47	23	26
LMP	%	-	-	-	-	7,5	5,3	7,1
	S.	-	-	-	-	16	5	8
KDNP (CP)	%	7,0	2,3	3,9	Fidesz	Fidesz	Fidesz	Fidesz
	S.	22	-	-	(23)	(36)	(16)	
MDF	%	11,7	2,8	Fidesz	5,0	2,7	-	
	S.	37	17	(23)	11	-	-	
SZDSZ	%	19,7	7,9	5,6	6,5	MDF	-	
	S.	70	24	20	20	-	-	
Total	S.	386	386	386	386	386	199	199
Turnout	%	68,9	56,3	50,5	67,8	64,4	61,7	68,1

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/hungary.html>, accessed 22.10.2018

## Political development after the EU accession

After the integration of Hungary in 2004 and the subsequent years were peaceful, with no major events until the 2006 election, which worth some brief investigation. First of all, it was for the first time after 1990 that the party in government won the elections. As in 2002, to socialists had only 1% more than FIDESZ, yet due to the rather curious electoral system, they succeeded to secure 186 seats, plus 6 on a common ballot with the liberals. With the 18 seats won by the liberals, they were able to stay in power, in fact having better results than in 2002, when the socialist-liberal coalition had 198 seats, 10 more than of FIDESZ and having just a 5 seats majority. Secondly, just months after the voting, some riots occurred, partly fueled by a leaked declaration of Prime Minister Gsurcsany, in which he admitted socialists lied in the electoral campaign, presenting a better situation of economy. The next year was rather peacefully, yet it was the starting point for the entering in big politics of JOBBIK, a rather marginal party: they founded a paramilitary group, Magyar Garda, which caused heated debate in the society.

The year 2008 proved important for the Hungarian political arena for the years to come. First of all, in March the government organized a referendum regarding the cancelling of some medical and educational fees. It is important to note that the referendum was initiated by the opposition party FIDESZ. The voters supported the cancelling, in all three questions approving it (and thus opposing the governmental plan) with a majority of more than 80%. Since the Minister of Health was supported by SZDSZ, soon a conflict emerged between the two coalition parties, which eventually led to a political divorce. For the liberals, although it has ideological explanations, the move proved to be disastrous: they were unable to regain their 1990s strength and disappeared in just few years. Interestingly, the socialists resisted in power and were able to govern until 2010. Although a rather small party, SZDSZ was important for the Hungarian party system, acting as a buffer zone between the right and left. Without a centre party and with the continuous weakening of the left, in just few years the party system moved significantly to the right.

Last but not least, the year 2008 is important because it was the start of the world economic crises, which hit hard Hungary, already in some economic difficulties for some years. Even they had in 2006 one of the best electoral results, all these problem hit hard the Socialists, who dropped at the less important European Parliament elections of 2009 under 18%.

**Table 4. GDP growth, Hungary, 2017-2018**

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Hungary	0.4	0.9	-6.6	0.7	1.7	-1.6	2.1	4.3	3.5	2.3	4.1	4.9

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tec00115&plugin=1>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-performance-and-forecasts/economic-performance-country\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-performance-and-forecasts/economic-performance-country_en), accessed 15.10.2018

Scoring around 40% at the precedent two elections, Fidesz kept its voters once more and using the Socialists political and electoral failure, succeeded in achieving their best result after 1989, at the 2010 elections. The year 2010 is important in the political history of Hungary for several reasons.

First of all, as mentioned, Fidesz acquired their best electoral result after 1989. In fact, it was the best result of any party in the post-communist history of Hungary, being a record that seems to be difficult to break in the future. Fidesz received almost 53% of the popular vote, but due to the electoral system, the party succeeded in controlling 68% of the parliamentary seats. The mixt electoral system allows that almost half of the seats to be win in single member constituencies. Fidesz was so powerful that won 173 seats out of 178.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, FIDESZ come to power and started its long and influential governing, being able to win the elections two more times, a rare performance in CEE countries.

Thirdly, the other main Hungarian party, the MSZP lost their political power, gaining less than 20%. Moreover, the party was unable to recover, and became a less important party. In fact, the entire opposition entered into turmoil, not being able to produce a powerful party or coalition, which could compete with FIDESZ.

Last, but not least, in 2010 Jobbik entered the Hungarian Parliament, after receiving almost 17%. In fact, the two right-wing parties received together three elections in a row around 70%, proving that the Hungarian political arena is highly unbalanced.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv10/outroot/vdin2/en/l22.htm>, accessed 30.10.2018



Once a liberal party, Fidesz started to govern having a clear, yet conservative agenda. The party started to change several aspects of the social and economic life, by bringing a more a conservative, paternalistic feature. On the other hand, it tried to change the political system, the political rules in order to stay in power as much as possible, via democratic tools, such as free elections and respecting the Constitution. Yet, in order to avoid breaching of the Constitution or to loose governmental majority after future elections, Fidesz begin to work in these two directions, right after its victory in May 2010. Among others was the law that changed the power of the Constitutional court to control or amend the legislation in the budgetary field.

Even it seems to be a popular measure and budgetary sound, the new Parliament adopted a Constitutional amendment that reduced the number of MPs to 199, starting with the next elections. Such measures, which please the voters, have side effects, such as the possibility that the government (and the governing party) to control easier a smaller parliament.

Eventually, in 2011 Hungary adopted a new and criticised Constitution. In fact, after the fall of communism, Hungary did not adopt a new constitution, but transformed significantly the 1949 one. The new one generated some controversies: it affects the system of checks and balances and limits some civil liberties (for instance, defining marriage as a union of man and woman) and last but not least, affects in certain areas the independence of justice. For instance, the new constitution states that the Constitutional court should be composed of 15 members, with a mandate of 12 years, compared with the 1989 one, which had 11 members, appointed for 9 years. Due to the fact that some judges retired, Fidesz was able to appoint 11 new judges by 2018. Also, in the judicial area, high ranked officials can only be appointed with a two third majority, which seems difficult to achieve in the next elections. The governing coalition was able thus to appoint several officials close to the two parties and who can be hardly removed from their position heavily, even if another party would win.<sup>9</sup>

Also in 2011, the Parliament adopted a new electoral law, which redesigned the electoral districts, and also changed the system from a rather proportional one to a mixed system which favours constituency candidates and the party gaining the first positions. For instance, in 2018,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://theorangefiles.hu/the-constitutional-court/>, accessed 22.10.2018

FIDESZ received 49% of votes on the national list but 67% of seats, while the opposition received 44% on the national list, yet only 32% of the seats.<sup>10</sup>

Further in 2011 it was adopted a law granting citizenship to Hungarian living abroad, mainly in Romania and Slovakia. Once with citizenship also came the right to vote, a measure criticised at that time, since it would allow to vote people who may not live in Hungary not a single day. The strategy proved successful: in 2014 and 2018, more than 95% of citizens from diaspora voted for FIDESZ in 2018, there were around 225.000 valid votes coming from abroad, which added 2 seats to FIDESZ, helping the party to achieve the needed two thirds necessary to amend the constitution.<sup>11</sup>

Not only FIDESZ adopted a new constitution in the Parliament, but it amended it seven times until 2018, which is considered as too frequent, taking into consideration that a constitution should be a stable text.<sup>12</sup> It is important also to note that there were no minor, technical adjustments: in one case, in 2013, the amendment contained 22 new articles. Also, the electoral law was four times between 2011 and 2013.<sup>13</sup>

At political level, the opposition was further weakened by some splits among the Socialists and their factions. After some discussions without results in 2013, eventually most of all these parties and factions (some of them coming from the Socialist Party) agreed in January 2014 to run on a joint list, named Unity (Összefogás). Unfortunately for the opposition, the Greens and LMP decided not to join this common list and had their own campaign. Despite all these effort, the opposition remained low in the opinion polls: except 2012, when MSZP reached 30%, and in January 2014, when the new alliance was close to 35%, they remained under 30%, with LMP being around 5%. By the contrary, after a minimal 37% in 2012, FIDESZ stayed solidly between 40 and 50% until the 2014 elections.<sup>14</sup>

Even the economic recovery was slow (in fact, in 2012 Hungary witnessed another GDP decline), FIDESZ and its Christian Democratic ally managed to keep its voters close, or better said managed not to lose so many.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/385959?download=true>, accessed 29.10.2018

<sup>11</sup> Of which around a half of votes came from Romania.

<sup>12</sup> The constitution was amended five times between 2012 and 2013

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/116757?download=true>, accessed 29.10.2018

<sup>14</sup> <https://pollofpolls.eu/HU>, accessed 11.11.2018

In fact, even after a rather problematic governmental period, FIDESZ gained almost the same number of votes as in 2002 or 2006: 2,2 million. From a total of 128.000 votes coming from abroad, 122.000 went to FIDESZ.

The change of the electoral system proved successful: the FIDESZ-KDNP alliance won 96 of the 106 seats in constituencies where a FPTP system was used, while the opposition could win in only 10 constituencies. Even receiving less than 35% in some places, Fidesz won every not-Budapest constituency but two (in one of that two constituencies, the opposition candidate had only 300 votes in front of the Fidesz candidate).<sup>15</sup> On the party list, Fidesz was also first, with over 45%. With the two combined, FIDESZ-KDNP passed once more the two thirds barrier, taking almost 67% of the total seats.

2014 was a full electoral year in Hungary, with national, European and local elections. Curiously, the national election were held in April and Fidesz received less than 45%, yet one month later, at the European Parliament elections the party received 51,5%. It was the second best result of a party at the 2014 elections, but the important piece of news was the fact the socialists received their lowest percentage of votes after the fall of communism (10,9%). It must be also underlined that the turnout at the EP elections was the fourth lowest in Europe, only 2,3 million citizens being interested in voting, compared with the 5 million one month earlier.

Besides the two elections, 2014 was also important for another political event. In July, at a Summer school in Baile Tusnad, Romania, Viktor Orbán had its famous speech in which first mentioned the term "illiberalism", which later became famous and main label for countries in CEE where there are problems in terms of democracy quality.<sup>16</sup>

Even it was successful at the October local elections, too, Fidesz lost some of its popularity and at two by elections in 2015 did not succeed to keep the seats; an independent candidate and a member of Jobbik winning

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv14/szavossz/hu/oevker.html>, 27.10.2018

<sup>16</sup> "Meaning, that Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not deny foundational values of liberalism, as freedom, etc. But it does not make this ideology a central element of state organization, but applies a specific, national, particular approach in its stead.", Viktor Orbán, speech at Baile Tusnad Summer University, 2014

the available places. The damage was important due to the fact that the governmental majority lost its two third majority thus being unable to modify the constitution, as it did several time between 2010 and 2014.

To regain its popularity, Fidesz used the refugee crises which took place in the summer of 2015. To block the flux of immigrants from Serbia and Croatia, Hungary built almost 200 kilometres of fence, which caused irritation at EU level and in Brussels. The action was efficient for the governmental parties, since they regained their approval rate, at the level they were one year earlier.<sup>17</sup> Even the number of immigrants applying for refugee status dropped significantly after the built of the fence, Fidesz further used this topic on the public agenda.

In February 2016, the government initiated a referendum on the same topic, yet the vote was held only months later, in October.<sup>18</sup> The opposition boycotted the voting, in order to block the referendum to be valid, that is to reach the majority of 50%+1 of registered voters. They were successful, nevertheless the government, claiming that it must fulfil the preference of the 98% who voted “no”, initiated an amendment to the constitution. The amendment was rejected in November 2016: 131 Fidesz-KDNP MPs supported it, yet 133 votes were necessary to pass. Jobbik supported the idea, but asked for further measures, which were not accepted and therefore the extreme right wing party refused to support the governmental majority.<sup>19</sup> After the constitutional transformations of 2012-2013, the immigrant question was the one that dominated the governmental and public agenda of 2016-2018.

Until the 2018 elections, the Orban government further diluted the quality of democracy in Hungary. Two directions were important in these respect.

First of all, media came more and more under the control of Fidesz. Mainly business people close to the party were involved in some acquisitions. As a result, most of the regional papers came under the influence of FIDESZ

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<sup>17</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/hungary>, accessed 7.11.2018

<sup>18</sup> The so called ‘Quota referendum’, which looked to an answer for the question: “Do you want to allow the European Union to mandate the resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary without the approval of the National Assembly?”

<sup>19</sup> <https://theorangefiles.hu/amendments-to-the-fundamental-law/>, 22.10.2018

associates.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, *Nepszabadsag* political daily was also closed down just days before its editing company was purchased by a businessman close to the governmental coalition, a move that was seen as premeditated and planned by governmental/FIDESZ circles.<sup>21</sup> As a result, most of media is indirectly under FIDESZ control, except some TV stations and news portals.

Secondly, NGOs became a target for governmental regulations. A so called 'NGO law' was passed, with the main purpose to control funding coming from abroad. The NGOs with such financial resources have to separately register and have to fulfil certain regulations. Connected to this topic were the attacks against Hungarian origin USA philanthropist George Soros, who is financing one of the largest Hungarian NGO and also the Central European University (which eventually was forced to relocate to Vienna).

After years of economic growth and with an opposition which failed to unite or increase its electoral support (as surveys showed), Fidesz stayed strongly at around 45%, while the socialists were near 15%, not to mention that the other opposition parties (except Jobbik) were under the limit of 10%.<sup>22</sup> As compared to the 2014 elections, when most opposition parties, that is the liberal and socialists ones, managed to form an electoral coalition, in 2018 all the negotiations failed. The lack of unity did not harm the opposition parties, at least at constituency level, since they won almost the same number of seats. Nevertheless, a more unified opposition could deliver a stronger message, to alter Fidesz at national level.

The 2018 were important for several reasons. First of all, the winner was the same party/alliance that did it twice at the previous elections, this one being the third in a row. Secondly, Fidesz kept its level of popularity, receiving constantly 45-50% of votes. In fact, in 2018 Fidesz received the largest number of votes ever, 2,8 million Hungarians voting for this party. Thirdly, the turnout was high, 68%, one of the highest after 1990. At this point, it must be added that voters could have been tempted not to attend elections, since the name of the winner was well known. It was the ability of Fidesz, which used every tool, but mainly its party apparatus to

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<sup>20</sup> [https://index.hu/kultur/media/2017/07/31/russmedia\\_heinrich\\_pecina\\_mediahaboru\\_napilapok/](https://index.hu/kultur/media/2017/07/31/russmedia_heinrich_pecina_mediahaboru_napilapok/), accessed 17.10.2018

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/12/world/europe/hungary-newspaper-nepszabadsag.html>, accessed 29.10.2018

<sup>22</sup> <https://pollofpolls.eu/HU>, accessed 5.11.2018

stimulate citizens to go to vote.<sup>23</sup> The opposition received about the same number of votes as in 2014, and almost the same number of seats. Fourthly, the performer of the elections was Jobbik. The extreme right wing party, with few resources, entered in high level politics only in 2010, succeeded to maintain the same percentage of votes as four years ago (19%, respectively 20%), and even to increase the number of votes by 70.000.

## Conclusions

The present text, although it slightly revises ideas already discussed, it tries to bring a broader view, taking into consideration a mixture of elements, in order to reach some conclusions.

Hungary displayed a special kind of communism. After the 1956 revolution and the terror that followed, the regime started a softer version of communism, allowing some forms of free speech and parts of market economy. It was the first country that showed a departure from communism, in May 1989, when it removed the fence at the border with Austria, which allowed thousands of East Germans to travel to West Germany and ask for political asylum. A series of round tables ended communism in Hungary, with the first free elections held in 1990. Due to its rapid transition to democracy and market economy, Hungary was praised by foreign countries, and soon invited to join NATO and the European Union. Negotiations to join the latter started in 1998 and ended in 2002 and were conducted almost entirely by the first Orban government.

The first membership years evolved under a socialist-liberal government, with no significant political events until 2006, when a leaked registration was made public, in which Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitted that MSZP lied about the governmental performance, which affected the Socialists' popularity. On this ground, and also paved by the economic problems of 2007-2010 Fidesz and its Christian-democratic ally came to power with a record percentage. There were few signs on what will come in the political system, the move of Fidesz towards a more nationalist and Eurosceptic zone.

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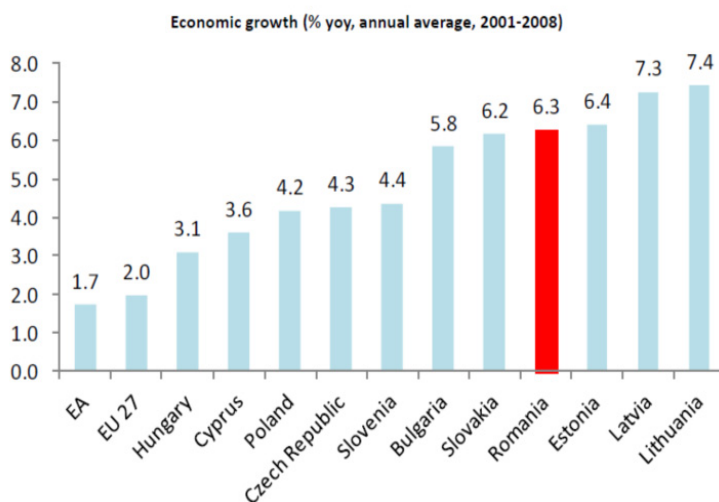
<sup>23</sup> Ovidiu Vaida, "Cauzele victoriei lui Viktor Orbán", *Revista 22*, 11.04.2018, <https://revista22.ro/opinii/ovidiu-vaida/cauzele-victoriei-lui-viktor-orbn>, accessed 22.10.2018

Next, some answers connected to the question: what is the current state of Hungarian politics, how can be explained the decrease of democracy? will be delivered.

One first answer for the important changes that took place in 2011-2012 it the fact that Fidesz, although it had more MPs than its rivals MSZP in 2002, it could not stay in government. As in Poland, once that it won again, first measures were to change the political framework, to stay in power as much as possible, or in the case of lose, to reduce the damage.<sup>24</sup>

Another element which must be discussed is the fact that between 2007 and 2010 Hungary was severely hit by the global economic crises. Already in 2007 the country had an only 0.4% GDP growth, slowing down from 3-4% in the previous years, but the blow came in 2009, with severe -6,6%. Therefore, not only the MSZP mistakes and disputes inside the governmental coalition, but also the harsh economic crises could explain the unparalleled electoral success of Fidesz in 2010. From the voters' point of view, the crises came right after the enlargement, and the membership did not bring economic wellbeing, but the contrary.

**Figure 2. Growth rate in the pre-crisis period**



Source: [www.fiscalcouncil.ro/prezentare-9-2012.pdf](http://www.fiscalcouncil.ro/prezentare-9-2012.pdf), accessed 6.10.2018

<sup>24</sup> In Poland, PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice) used the same path, after winning the majority of seat at the 2015 elections. The main changes affect the independence of justice and appointment of different state officials.

Thirdly, the Hungarian political arena had always displayed two main sides: the right wing and the centre-left. Between 1990 and 2010, the government was dominated by either a right wing coalition, first led by MDF, then by Fidesz, or by an alliance between MSZP and SZDSZ. The 2006-2010 difficult government had effects on the party system. On the one hand, due to their mistakes and economic difficulties, MSZP performed poorly at the 2010 elections. What was important for the political balance of Hungary is that the Socialists could not recover: after a refreshing 25% in 2014 (which was the score of an electoral alliance) it dropped four years later to its worst result in two decades: 11,9%. On the other hand, SZDSZ acted as a buffer zone in the political centre, and it was the main ally of the Socialists, while in government. Even losing its early 1990s popularity, it was still able to gain regularly 6-7% and it also hold the very important position of Mayor of Budapest for almost two decades. After a disappointing 0,25% in 2010, the party was dissolved in just a few years. The Liberals were important since they acted as a moderate, centre party, a much needed position in the Hungarian political system.

From a timeline point of view, the decline in democracy quality that occurred after 2010 could be divided into two periods. First of all, it seems that until 2014 Fidesz was rather interested in changing the political framework. The Constitution came first, and in few years, due to the fact that the party and its ally controlled two thirds of the votes in the Parliament, it was changed several times. Soon the Electoral law was on the agenda, and besides decreasing the number of MPs to 199, to law was modified in order to work in the advantage of the largest party. Other changes were also made, some of them can be amended in the future only with a two third majority. This way, Fidesz made it sure that in future, even if the party might lose the power, the political arrangements it devised will remain unchanged. That is a new coalition may govern, but under the rules of Fidesz.

A second phase could be witnessed after 2014. Having all major political arrangements solved, and after it lost the two third majority in 2015, after two by elections, the governmental majority was keen to work more on details, such as the economic advantages for its business supporters, media and civil society regulations.



One must pay attention to the fact that while Fidesz is supported by half of the voters, it may be that not all of them completely approve its policies or messages. It seems that it is case of top-to-bottom Euroscepticism or an induced Euroscepticism. While Fidesz clearly has anti-Brussels rhetoric and belief, it seems that partially it is a rather rationale vote gaining attitude, and not necessarily the mirroring of some views within the society.<sup>25</sup>

As the Eurobarometer shows (Table 5), the level of *trust* is more or less at the same level, around 50%. It is true, the level of *do not trust* slightly increased after 2016, yet in 2015 it was a low of 34%. Curiously, the highest levels of *trust* are in the years that follow the EP elections. The point is that level of confidence in the EU is not declining considerably and in fact anti-Brussels views are used for electoral reasons also.

**Table 5. Level of Trust in the EU in Hungary, 2008-2018, Standard Eurobarometer**

Year	Trust	Do Not Trust
2008 spring	52%	33%
2009 spring	49%	39%
2010 spring	55%	30%
2011 spring	54%	40%
2012 spring	46%	40%
2013 spring	47%	46%
2014 spring	44%	50%
2015 spring	56%	34%
2016 spring	41%	53%
2017 spring	46%	49%
2018 spring	44%	50%
Average	49%	42%

Source: Standard EB, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/index#p=1&instruments=STANDARD&yearFrom=2008&yearTo=2018>, accessed at 11.06.2018

<sup>25</sup> A hypothesis analyses also by Simon Hix in "Euroscepticism as Anti-Centralization: A Rational Choice Institutional Perspective", *European Union Politics*, 8(1), 2007, pp. 131-150

The case of Hungary would be curious, if there is analysed out of context. In fact, all over the European Union there is general tendency of support for right wing or Eurosceptic parties. Shortly, there is a general shift to the right and Hungary is nothing else than an example in this respect.<sup>26</sup> What are to be noticed in Hungary are the fact that right wing soft Eurosceptic parties are in the government and also the fact that the share of these parties is higher than anywhere in the EU. In fact, starting with 2010, when Jobbik first entered the parliament, together with Fidesz account for 68-70% of the general votes. This allows Fidesz sometimes to be radical since it has a more radical party at the extreme right. In fact, they have similar views in more areas, for instance regarding immigrants or Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries. Yet, since Fidesz and KDNP have enough votes to govern by themselves, there is no cooperation between the two parties at all.

A last but important element is that Fidesz is extremely skilful in building a good image. Either by using well targeted campaigns (regardless their moral limitations, see immigrant or Soros) or by taking advantage of the numerous media institutions close to the party, Viktor Orban and his colleagues were able to deliver a good impression and keeping its voters close.

**Table 6. Number of votes for Fidesz, at the national elections.**

Year	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Number of votes (mil.)	2.3	2.2	2.7	2.2	2.8

Source: <http://www.valasztas.hu/orszagyulesi-valasztasok>, accessed 17.10.2018

<sup>26</sup> Ovidiu Vaida, The New Challenges for the European Centre-Right and Centre-Left at The Beginning of New Century, *On-line journal Modelling the New Europe*, Issue No. 23/September 2017, pp. 3-18, [http://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/On-line\\_Journal\\_No\\_23-September\\_2017\\_4-19.pdf](http://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/On-line_Journal_No_23-September_2017_4-19.pdf)

It worth also to underline the fact that at EU level Hungary is member of the largest party federation, the European Peoples' Party. Even there were several disputes regarding Fidesz and its leader, Viktor Orban inside EPP, no serious measures were taken for years. After repeated warnings, finally the European Parliament voted in September 2018 a motion against Hungary, which was backed by most EPP members, but still, steps for the triggering of Article 7 of the Treaty of EU were not initiated.

As different democracy indexes show, as media articles or experts' report present, the level of democracy is constantly decreasing in Hungary, especially after 2010. This process is closely linked to the name of Fidesz and its leader, Viktor Orban. Due to lack of political power of opposition, due to the rather jovial attitude of the EU institutions, but also of the EPP, the party could easily design al kind of measures that that would reinforce its domination, from changing the Constitution till the appointment in state positions of persons close to it. Not only was Fidesz in Hungary, but also became a model for other countries in CEE, such as Poland and Romania. Since there are signs at EU level that the situation cannot be longer tolerated, it seems that 2019 will offer a more clear answer regarding the state of democracy in Hungary.

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