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The transformation of the Hungarian opposition?



The fact that the Hungarian opposition was not able to win elections for the past twelve years makes it unique within East-Central Europe, since the oppositional parties could oust the governments similar to that of Orbán in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. We have to add however that after the changes of government in 2021 the successor

governments already failed in two countries out of four. Hungary can therefore be seen as unique in the region. This is the reason that international political science doesn't recognize Hungary and Serbia as a liberal democracy. Instead, they place these two countries into the otherwise numerous camp of electoral autocracies.

This raises the question of whether the Hungarian opposition is weak because there is an „electoral autocracy,, or independent of that. According to the government, Hungarian democracy is healthy, moreover the Hungarian political system (including media pluralism) is freer and more democratic than most of the countries in Western Europe. Naturally the Hungarian opposition and the western mainstream public opinion objects to this approach. In their opinion the Hungarian media system is not pluralist, in fact a large part of it is a victim of government centralization.

With this reasoning however, we cannot explain the state of the opposition. Why is the Hungarian opposition so weak? Not long ago Klára Dobrev – the shadow prime minister appointed by the Democratic

Coalition – mentioned three reasons for this weakness. One of them is that the opposition has no program. A second one is that it doesn't have enough politicians. The third is that their social network is weak. All three are significant problems, at the same time it is possible to change all of them. The reason the fragmented opposition could not change these is because changing these three factors is a task for one political actor not for many. Which raises a second question. Is Hungary ripe for a two party system?

The notion of a two party system evolving in Hungary is not unrealistic. The examples which were introduced at the beginning of this essay confirm that multi-party coalitions in government break up rapidly. Therefore, there is a need for concentration in the opposition as well. On the other hand we have to see that there is no system in the world which can suddenly change from a multi-party system to a two-party system. This won't happen in Hungary either. We can expect a three or four party-system at a maximum. That is, a three party opposition (a liberal, left-wing and green party) next to the governing party. The reader

may ask, and rightly so: what about conservatives who are disappointed by Fidesz? Hungarian political history teaches us that it is almost impossible to create a conservative block. So this isn't to be expected. It is possible however that the opposition parties will continue to fight amongst each other until a force that can directly challenge the government emerges.