The current campaign is unusual, since the municipal election will be the third election in Hungary this year (after the parliamentary and the European Parliament elections), and the Hungarian parties had never had to cope with such a burden before. Apparently, they find it difficult to tolerate: we see few new messages; the parties are not able to explain the real stakes of the elections for their voters and a relatively low participation rate is to be expected.

During the two spring elections, the parties have exhausted not only their messages, but also most of their budgets. The state gives money to candidates and nominating organizations only for the parliamentary election campaign, and those who used that up entirely are now able to finance the activities required for the promotion of their municipal candidates only from private donations or loans. The governing parties are less affected by this (partly because they use public funds to promote the performance of their politicians), the opposition, however, faces serious problems. Therefore, the parties must consider where to concentrate the available resources, in which areas to conduct an intensive campaign.

The lack of messages and resources is most obvious in the main stage of the municipal election campaign: the mayoral election in the capital. We have already analyzed the candidates, but the situation has significantly changed since then. Ferenc Falus made several mistakes, and, according to an opinion poll, his popularity fell behind another opposition candidate, Lajos Bokros. The left-wing parties nominating Falus believed in the success of their own candidate so little that – as Falus told – they did not spend money on a verifying poll, instead they took the published data for granted. Their lack of messages is visible in the way they handled these results: they were not able to give a new direction to their campaign, instead they simply withdrew their candidate in favor of Bokros (who became famous 20 years ago as the financial minister of a leftist government, but he is otherwise conservative). According to other public polls published since that move, it seems that their decision was not very well-founded, and it is even more certain that due to the left-wing mayoral campaign lacking ideas and funds, István Tarlós is the number one candidate for mayor in Budapest: these errors and U-turns only improved his already good chances.
The left-wing parties focus their campaigns on the capital’s districts, which have become very valuable since the new electoral law. Here they have a chance to keep their current position and in some places win over districts from the governing parties. However, in the rural towns the fragmented opposition has little chance; it would be a success if their most important mayor, László Botka remained in office. In Szeged, Fidesz campaigns heavily against Botka, investing huge amounts of money to conquer the last rural bastion of the opposition.

The main reason for the opposition’s poor positions is that the former networks of the left fell apart in the countryside, and in many cases they were replaced by the organizations of the radical right-wing Jobbik. Perhaps the greatest question of the municipal elections is to which extent Jobbik will be able to break ahead of the governing parties in the small communities. Given the results obtained in April, this is the most interesting fight in this election, and its outcome could be decisive for Hungarian politics in the medium term. In so far as Jobbik will further increase its popularity in the countryside, building on this base it may become the number one party of the opposition, even without gaining power in Budapest. Accordingly, the radical party concentrates on its rural campaign; one can rarely see Jobbik’s campaign elements in the capital. The fourth parliamentary party, the green LMP does not have significant chances anywhere: for them, even having a candidate can be considered a success in most places.

It can be stated that this campaign is quieter than the parliamentary was; this is due to the apathy of voters and political parties, but also to the lack of funds and messages in case of the parties. The trends observed in the spring continue: the left is stuck in a hole, unable to improve its positions; in fact, it becomes more and more fragmented. The governing parties are in a good position in the vast majority of municipalities, and Jobbik is most popular in the countryside. Naturally, the media focuses on Budapest and the county centers promising a close vote, but this time the trends in small communities might be more interesting, because this is where a process which may have an important effect on Hungarian politics in the medium term is taking place.