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## Political learning and non-learning



Even long-term ruling parties fall at one point – this basic truth has been described many times. The question is not when, but how? Anyone familiar with the history of Hungarian politics knows that these falls from power were never pretty. In 1918, the old system ended with a revolution following World War I; In 1945, a new system was established under Soviet patronage following World War II. There was no revolution in 1989-90, or if we can consider the regime change as one, it was – in the words of István Bibó – a limited revolution. In 2024, however, we can

conclude that the peaceful change of regime in 1989-90 only resulted in regular shifts in power for a while, and since 2010 we have been living in a [dominant party system](#) again. This "new" dominant system will also end one day, and this is where the question of when and how becomes really exciting.

After 2010, the opposition of Fidesz confronted the ruling party with increasing vehemence and tried more and more vigorously to overthrow it. They failed. And not because they made a political mistake, but because they did not consider the ruling party as a "rival". The direction of their policy was that Fidesz is a state party, the system it built is an autocracy (if not a full-fledged dictatorship), and therefore it does not deserve to be more seriously investigated. However, several Fidesz victories with a two-thirds majority prove that this was an incorrect strategy. But the old opposition parties could not identify what they were doing wrong. After a while, they admitted that what they were doing was ineffective. The second time they failed, in 2014, they came to the conclusion that it is not really possible (worthwhile) to do anything else, because the Fidesz system is invincible. They gave up trying to learn from their mistakes and the situation at hand. They simply ruled out the possibility that Fidesz could ever do anything well. It did not occur to them to investigate: how Fidesz became – in their words – a state party.

A dominant party can be defeated by peaceful means. The only prerequisite for this is that you have to get to know the party. If the opposition reaches this point, it has already done a lot. The newly emerging Hungarian party, Tisza, realized in two areas that radical criticism of the ruling party is not enough, it is also necessary to analyze the successes of the ruling party and learn from them. On the one hand, the party realized that the most effective politics is micropolitics focusing on everyday people. (Fidesz previously learned this from the former major party, MSZP). On the other hand, it realized that the changes it envisioned could not be implemented within the old party framework. This is why the Tisza party does not talk about major social reforms, but about the everyday anomalies of healthcare and education. And this is also the reason why it wants to rebuild the entire party system. As the first step of this process it has already squeezed out most of the previously existing opposition parties, leaving it essentially the only political force capable of action. As a result of these two "innovations", Hungarian politics may be entering a new era. However, the lesson is that for successful politics, it is not enough to speak strongly, and it is not enough to completely reject the ruling party. Successful politics requires taking the opponent seriously if it is successful. The old opposition did not take it seriously, but the new one does. There's no shame in learning from an opponent, especially when the aim is to achieve a regular shift in power.