A book on grand coalitions and social cohesion

There are two ways a foreigner can approach the past few years of Hungarian politics. One is incomprehension, the other is rejection. The conduct of the Orbán government and the Prime Minister's frequently quoted phrase concerning an „illiberal state” have significantly contributed to the latter.

The greatest political problem currently in Hungary however, is that on its own, neither the existing government, nor – in the event of an electoral win – the liberal-left can create a truly functioning country.

Centre for Fair Political Analysis has been devoted to analyzing Hungarian politics in an objective, non-partisan way for several years now. The think tank has written about domestic policy, including the Hungarian right repeatedly. Amongst others, in 2013, we devoted a lengthy essay to the anatomy of the Hungarian right.

As the newest in this series, we are proud to present the e-book of Ervin Csizmadia, the director of CFPA, titled: The Next Hungary. Political Cooperation, Grand Coalition and Social Cohesion. The e-book will be available shortly in English too, for now; we would like to give a short summary of the main points.

The premise of the author is, that similar to European examples; grand coalition governance will eventually be necessary in Hungary as well. However no one is interested in a grand coalition in Hungary currently, moreover, the tension and the political polarization between the two camps are ever growing.

The essay enumerates on the cogent arguments against grand coalitions, at the same time illuminating no less thoroughly why it would be needed despite the difficulties. It presents the Hungarian political traditions in its reasoning, including the fact that during the past 150 years, there have been several occasions when – as today – there were governments with two-thirds majorities or of similar strength, in face of which there was generally a fragmented, multi-party opposition that is incapable of governing. At the same time we have to see that while the potential to
govern of this opposition is weak its intellectual capacity and international orientation is nevertheless strong,

What should happen if the government once again has a two thirds majority, however its international acceptability is weak, while the opposition is small and fragmented yet its international assessment is better? According to the author the only appropriate long term solution would be a grand coalition based on the cooperation of the two sides. While momentarily this is not on the political agenda, this does not mean that it is impossible. The right-wing needs to familiarize itself with the left and vice-versa because this did not take place at all in the 25 years following the 1989-90 democratization. What did happen was the stigmatization of one another which led to the fatal decline of political efficacy.

Finally, the author also mentions that there is no talk of some sort of „give-and-take policy”. On the contrary. Conciliation can only come about in a grandiose debate process with complete respect for the values of the other half. Furthermore there is an issue that can only be brought to fruition by working together to reach a common goal in a grand coalition government. This issue is the promotion of social cohesion. The book shows that this key topic of Western European political, social development has completely disappeared in the two and a half decades following the regime change, moreover the political actors didn’t even know that they had a task concerning this question. Nevertheless, setting up democratic institutions in itself did not and could not call forth a solid liberal democracy.

Therefore, the program for a future Hungary can be no other than the realization of the primary importance of social cohesion and its development. This can be achieved by cooperation amongst parties unlike any other that we have seen, namely – following the German and Austrian model – through a grand coalition.