

WHAT DOES THE PERC INDEX SHOW?

or

From the EU-Destructives to the Federalists: the attitude of Hungarian political parties towards the European Union

A Hungarian Europe Society Report 2

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On the eve of the national election a research team of the Hungarian Europe Society (HES) has examined the attitude of the top Hungarian political parties towards the European integration and its future. The PERC report that has been just published (PERC stands for a Party EU-Attitude Report Card, in Hungarian *perc* means *a minute*) is the second one in a series (the first one can be viewed on the website of the HES, executive summary in English: <http://europatarsasag.hu/images/2013Jan/PERC%20%20executive%20summary.pdf>, full report in Hungarian: http://europatarsasag.hu/images/2012dec/perc_web.pdf).

Six parties have been considered in the current analysis, which covers a period between mid-2012 and the end of 2013. According to the public opinion polls taken at the end of last year all these parties will pass the 5% threshold, be it alone or in a coalition. Thus the PERC-2 features **Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance)**, the **Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP - Hungarian Socialist Party)**, **Jobbik**, the **Lehet Más a Politika (LMP - Politics Can Be Different)**, the **Demokratikus Koalíció (DK - Democratic Coalition)**, and the **Együtt-PM party alliance (Together – Dialogue for Hungary)**. The researchers ranked statements made by the parties in the European Parliament, the Hungarian parliament and the media as well as EU-related parts of their 2014 election platforms – altogether 600 items – according to a 1-10 PERC scale covering the character and intensity of the attitude towards integration. The scale comprises precisely defined categories ranging from the „EU-destructives”, who call for the demolition of the integration, to the „Federalists” assuming dissolution of current nation states.

The averages of these scores, at places complemented with a half-a-point subjective correction, have produced that PERC indicator for the examined parties.

| | Fidesz | | MSZP | | Jobbik | | LMP | | DK | | Együtt-PM | |
|--|--------|------|------|-----|--------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----------|-----|
| | P1 | P2 | P1 | P2 | P1 | P2 | P1 | P2 | P1 | P2 | P1 | P2 |
| Basic Documents | | | | | 3 | | 8 | | 8 | 8 | | 7 |
| EP Electoral Manifesto, 2009 | 7 | | 7 | | 2 | | 7 | | | | | |
| Hungarian Parliament Electoral Manifesto, 2010 | 5 | | 7 | | 3 | | 7 | | | | | |
| EP Speeches | 6,5 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 3 | | | | | | |
| Hungarian Parliament Speeches | 6,3 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 3,5 | 3,5 | 7,5 | 6 | 7 | 7 | | 7 |
| Media Appearances | 5 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 8 | | 7 |
| Hungarian Parliament Electoral Manifesto, 2014 | | | | 7 | | 2 | | 7 | | 8 | | 8 |
| Average | 6,0 | 5,3 | 7,4 | 7,3 | 2,9 | 2,6 | 7,3 | 6,3 | 7,3 | 7,8 | | 7,3 |
| Subjective Correction | -0,5 | -0,5 | -0,5 | | | | 0,5 | | -0,5 | -0,5 | | |
| Total | 5,5 | 4,8 | 6,9 | 7,3 | 2,9 | 2,6 | 7,8 | 6,3 | 6,8 | 7,3 | | 7,3 |
| PERC indicator (rounded up) | 6 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 7 | | 7 |

| | PERC-1 | PERC-2 |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Fidesz | EU-pragmatic | EU-pessimist |
| MSZP | soft EU-pragmatic | soft EU-pragmatic |
| Jobbik | hard EU-sceptic | hard EU-sceptic |
| LMP | EU-constructive | EU-pragmatic |
| DK | soft EU-pragmatic | soft EU-pragmatic |
| Együtt-PM | | soft EU-pragmatic |

One of the most important conclusions of PERC-2 is that **while the parties' average was 6.2 in PERC-1 this time it has decreased to 5.8** despite the fact that, according to the public opinion poll published in the report, **more than 70% of Hungarian society represents a definitely pro-EU stance**. The second PERC report has not identified a party that could be positively ranked into the EU-constructive, 8th category, even though in some sub-areas more parties have received this, rather high, score; the overall score has been lowered by two subjects of the research.

One of these subjects has been **Fidesz**, which over the last 1.5 years has moved from the previous value of 6 to the bottom half of the scale turning into an EU-pessimist party. During the 18 months in government under examination not only has its voice become more and more critical of the EU but also its **negative attitude towards the EU has become more consistent**. Even today Fidesz exemplifies the so-called Strasbourg syndrome, which means that the EP members from the party on average present a more positive attitude towards the EU than their counterparts within the Hungarian parliament, among whom previous differences have disappeared. Today Fidesz politicians talk like europessimists both in the parliamentary committees, which are rarely covered by the media and in the plenary meetings, whose coverage is more frequent. Moreover, the media appearances of the party's leading politicians, including the PM, mobilise their followers against the EU and European unity rather than for these concepts. An analysis of the interviews of **Viktor Orbán**, which belong to the EU-sceptic, 4th grade on the scale, has shown that the governing party's attitude towards the EU has started to turn into a cultural, ideological and geopolitical doctrine. The PERC-2 team was unable to compare the current public statements by Fidesz, which are more important than before given the approaching election, to the electoral manifesto as it had not been published before the end of March, when the research period ended. For this reason half a point was deducted from the calculated PERC score.

The score of the **LMP**, which over the last 1.5 years has carried out an **ideological U-turn** and has found itself opposing the pro-EU views of its voters, has dropped by two degrees. The party, which defines itself as eco-social, reached the highest score of 8 in the previous report and even then the frequently critical of the EU LMP scored so high because of an integration concept accompanied by numerous federalist, constructive proposals, which the analysts rewarded with an extra half „bonus” point. Current EU-related statements of the party, which in the meantime has gone through a factional break-up, feature EU criticism as their main message. Today the green party demands a break away from the **four basic freedoms** (of the movement of goods, services, capital and workforce), which constitute the pillars of the EU. It may propose a principle of the „triple responsibility for the land, society and consumers” as a basis for the European collaboration, however, in the evaluation of the PERC team confronting the economic and social integration is an idea that is both inconsistent and in reality harmful for the integration. The research has found that the LMP, and especially the party's co-president **András Schiffer**, have reached their radical stance critical of the EU through an extension of their protest against the foreign ownership of the Hungarian agricultural land, which is featured prominently in the party's electoral platform.

Jobbik, among the examined parties **consequently the most anti-EU party**, already in PERC-1 achieved its eurosceptic score of 3 only thanks to a significant upwards rounding up of the PERC average. This time the rounding played an even bigger role for achieving this score as a large number of the party's statements in PERC-2 had to be qualified as EU-phobic. During the analysis of parliamentary speeches a peculiar phenomenon could be observed: if an EU policy issue happened to be overlapping with Jobbik's position, the party would rather choose a U-turn accepting a professional inconsistency or support of the governing party than the odium of an EU supporter, only EU transfers made here an exception sometimes. In the last 1.5 years the extreme right party on several occasions,

among others in their 2014 electoral manifesto, has promoted the creation of some „Central European initiative” as an alternative to the EU membership, it has also floated the idea of a „switch” to the EEA: outside the EU but still a part of the European single market. There is no statement of the party on the legal, economic or political consequences of such a step, for example, how the requirements of the single market could be met in the current situation of Hungary and without EU support. For the first time in the history of the PERC reports a score of 1 (**EU-destructive**) has been granted: it was received by the security policy clause of the Jobbik manifesto, which, following a military logic, demands a „third Hungarian conquest”.

Current research shows that the **three left parties**, which at the end of 2013 existed as separate entities and despite fielding of a common list in the 2014 elections have issued separate electoral platforms, have not managed to prevent the drop of the political sphere on the PERC scale even though none of them has left doubts about their commitment to the European integration idea. From the perspective of the focus of the PERC research **MSZP** has been the most stable of them; it can be consistently found a bit over the score of 7, i.e. a soft-pragmatic. Both PERC reports have characterised the attitude of the MSZP as dual since the party presents itself publicly with a **mixture of cultural commitment and material interest in EU grants**. While 1.5 years ago the utilitarian approach dominated by now it is the European culture, values and ideology that are in the focus. The small but extraordinarily active MSZP EP team has been particularly open towards federalist ideas emerging at the EU level. In comparison, the statements made in the national parliament and the media, which usually focus on the criticism of the government, except for frequent mentions of the European arguments and values have revealed little about the MSZP’s future integration ideas.

The **Demokratikus Koalíció**, which had broken away from the MSZP, was not an easy research subject for the PERC team not only because the party has produced fewer EU-related statements than the others. At the rhetorical level the DK **goes farthest** with regards to the deepening of the EU and explicit support to a federalist development. **Ferenc Gyurcsány** projects the vision of a „United States of Europe” as positive. The fact that the DK as the only party including in its electoral manifesto a specific date (2020) for Hungary’s entry into the euro zone has been registered as EU-constructive by the research team. The general impression of the analysis was that this party, which nominally could be qualified as „radically federalist”, as noted already in the conclusions of PERC-1 consequently provides few details of its bold ideas. For this reason also this time we have deducted half a point from the relatively high score of 7.8.

The Együtt-PM party alliance created one year before the 2014 elections has been included in the PERC report for the first time. The founding documents of the alliance demonstrably and consequently show a commitment to the European value system and integration. There seems to be a **certain „division of labour”** between the two members of the alliance: while the Együtt focuses on furthering of the, already advanced, economic integration, the PM, which broke away from the LMP, concentrates on advancing of the area of socio-political integration, which goes beyond the economy. In the case of the Együtt-PM these components complement rather than contradict each other. Moreover, they appear with due details in the **electoral manifesto evaluated as EU-constructive** by the PERC researchers. Altogether however this dual party can be only called „cautious federalist” especially as **Gordon Bajnai**, the leader of the alliance, on numerous occasions has expressed his reservations *vis-a-vis* the United States of Europe concept and the party program does not call for the completion of the political union among its EU-related goals but rather for the maintenance of the „balance of the community and intergovernmental perspective”.

Although in the second PERC report we have a **separate chapter** dedicated to the federalist ideas floated recently in the European discourse, which with the calming down of the crisis will certainly appear on the agendas of the member states and the EU decision-making bodies, the research has shown that the approach towards the future of integration has not turned into the fault line of the 2014 election campaign.

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The Hungarian Europe Society is a non-governmental and non-partisan organisation. The core of its interests and activities - although not exclusively - is the European Union and the Hungarian membership inside the Union. Its objective is to represent and promote the idea of a united Europe, and the European common values, in Hungary and abroad. Guided by these principles, the Society takes part in the public life as well as in international expert debates concerning the future of liberal democracy.