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**Municipal election law and party politics in the capital**

It seems that the events of the 2014 national elections will be repeated on a local level. Politicians of the opposition, Hungarian journalists, and even some foreign media stated countless times their view that the national electoral law – owing to the extra compensation votes for the winner, the increase of the weight of single-member electoral districts, and by making the election one-rounds instead of the former two – has made the Hungarian electoral system disproportionate, and that it clearly favored the governing parties. In addition, it forced the various left-wing parties of the opposition (MSZP, Együtt-PM, DK) to create a politically unfortunate alliance, even though these parties showed significant differences regarding their ideas and ambitions. And what was this coercive power we referred to? The fact that they had to avoid the fragmentation of the opposition votes, which would have made Fidesz a laughing winner even in those constituencies where it otherwise had a weak position.

After winning the parliamentary elections, one of the first acts of the Fidesz government was to amend parts of the municipal electoral procedure law concerning the capital. In essence, it abolished the direct election of the 33 members of the Metropolitan Assembly governing the capital, and instead it made the future mayors of the 23 capital districts, to be elected on October 12, members of the Assembly ex officio. The remaining 10 members will be: the mayor of Budapest, as well as the most successful candidates of the compensation lists, who campaigned for mayor in a district, but lost. The law also provides that compensation lists can be created only by organizations which had a mayoral candidate in more than half of the capital’s districts.

As before the parliamentary elections, the prevalent opinion in Budapest before the municipal elections is also that, as a result of the mentioned law, the left-wing parties must work together if they want to change the Fidesz-dominated local government. At first glance, this approach is rational, because if the three main left-wing parties fought with each other in each district, they would be defeated in most of them, despite the fact that in the spring elections their alliance barely fell short of Fidesz in Budapest. Consequently, most leftist politicians now think like before the parliamentary elections: they are aiming to avoid the
fragmentation of the potentially leftist votes, and likewise they have to run against Fidesz together. This strategy dominates, but not unanimously, given that even the leftist parties have their own candidates in some districts at the moment.

Nevertheless, the great leftist alliance did not succeed as an organization in the spring elections, to the extent that the Fidesz-KDNP coalition was even able to maintain its two-thirds majority in the parliament. Maybe the left would have had more chance, if they have had a better prime minister candidate, or in case they have allied much sooner.

In the long-lasting leftist debate about allying or not, it has never been considered that this problem could be solved if a large leftist party would emerge, which could get most of the leftists votes, up to 80 or 90% of them. In this case, the problem would be much less critical, only to the extent that this great, dominant party could force its will on its allies. Of course, such a great leftist party has never actually emerged in Hungary even since the historical defeat of the once powerful MSZP in 2010, though four years could have been enough, even for that. It is not uncommon for larger parties to emerge from a fragmented party system: a good example would be Silvio Berlusconi’s PdL from the 1990’s Italy, or the current Italian Prime Minister’s, Matteo Renzi’s Democratic Party.

The Hungarian and foreign critiques regarding the election law concerning the capital are valid, seeing that the new rules made the job of the organizationally fragmented Hungarian opposition undoubtedly more difficult, in addition to the fact that the law was amended in a way that was far from elegant, just months before the municipal elections, giving little time to prepare. To create a dominant leftist party, it is necessary to have a powerful organization, professional politicians, well-ordered communication, strong beliefs they want to share, and close relations with society. The Hungarian left-wing lacked many elements from these, therefore the new election laws, even if they were undoubtedly fabricated for political purposes, are only partially responsible for their failure so far.