Ervin Csizmadia

A Playboy lifestyle? Or something else?

Not long ago, Nick Thorpe wrote a piece on the Hungarian status quo containing several important observations. (Hungary’s Fidesz: Cracks emerge in ruling party. Oct 23, 2014.) One of these concerns the existing fault line within the Hungarian ruling party. Another is about telltale signs of a certain lifestyle to which – though phrased in a different way – Bill Clinton, the former President of the United States referred to earlier as well. With protesters taking to the streets by the thousands over a proposed internet tax, it is even more important to refer to these.

It is no wonder, that even a journalist who has been living here for a long time sees the governing party rather weatherworn. The third election victory this year and the excruciatingly unfortunate situation of the opposition jointly erode the governing party. Having a two-thirds majority on the long run is never a good situation. Without an opponent, sooner or later the governing party becomes its own enemy; conflicts within can intensify and gradually, internal struggles take place of the government-opponent frays present in democracies.

Perhaps foreign readers still remember the catchphrase of former socialist countries: “a party is its own opposition.” Gradually, Fidesz is forced to take up exactly this role. Everyone else is so weak and uninspired that there remains no other than the governing party.

In this situation, many of the government potentates may have become overconfident. The non-existence of an opponent has very adverse effects, as the governing party becomes overly confident and some may – as Thorpe says – become playboys. This may or may not be the case: there is no exact data concerning this. Nevertheless we don’t think this to be the country’s or the Hungarian government’s greatest problem at hand.
The biggest problem is with the Western identity of the governing party. Here we must be precise: It is possible – even encouraged to criticize the state of the European Union. In itself, Fidesz and the Hungarian right wing cannot be criticized for their harsh evaluation of the European situation. We can’t even object to the fact that Fidesz is submitting all kinds of unorthodox alternatives. Strong criticism and alternatives is one thing though, and the waving of Western identity is by far another. The Hungarian government party has gone way too far in this issue therefore it is no wonder the rest of the world stands uncomprehending.

Living in Hungary helps understand somewhat more the conduct of the government. Fidesz takes heed of Hungarian history, a history which teaches an important but often disregarded lesson: when Western relations weakened, Hungary has opened towards Eastern powers repeatedly throughout history. Not necessarily because it permanently wished to turn away from the West, but out of fear for its national sovereignty.

As for national sovereignty, naturally we know that – especially nowadays – it is inherently limited. Yet we must acknowledge that not everyone shares this opinion – for example the Hungarian right wing. Fidesz behaves this way because they believe that the “opposing” Western Europe and the European Union is interfering in this national sovereignty. This is the root of all conflict, and what the West finds hard to understand and let’s be honest; it is not hard to see why.

On top of this, the Hungarian government keeps asking the West for its acceptance, for it to focus on facts and so on. But time comes when the Hungarian powers ought to reflect: do they really know the West? Do they understand why the West acts the way they do towards us? We cannot be convinced that they do.

Even so, the playboy lifestyle does not explain Hungarian politics. The internal fault lines are closer to the truth, but mostly Hungarian history. Fidesz brings back the forgotten logic of Hungarian history, which does not just consist of the Horthy-era exclusively. In this history, the value of national sovereignty stands above all.
But how can this co-exist with the global-era?

This is the greatest challenge of the Orbán government.