



HUNGARIAN
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE

Information Note on Recent Updates National Elections of Hungary 2022

Information Note
23 March 2022

Hungary will hold its national elections alongside with a national referendum on the 3rd of April 2022. The political campaign period will last from 12th of February 2022 until the end of the single round Election Day (3 April), for 50 days.

Following the [baseline information note](#) of 18 February 2022 and the [updates](#) of 7 March 2022, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee publishes its second update on some important developments in the campaign period towards the national elections and national referendum.

1. Electoral system

664 single-member constituency candidates of 20 organisations are registered. Voters will choose between 6 party lists. 12 minorities registered minority lists. The lists have 1146 registered candidates altogether.¹

The deadline of registering for mail voting at the upcoming elections was 9 March. 456,339 citizens are in the registry of voters without a Hungarian address and are entitled to cast their ballots by mail, and 7,708,704 voters having registered addresses are entitled – according to the data of 23 March – to cast their votes at inland polling stations on 3 April.² The registration deadline for casting votes at foreign representations of Hungary is 25 March.

2. Party and campaign finance

(a) General elections

Social media advertisement spending of parties falls under the limit a party or single-member constituency candidate may spend on campaign activities. Due to the public Facebook Ads Library, the advertisement expenditure may be well monitored on Facebook at least. There are many news outlets, sites which promote the messages of one of the parties up to repeating the same content in many cases. This type of outsourcing of advertisement expenditure resulted in the first month of the campaign that campaign related advertisement costs of all type of sites was, according to the calculations of Telex online news outlet, approximately three times higher than the advertisement expenditure of parties.³ This advertisement financing system of the parties and their alliances is legal according to the election related laws however the fairness is obviously violated. The advertisements of the government were not even calculated in the above, and the extensive use of government's (which is basically a party coalition running at the elections, too) advertisement leads to the severe violation of the principle of equality.

'Fake' parties still owe 716 million forints (ca. 1,9 million EUR) to the State since the elections of 2018. Some members of those parties are involved at the elections of 2022 as well, for example the leader of the 'Normális Élet Pártja' (Party for Normal Life), Mr. Gődény.⁴

According to the polls all opposition parties have lost somewhat from their popularity. For continuously updated, aggregated polls see the graphs of e.g. [Politico](#), [444.hu](#), or [taktikaiszavazas.hu](#).

3. Election campaign and media

See the [first](#), [second](#) and [third](#) updates of the Mertek Media Monitor's election campaign news monitoring.

¹ Constantly updated statistics on candidate nominating organisations on the website of the National Election Office [here](#)

² Constantly updated statistics on number of electoral on the website of the National Election Office [here](#)

³ Zs. Hanula, „[Szinte teljesen kiszervezte a szűrkezőnába az online kampányt a politika](#)” ('The politics almost totally outsourced the online campaign to the grey zone'), *Telex*, 18 March 2022

⁴ B. Nagy, „[A 2018-as választás óta még mindig 716 millióval tartoznak a kamupártok](#)” ('Fake' parties still owe 716 million after the elections of 2018'), *Telex*, 16 March 2022

(a) General elections

Scandals followed the recommendation collection of the candidates because many voters realised after checking the website of the National Election Office⁵ that their signatures were falsified and used for recommending candidates whom they never wanted to recommend. These reports concerned mainly the candidates of the 'Normális Élet Pártja' (Party for Normal Life) and the 'Megoldás Mozgalom' (Solution Movement). Registration of a candidate in Budapest was denied because he did not have the threshold of 500 recommendations after subtracting the number of recommendations with the falsified signatures and signatures with administrative mistakes.⁶ The 'Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt' (Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party) filed a report against the 'Normális Élet Pártja' (Party of Normal Life) at the Hungarian National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information (NAIH) for alleged unlawful data collection.⁷ The police has also started some investigations as the falsification of signatures are crimes.⁸

Posters are common tools of the campaign. In some cases, workers of the public work scheme were ordered to put up posters for Fidesz even though this is obviously unlawful, this type of work does not qualify as public work. All parties have raised complaints because their posters were damaged or torn off. The perpetrators are mostly unknown, although the candidates of the United Opposition accuse the governing Fidesz-KDNP party coalition that the Fidesz-KDNP's paid activists damaged thousands of posters causing major financial damage. The Fidesz-KDNP blames the United Opposition vice versa.⁹ These acts are unlawful according to the Electoral Procedure Act, and such damage is punishable based on the Act on Minor Offences¹⁰ and the Criminal Code¹¹. Candidates filed police reports in some cases, and police started at least one procedure when the perpetrators were caught in the act¹².

'Mi Hazánk' (Our Homeland) filed a complaint to the National Election Commission because their party was granted allegedly significantly less billboard space, by the operator company, than Fidesz-KDNP and the United Opposition. The National Election Commission rejected the complaint as the Commission did not have evidence on the exact numbers of the other parties' billboard spaces.¹³

On the 15th of March, Hungary celebrated the Memorial Day of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The United Opposition held a rally for its supporters and claims that ca. 80-100,000 people attended.¹⁴ The 'Mi Hazánk' (Our Homeland) party also organised its event for supporters where racist (against the Roma population) and anti-LGBTQ statements were made. The pro-government Civil Union Forum (CÖF-CÖKA) and the government held the so-called Peace March for government and Fidesz-KDNP coalition supporters, they claim that ca. 500,000 people attended.¹⁵ All parties used their events to call voters for support and attendance on Election Day, however it might be considered problematic that the Prime Minister called for voting against the opposition on a government organised demonstration accompanied by some anti-LGBTQ and racists (against non-European asylum seekers and migrants) messages.

Mainly the war in Ukraine has been on the agenda of campaign rhetoric. The United Opposition accuses the prime minister (and prime minister candidate), Mr. Orbán of being favourable towards Russia, the Fidesz-KDNP accuses the united opposition's prime minister candidate, Mr. Márki-Zay of wanting to

⁵ Tool for recommendation checking on the website of the National Election Office [here](#)

⁶ Decision [Kvk.III.39.280/2022/4.](#) of Curia

⁷ Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party, [„A Csirkeember találkozása Gődénnyel, aki odahamisította az aláírását az ajánlóívre”](#) ('The Chicken man meets Gődény who falsified his signature on the recommendation sheet'), 6 March 2022

⁸ G. Tenczer, J. Presinszky, [„Nyomoz a rendőrség a Megoldás Mozgalom és a Gődény-párt VI-VII. kerületi jelöltjeinek gyanús ajánlásai miatt”](#) ('The police investigates because of suspicious signatures on the recommendation sheets of the Solution Movement's and Gődény Party's candidates in the 6th and 7th districts of Budapest'), *Telex*, 22 March 2022

⁹ B. Cseke, [„Plakátozó közmunkások, festékszóró, autós üldözés, airsoft – ez folyik az utcákon a választás előtt”](#) ('Posting public workers, paint spray, car chase, airsoft – these are happening on the streets before the elections'), *Telex*, 22 March 2022

¹⁰ [Act II of 2012](#)

¹¹ [Act C of 2012](#)

¹² M. Világi, [„Eljárás indult három férfi ellen, mert kampányplakátokat rongáltak Egerben”](#) ('Procedure was started against three men who damaged campaign posters in Eger'), *Telex*, 14 March 2022

¹³ Decision [180/2022](#) of National Election Commission

¹⁴ Facebook post of Márki-Zay [here](#)

¹⁵ Press release of the Civil Union Forum [here](#)

enter the war in Ukraine with Hungarian troops and therefore endangering the peace of Hungary. Great amounts of funds must have been spent on the numerous advertisements, billboards, posters of these new messages. The government has been displaying many billboards and advertisements with the face of Mr. Orbán and quotes like 'Let's preserve peace and security of Hungary'.

Besides the war itself, the main topic has been the economic consequences of the war. The public already experiences price increase and weakening of the Hungarian currency.

The public media has offered 5-5 minutes of airtime for each organisation running a party list at the elections.¹⁶ This is not obligatory by law but has been the practice at previous elections, too. According to the calculations of member parties of the United Opposition, their members have appeared in the public media only 18 times over the previous four years which shows the bias of the public media.¹⁷

The overlap between government and Fidesz-KDNP resources and campaign remained enormous since the last update of these information note series.

(b) Referendum

The civil society organisations continue their campaign for casting invalid votes at the anti-LGBTQ referendum¹⁸. The government campaigns for 'No' at the referendum which they refer to as the 'child protection referendum'¹⁹. Opposition parties had been silent for long, but in the past few weeks started to agree publicly with the invalid vote campaign. The united opposition used its airtime provided for the referendum at the RTL television channel for parliamentary election campaign purposes which the RTL filed a complaint against to the National Election Commission. The National Election Commission banned the united opposition from continuing this unlawful practice as the Commission agreed with the RTL.²⁰

4. Complaints and appeals

After the Curia (Supreme Court of Hungary) ruled that the government's newsletter was unlawful when including downgrading messages on the campaign of the United Opposition, the government turned to the Constitutional Court claiming that the Curia violated its fundamental right to fair trial. The highly biased Constitutional Court nullified the decision of the Curia claiming that it is the government's responsibility to distribute information for the public, and the government only complied with this responsibility in its newsletter.²¹

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has submitted a complaint on the referendum related commercial²² of the government to the National Election Commission. The commercial is aired as 'commercial for societal purposes', the Hungarian Helsinki Committee claims that it has a clear political message, and the broadcaster had no right to publish it. The National Election Commission rejected the complaint on formal grounds, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee requested judicial review. The Curia ruled that the National Election Commission was wrong when rejecting on formal grounds, and the Curia rejected the complaint in the merits. According to the Curia, the commercial does not suggest any point of view, only promotes attendance at the referendum for the public.²³

Fidesz candidates started to file complaints against opposition elections commission members because of Facebook posts claiming that the commission members must be seen impartial in the eye of the public. The opposition later joined by filing similar complaints against pro-Fidesz election commission

¹⁶ 5 minutes for the parties in the public media: united opposition [video](#), Party for Normal Life [video](#), Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party [video](#) (The rest of the parties will be aired in the coming days)

¹⁷ J. Presinszky, „Az elmúlt négy évben összesen tizennyolcszor szerepelhetett ellenzéki képviselő köztévés műsorban” ('In the past four years, opposition representatives may have been aired all together eighteen times in public media programs'), *Telex*, 9 March 2022

¹⁸ 'Invalid vote' campaign website [here](#)

¹⁹ Government's referendum campaign website [here](#)

²⁰ [Decision 186/2022](#) of National Election Commission

²¹ [Decision IV/665/2022](#) of Constitutional Court

²² See the commercial [here](#)

²³ [Decision Kvk.IV.39.300/2022/5](#) of Curia, [Decision 153/2022](#) of National Election Commission

members. The practice of the Curia and the National Election Commission decided that the party delegates are free to express their views unlike the elected members of the election commissions who should remain absolutely impartial and should be seen as such.²⁴

See also paragraph 3 of Section 3 Subsection (a), Section 3 Subsection (b), Section 5 Subsection (b).

5. Third party actors

(a) Pro-government NGOs

The pro-government Civil Union Forum and the associated Civil Union Public Benefit Foundation (CÖF-CÖKA) co-organised a rally on the national holiday of 15 March. (See Section 3 Subsection (a))

(b) Pro-Fidesz-KDNP organisations abroad

Leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) Romanian party has campaigned for the first time openly for the Fidesz-KDNP among ethnic Hungarians in Romania.²⁵

Hungarian Association of Vojvodina (VMSZ) Serbian party has obtained the mail voting packages of ethnic Hungarians in Serbia even when voters precisely requested delivery to their post addresses. Activists of VMSZ were delivering the mail voting packages. VMSZ is very well connected to Fidesz just like RMDSZ in Romania. The activists were encoring the voters not to send back the ballots by mail directly to the National Election Office but to take them to the VMSZ office. It has been reported that in some places the activists did not deliver the mail voting packages but contacted the voters via Facebook Messenger to go to the VMSZ office for obtaining the mails. In one reported case, the voter was told that he is not allowed to take the package from the VMSZ office but has to fill it out there and leave the mailing for the VMSZ.²⁶ These are very serious violations of privacy, and of principles of free and fair elections because the VMSZ has obtained addresses and names of voters, there is no guarantee that VMSZ delivered the voting packages for those who are well-known non-Fidesz voters, and there is no guarantee that VMSZ will not open the filled out votes and throw away or turn invalid those which are casted for the opposition. National Election Office claims that they followed the procedures and it must have been the Serbian post office which delivered the mails to the VMSZ instead of voters.²⁷

6. Suppression of votes/unlawful campaign activity

Besides the serious violations concerning the mail voting packages in Serbia (See Section 5 Subsection (b)), the Hungarian Helsinki Committee has received complaints and information on late delivery of mail voting packages, and defected packages (e.g. missing answer envelop).

Following the government's newsletter of 24 February which contained some messages on the war in Ukraine and some smear messages on the opposition, two further newsletters have been sent to people who consented to use their contact when registering for the COVID-19 vaccination. These newsletters are designed the same way (government message on the war and smear messages) but instead of using the wording "opposition" they use "there are some people who..." or "there are players in the Hungarian public life who..."

Mr. Orbán and the newly elected president, Mrs. Katalin Novák spent some days close to the Ukrainian border three weeks after the outbreak of the war. They have been posting on their Facebook pages²⁸ several photos and videos with children who fled the war. Mrs. Katalin Novák was elected on the last day of present government with two-third majority since the mandate of former president, Mr. János Áder will expire in May.

²⁴ See examples of the decisions e.g. [164/2022](#), [165/2022](#), [167/2022](#), [168/2022](#), [172/2022](#), [188/2022](#) of National Election Commission, and decisions [Kvk.VI.39.309/2022/5](#), [Kvk.VI.39.308/2022/5](#) of Curia

²⁵ See the post of Transtelex.ro [here](#)

²⁶ *Szabad Magyar Szó*, [„A postások helyett pártaktivisták kézbesítik a magyarországi szavazási levélcsomagokat”](#) ('Party activists deliver the Hungarian mail voting packages instead of the post officers'), 17 March 2022

²⁷ [Press release](#) of the National Election Office, and decision [187/2022](#) of National Election Commission rejecting a related complaint

²⁸ Facebook pages: [Viktor Orbán](#), [Katalin Novák](#)

7. Hostile environment

Hateful speeches against LGBTQ, or Muslim asylum applicant or migrant people, and in some cases against members of the Roma minority have continued. (See the article²⁹ of Bea Bodrogi on hate speech during the campaign.)

Mr. Orbán said in his speech on 15 March Memorial Day to hundreds of thousands of supporters that everyone may see now the difference between terrified women crossing the border from the neighbouring country running away in a hurry from armed conflict with children and the migrants “arriving from several thousands of kilometres” “besieging the borders”. Mr. Orbán added that “Hungary helps refugees but continues to reject migration”. Mr. Orbán also said that they will “Win” the referendum, too, and they will stop at Hungary’s borders the “gender insanity” running through the “Western World”, and they will “protect” the Hungarian families and children”. He finished with this line of thoughts by “the mother is female; the father is male. Leave our children in peace!”³⁰

Member of the European Parliament and founder of Fidesz, Mr. Tamás Deutsch said at a public Fidesz campaign event in the town of Szentes that he likes a lot the referendum related television commercial of the Government which is aired as commercial for societal purposes. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee claims that the commercial is for campaign purposes (see Section 4). Mr. Deutsch said that the referendum is important this possibility against LGBT ‘propaganda’ should not be missed.³¹

Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. László Kövér differentiated between the “besieging young men” at the southern border of Hungary [who are asylum seekers and migrants arriving mainly from the Middle East] and the mothers holding their babies arriving from Ukraine in his speech at a public Fidesz event in the town of Mosonmagyaróvár.³²

‘Mi Hazánk’ (Our Homeland) party’s prime minister candidate, Mrs Dóra Dúró said at their event on 15 March that “migrants at the Southern borders” and the “LGBTQ lobby” aim to take away the identity of the Hungarian children.³³ The head of ‘Mi Hazánk’ youth movement said that Hungary is threatened by the “increase” of Roma population and the global “Gender Lobby”.

8. Election observation

ODIHR’s Election Observation Mission published its interim report on the elections in Hungary on 21 March.³⁴ ENEMO International Election Observation Mission’s interim report is also available from 21 March 2022, too.³⁵

As of 23 March, 742 international election observer have registered: OSCE/ODIHR and OSCE PA, ENEMO, International Republican Institute, Agora Election Observation, Silba – Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy, Sejm of Poland, Embassy of the French Republic in Budapest, Civil Alliance for Development (Georgia), Embassy of Ireland, Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway, Pakistan Senate Delegation, Political Accountability Foundation Poland, Judicial Watch, Cercle Droit & Liberté, German Embassy, Nazione Futura, Belgian Embassy.³⁶

²⁹ B. Bodrogi, ‘[Surviving the Campaign: The struggle to combat hate speech and polarisation during the Hungarian elections](#)’, *European Observatory of Online Hate*, 2 March 2022

³⁰ See [video](#) of Mr. Orbán’s 15 March Memorial Day speech

³¹ G. Poszler, ‘[Deutsch Tamás: A baloldal úgy gondolja, ez nem háború, hanem egy új Netflix-sorozat](#)’ (‘Tamás Deutsch: The left wing believes that this is not a war but a new Netflix series’), *24.hu*, 17 March 2022

³² See [video](#) of the event

³³ See [video](#) of Mrs. Dóra Dúró’s speech, and [article](#) on the speech of the youth movement’s leader

³⁴ OSCE – *Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*, Hungary. Parliamentary Elections and Referendum. 3 April 2022. [Interim Report. 24 February - 15 March](#), 2022, 21 March 2022

³⁵ European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations – International Election Observation Mission, Parliamentary Elections and Referendum, 3 April – Hungary 2022. [Interim Report. 01.02.2022-18.03.2022](#), 21 March 2022

³⁶ List of registered international observers on the website of the National Election Office [here](#)

For more details see:

[Mertek Media Monitor: Hungarian News Monitoring, 2022 Election Campaign – Part 3](#)

[Mertek Media Monitor: Hungarian News Monitoring, 2022 Election Campaign – Part 2](#)

[Mertek Media Monitor: Hungarian News Monitoring, 2022 Election Campaign – Part 1](#)

[Hungarian Helsinki Committee: Information Note on Recent Updates, National Elections of Hungary 2022, 7 March 2022](#)

[Hungarian Helsinki Committee: Baseline Information Note on the National Elections of Hungary 2022](#)

[Hungarian Helsinki Committee: A Threat Assessment of the 2022 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections. 2022](#)

[Unhack Democracy: ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Briefing](#)

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