



**Criticism, rejection and civil opponents of the  
extreme right in Hungary - 2010**

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## **Criticism, rejection and civil opponents of the extreme right in Hungary - 2010**

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The increasing activities and new generation of the Hungarian extreme right-wing, and its spreading influence after 2006 surprised not only analysts but also the potential political and civil opponents of the extreme right. During the years of 1987-89, the movements that drove the political regime change paid no serious thought to the increasing activity of the radical right. Naturally, everybody in the country was aware that there had been considerable radical and extreme-rightist movements in operation – although with different intensities and in different forms – in Hungary between 1920 and 1944. However, social criticism that preceded the political regime change was in accord that if any new political start were to take place when the ideologies and movements of the era before State socialism would surface, the benchmark year would be 1948-49. And then, the radical right wing may not exist, having been eliminated from Hungarian political life early in 1945. Although a movement that implied the once-existent radical right in its mood and the connotation of its slogans appeared on the fringe of the conservative side, headed and embodied by István Csurka, in 1991-92, the conservative side of the time – by and large in keeping with the recent Western patterns – dissociated itself from it. This demarcation line was much firmer than was customary during the 2000's, yet did not appear to be sufficient for the urban bourgeoisie, which sought protection on the left as it quickly gained strength. Ultimately, the Democratic Charter born at that time created the foundations for a political alliance between Socialists and Liberal Democrats, which lasted for one and a half decades. Between 1992-1994, the Charter organisation primarily held mass events in Budapest, attended by a relatively large number of sympathizers of these parties. During this period, the Charter essentially absorbed all the civil initiatives that combated the verbal extremism of the extreme right, which mostly surfaced in intellectual dialogue. Very clearly, the *Kulturkampf* of the 1930's in Hungary came to life underneath the discussions and actions related to the Charter. In that, the 'Christian middle class' battled with the 'Jewish bourgeoisie' that threatened the former's positions. During the 90's, in fact neither formation existed in the sense as they were talked about in the 1930's; however, there were important new forces who did not hesitate to try on the costumes that remained, and basically, after a half-decade pause, the battle started again. In this battle, neither side considered the internal fractions of the opponent to have any importance. Thus,

the leftist-liberal camp rejected the 'nationalists' and did not try to select or detach those of the 'nationalists' who could actually be called extremists, radical exclusionaries or even neo-Fascists. To a lesser extent, this indeed reflected the logic of the *Kulturkampf*; however, it also stemmed from the right's internal structure to a non-negligible extent, where a part of the social base was visibly radical to a greater extent and then again, to a peripheral extent nearly in an accidental manner, subject to causes or personal appearances. The various divisions and groups of the right wing as much as continuously fluctuated within the given political field. Starting from the late 90's and, particularly the early 2000's, the cultural profile, method of battle and internal composition of the extreme right started to change. It quickly became younger (Csurka and his party was more and more left on its own), learned to use the new communication techniques while remaining under the political umbrella of the right, remaining as much as invisible for the nationwide political public. The sub-culture existed and received support from abroad, demonstrably if not to a significant extent (partly from the radical right of Western Europe, and occasionally from the businesses of former Hungarian Fascists who weathered through the winter in South America, the U.S. or Canada), and organised minor symbolic actions from time to time. At the moment before its parliamentary defeat in 2002, FIDESZ attempted to defend its government positions held between 1998 and 2002 by mobilising the young. The quickly growing electoral mass of the radical right was still predominantly controlled by FIDESZ, however, criticism of FIDESZ surfaced in the radical sub-cultures that were even more to the right, and the independent party 'Jobbik' was soon formed among the young mobilised in 2002.

However, the leftist-liberalist public of Budapest failed to really separate FIDESZ, its radical right-wing and those who were even further to the right essentially up until 2006. On the one hand, these groups were mostly indeed mingled together during the years in question. On the other hand, starting from 2006, the relationships between the Socialists and FIDESZ appearing in publicity was so rankled that the leftist-liberal media was not really interested in emphasizing the differences that were, however, visible. On the one hand, the leftist-liberal side was interested in depicting FIDESZ as an ally of extreme rightist actions but could not call it 'neo-Fascist' in its entirety. Consequently, there were no doubts on the left that they should attempt to use these radical ties of FIDESZ to compromise the entire system of right-wing parties, yet it was not clear how accurately this should be done in terms of ideology. It was similarly unclear just what the leftist-liberal wing's interest was concerning this issue: to isolate the extreme right and obtain support for this from the national conservatives – or just the reverse, namely that national conservatives should not be allowed to be dissociated from

the extreme right (what was more, national conservatives did not want to be dissociated in the first place) as this could compromise the entire right wing.

### **‘Anti-Fascism’**

Terminological self-identification of the programmes that opposed the extreme right represented a separate problem. According to the traditional approach, leftist traditions have been permeated by anti-fascism ever since the 20’s and 30’s. This is the political side that really defends those persecuted by the extreme right of that time, so that the active operation of anti-fascism is incorporated in the always current rhetorics of the left. Although starting from 1939, plebeian National Socialism had a significant base in Hungary, the real debates were not related to the former ideologies or the reviving of the ideologies of this movement. These ideologies were understood to be extremist even by the historical interpretation of the conservative camp, and were not dominant ideologies of the middle classes even in the period investigated. However, there have been political traditions and cultural elements in operation before and beside them, from 1919-1920, which were not really parts of democratic conservatism according to the Western European typologies of that age but could be classified as parts of Hungarian fascism only in certain cases, too. In fact, the new debate after 1989 was and still is about the evaluation of such traditions and cultural elements. The left wing interpreted these as the drafter of the legislation on Jews, the voluntary allies of the Germans on Soviet fronts and in a certain sense, as paving the way to Hungarian Fascism and the arrow-cross movement. In contrast with them, the heroes of this age and ideology interpret the same as the intellectual forerunners of today’s conservatism, the formulators of a national idea that was actually rather civilised considering the circumstances, and whose unfortunate steps in foreign and ethnic policy followed from the pressure put on the *élite* of a small country by large powers. The new understanding of the *Kulturkampf* that characterise the end of 2000 is determined by the differences between these two approaches. The right wing re-negotiates the pre-1989 interpretations of these persons and events, while the left-liberal wing – with all subtle distinctions – essentially tries to defend such interpretations.

In 1989, many thought that a spectacular re-valuation of the role played by Hungary during World War II would be an important element of this historical reconstruction programme. It was thought that the masses of Hungarians who survived the battles in the Ukraine or along the Don River during WWII would finally tell what they had not dared tell for 50 years, namely that they had not felt so alienated at the front on the non-Soviet side, and that 1945

was not liberation but the raping of women and free robbery. The anti-fascist side was also ready to point out how misleading such memories were, should such a revelation occur. However, memories themselves surfaced very scarcely (not even from 1945); some attempted to present the point that they 'defended Europe from Bolshevik barbarism' at the bend of the Don River, which was, by the way, a propaganda idea of the Germans during WWII. However, nobody bought this idea, and this revenge concerning WWII has never been revived to a significant extent, at least in respect of the Eastern front.

As a consequence of all the above, the decisions concerning the 'anti-fascist' label were not so self-explanatory for the left wing of the 2000's. On the one hand, the anti-fascist tradition has never been formulated so distinctly; on the other hand, where that tradition was relied on was mostly those persecuted by Nazism in Hungary: not solely but mostly of Jewish extraction. However, the Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust have been prudent for long decades and wanted mostly to assimilate with the majority. In Hungary, at least up until the 70's and 80's, those who kept playing the 'anti-fascist' card were not the Communists – as in the GDR – but those who used to be persecuted. However, they preferred not to talk about having had been persecuted earlier as well. Given its age, this movement was about to disappear 60 years after WWII.

With the emergence of Jobbik and the quick radicalisation of the tone used by the extreme rightist press, those who wanted to oppose this movement up front faced three problems around 2005:

- a.) in the media – primarily with regard to the Roma but also in some other areas – hate speech has grown more frequent. The highly liberal press regulation after 1989 opted for so broad forms of defining the screening and regulation of hate speech based on which it was virtually impossible to ensure accountability before the court. The Socialist Prime Minister attempted to introduce stricter regulations in this respect (essentially by approaching a German or Austrian definition framework) but either could not secure the majority for it from his Liberal allies or some formula could have been accepted but no support could be secured for it from the Constitutional Court. As a consequence, the media and printed forms of hate speech spread very quickly after the mid-2000's, and an increasing part of society – even without sharing the same views – got accustomed to its use and found things in it that did not match their taste but was certainly not to be discarded. In such a situation, small intellectual groups formulated some protest proclamations on the Internet in connection with certain

publications or political wording, but these were good enough to suggest that an attempt had actually been made only to the issuers; the real weight of these campaigns was negligible. As long as the Prime Minister was Socialist, i.e. up until 2010, those who protested hate speech were not frightened off from signing such protests, meaning they were not directly intimidated, yet they had no opportunity at all to feel that they could count on the support of the silent majority in a crisis situation, that this majority was just comfortable but basically agreed with the issue detected by them. To the contrary; there were numerous signs to show them (see some survey results later) that the majority was reluctant to take a position concerning these issues, and that the part of this majority that had a definite opinion was somehow closer to the radicals than to the protesters.

- b.) The endorsement of the protest campaigns against the radical right was encumbered by the fact that up until 2010, they were essentially formulated solely around the left-liberal political parties and, therefore, although there were naturally some conservatives to whom radical movements seemed to be extremely foreign, these conservatives had no opportunity to protest them as that would have reinforced the opposing side. However, the leftist-liberal wing did not wish to have any regard to these conservative sensitivities. On the one hand, it considered anti-fascism to be indeed its own tradition – whatever that may mean. On the other hand, it tried to improve on its diminishing support vis-a-vis the national conservative wing for tactical considerations, by claiming the re-surfacing of the dangerous ideologies already known from history. In 2008, civil associations also tried to organise an anti-racist demonstration in downtown Budapest; there could have been only some sporadic conservatives among the organisers; on the other hand, a number of groups of young civil intellectuals who declared themselves to be westernised, perhaps liberal or green but by all means distant from politics. These groups asked the Socialist Prime Minister of the time (whose authentic anti-racism they appeared not to doubt for a moment) to refrain from personally attending the demonstration as he would threaten the inter-party nature of the demonstration by doing so. Eventually, the Prime Minister attended as a private person with his family, but there was no national conservative formation of any kind that supported this demonstration.
- c.) Finally, there were problems with the direct resistance of the groups that moved to the crosshairs of the radical movements. In the Hungary of the year 2000, the most important of these were not the Jews, not the gays, not the (barely existing)

immigrants but the Roma. Prejudices related to the Roma are much more widespread than just in the group that supports the radical right-wing. The differences can be detected in the method of the radical restricting actions deduced from the prejudices and the rhetorics concerning the issue at most. The Roma society in Hungary consists of many sub-groups and is certainly not homogenous, yet it is depicted as a homogenous 'source of threat' in the field of prejudices permeated by politics. Consequently, it could be assumed that those who were verbally attacked would defend themselves or support political forces that seemed to be defending them already, in theory. Very little is known about the Eastern European Roma political consciousness, but one thing seems to be certain: in most cases analysed, the Roma face conflicts without confrontation, rather, they try to distance themselves from the conflict, even up to the point of relative self-isolation so that they can avoid facing the prejudiced majority. Therefore, instead of radicalising them, a fiercer persecution leads to their de-politisation. Other subtle shades appeared in the Roma political confrontation of 2008-2010, but all in all, the tradition mentioned prevailed. Naturally, there were Roma leaders who saw the leftist-liberal alliance as their saviour (which, by the way, they considered to have sold the Roma out manifold or simply traitors). These minority politicians – who included some who trusted a more radical orchestration and some who favoured compromise – ultimately remained in minority; yet while most of the Roma entrusted themselves to the protection of the somewhat more moderate national conservatives in the situation concerning extremes, radical groups appeared on this side as well. Particularly in the settlements where Jobbik or the Hungarian Guard was very active, the young Roma became political and somewhat more radical as well. However, in this respect, the situation varies by settlement. All in all, however, it may be said that no non-Roma masses came to side with the Roma – who eventually became subject to a series of violent acts – to defend them and to show active solidarity with them. Researchers of the Roma living in Budapest – most of them liberals – set up Méltóság.net (Dignity.net) to support the Roma, and more than 20,000 people became signatories of the site, but no actions ever took place in real life; in certain highly visible cases, radical leftist Austrian or German groups living in or having a relationship to Hungary have done physically more to show solidarity with the Roma than the intellectuals of Budapest. Austrians living in Budapest proposed to clean the Roma Holocaust memorial from faeces, they together with German human rights organisations took part in the physical restoration

of Roma residential buildings damaged in the course of the conflicts. Hungarian civil organisations took part in such actions only on a random and relatively marginal basis. I checked the photos taken at the funeral of a victim of the anti-Roma murder series of 2009. The case was given nationwide publicity and many talked about re-formulating solidarity. However, if I can see the photos correctly, nearly everyone at the funeral was Roma.

### **The 2010 elections and their follow-up**

In the spring of 2010, Jobbik took part in the elections in compliance with all relevant regulations, as an independent political force, and obtained 17% in the list vote in April 2010. The April results very much rearranged the opinions concerning Jobbik and the scope of possible social action:

- a.) Jobbik made it to Parliament as a protest party. At the first moment, it tried to behave accordingly, but this time it was faced with the absolute winner of the elections – with the government majority that would also somehow represent the radical right wing, but interprets protest actions in the Parliament and in public as resistance to its own government work. Therefore, it takes the maximum steps to combat such actions. In response, Jobbik attempted to 'streamline' itself to parliamentary work. It wished to look more professional and visibly refrained from the scandal politics it had made such a firm use of up until April 2010. As a consequence of this as well, by the fall of 2010, the local elections of October, its group of supporters has diminished and a part of the supporters re-joined the camp from where Jobbik attracted them in the spring, namely, the FIDESZ camp. Consequently, in the eyes of the left wing now in opposition, the threat posed by Jobbik is weaker, nevertheless it is much more difficult to organise greater events to condemn Jobbik even virtually than before April 2010, regardless of party *élite*. The new government indeed prohibits movements by the successor organisations of the Hungarian Guard – which was banned before April 2010 – for the time being (and takes harder action to do so than the Socialist government, which was under pressure, before April).
- b.) On the other hand, the *Kulturkampf* gained increased strength, but this time with much less balanced positions between the two sides. The national conservatives, who now have a majority of two-thirds in Parliament, have essentially established total control

over public media, and as a consequence, their values and their interpretation of history are presented in that media without a balancing weight. A trend with a similar direction started in the re-building of school curricula. The approach apparent in them is, naturally, politically correct, yet its directions and understanding of the world show a lot of similarities with those of the radical right. Yet, this government majority seems to be stable a few months after the elections. Apparently nobody organises any firm movements, particularly any movements that would appear in the street, to oppose this majority. After all, who would want to confront themselves and the new media – which would probably be all too happy to report on it – with their own social isolation?

- c.) At the same time, it is clear that regular voters of the opposition parties and the political forces that were sidelined in the spring face a substantial dilemma. As regards the opposition, it cannot do with only a criticism of the government; it should reformulate its own profile in addition to that. Therefore, to a certain extent, it may not expend its energies only on government criticism, in order to find its own topics again. On the other hand, a regular voter wants to feel every day that the government is moved by values that differ from his; that the government does everything different from what he would like. This feeling should be kept alive in this domain until the next elections, i.e. 2014 under a favourable scenario. Therefore, the fora – be they civil get-togethers, media programmes, debate clubs or possibly even protests in the street from time to time – that give a feeling of not being left alone to the cursing regular voters should be set up. We would call these fora 'rampaging rooms'. These 'rampaging rooms' would basically serve to maintain emotions against the government; however, because the government is technocratic and populist at the same time, the agenda of the 'rampaging rooms' require fattening. In order to do so, the radical right should be included among the topics to be discussed there in its entirety. It may prove particularly handy if Jobbik tried to break out from the trap it is currently caught in by generating conflicts – say, by presenting its own historical views as the mainstream national conservative opinion (which took place recently concerning the memory of the excellent sociologist researcher Ervin Szabó) – or if it incited against the Roma making use of its presence of varied intensity in local conflicts.