



## ***“Where Does the PERC Index Stand? Or: From EU Destructives to Federalists: Relationship of the Hungarian Parties to the European Union”***

### ***Executive Summary***

At the time of Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004 there was practically an across-the-board agreement among the political parties of the Hungarian Parliament that Hungary’s place is in Europe not only geographically, and culturally, but also in political terms. Although some leading political figures – most importantly in centre-right Fidesz, which constituted the biggest force of the then opposition – did voice a certain reservation about the act the vote on Hungary’s accession treaty in the Parliament went unanimously.

Since then the Hungarian political landscape has changed almost unrecognizably. Fidesz has become an extremely strong governing party while the socialists have shrunk in size, the liberals have disappeared, a green party has appeared and a far-right party has grown to take the position of the third biggest party in the Parliament. It seems that new parties are on the way to be born until the next elections in 2014 out of awakening political movements.

In parallel with these changes the EU discourse of numerous Hungarian party politicians has changed from enthusiastic to indifferent at best and openly hostile at worst. The trend has strengthened since the 2010 parliamentary elections. This new phenomenon was particularly striking during the Hungarian EU presidency in the first half of 2011. While in the past dominating political discourse was pro-EU, by now – particularly on the political right – it has turned in a eurosceptic direction. It is likely that in the coming years while the euro-zone struggles with its troubles, Hungary fights with its own (partly self-made) economic problems and financial support from the EU decreases, this tendency will strengthen. It is no longer unthinkable that calls of the far-right Jobbik for Hungary to leave the EU will soon become impossible for other parties to ignore. Since hostility towards the European integration in Central and Eastern Europe for historical reasons goes hand in hand with political populism, breakdown of the rule of law, intolerance and xenophobia, this eurosceptic tendency is of great concern for the supporters of open democracies.

The intention of the Hungarian Europe Society with its research project was to start regular monitoring of the attitude of the Hungarian political parties towards the EU and to publish the results in a report available the media, opinion-makers and the voters themselves. It brings attention to the specific, EU-

related aspect of the political discourse, which is often hid by party politicking concentrated on domestic issues and not always sufficiently covered in the media.

For the execution of the research project the HES set up a research team of eight members. The research project, which lasted for 6 months, comprised four parts.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> part the team has worked out a special monitoring system for the measuring of the EU-attitudes of the Hungarian parliamentary parties. Based on an overview of the relevant international and domestic scientific literature on euroscepticism the research team has created its own PERC-index (PERC being the initials of the title Party Euro-attitude Report Card, also meaning “a minute” in Hungarian thus serving as an easy-to-remember brand name of the project now and in the future). The PERC-index has categories from 1 to 10 where 1 is equal to the total rejection of any kind of European integration and 10 is the complete acceptance of a full-blown European federalism. Researchers have given names to each category on the scale and elaborated finely tuned definitions for each category, to make them applicable for evaluating all kinds of political statements from the aspect of its relation to the EU. The categories of the PERC-index are as follows:

1. Euro-destructive
2. Europhobe
3. Hard eurosceptic
4. Soft eurosceptic
5. Europessimist
6. Europragmatist
7. Soft europragmatist
8. Euro-constructive
9. Eurooptimist
10. Federalist.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> part the researchers made a selection of political statements to be evaluated by the PERC index. The sources for the selection were the following 4 areas; the period covered spanning between June 2009 (European elections) and mid-2012:

- Official party documents (manifestoes and mission statements, party platforms for the 2009 EP elections and for the 2010 national parliamentary elections).
- Statements made by Hungarian MEPs on the plenary sessions of the European Parliament during the three years examined. These were selected from the official Minutes of the EP, the criteria being: legal act of the EP, and/or important European issue related to the agenda of the European Council and/or important issue regarding the activities and the future of the EU.
- EU-related statements made by Hungarian MPs in the committees and the plenary sessions of the Hungarian Parliament during the examined 3 years. The source for this collection was the official Minutes of the Hungarian Parliament.
- EU-related statements of the leading Hungarian party figures in the media. Six national daily papers, seven weeklies, three online news portals, two national TV channels and a national public radio station served as sources for this selection.

Altogether 643 EU-related statements by politicians of the five Hungarian parliamentary parties were selected for evaluation.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the work the researchers evaluated the selected EU-related political statements according to the criteria given in the different categories of the PERC index giving PERC scores to each of them. Where the party placed itself on the left-right scale was indifferent for the research, only the integration aspect of given statement was the subject of the evaluation. Following this averages of the scores were calculated for each party and for each area (official documents, EP, Hungarian parliament and media). The combined PERC indicator for a particular party was an average of the scores in the researched areas. Since no interim weighting of the areas was used the average was modified by a subjective correction of half a point if the researchers deemed this justified.

The final PERC-indices of the parties have been summarized in a single table.

#### **PERC indicators for Hungarian parliamentary parties**

|   | Fidesz | MSZP | Jobbik | Politics Can Be Different (LMP) | Democratic Coalition (DK) |
|---|--------|------|--------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Basic documents   | -      | -    | 3      | 8                               | 8                         |
| Party Platforms for EP Elections 2009                     | 7      | 7    | 2      | 7                               | -                         |
| Party Platforms for National Parliamentary Elections 2010 | 5      | 7    | 3      | 7                               | -                         |
| Speeches at European Parliament                           | 6,5    | 8    | 3      | -                               | -                         |
| Speeches at Parliament                                    | 6,3    | 8    | 3,5    | 7,5                             | 7                         |
| Media presence  | 5      | 7    | 3      | 7                               | 7                         |
| Average   | 6,0    | 7,4  | 2,9    | 7,4                             | 7,3                       |
| Subjective correction                                     | -0,5   | -0,5 | -      | +0,5                            | -0,5                      |

|                        |          |          |          |          |          |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| PERC total             | 5,5      | 6,9      | 2,9      | 7,9      | 6,8      |
| <b>PERC rounded up</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>7</b> |

**Based on the above table Hungarian parliamentary parties have received the following PERC categories:**

**Fidesz: Europragmatist**

**MSZP: Soft europragmatist**

**Jobbik: Hard eurosceptic**

**LMP: Euro-constructive**

**DK: Soft europragmatist**

The summary shows that no Hungarian parliamentary party has received the PERC category at the either end of the scale. The evaluation system makes it effectively impossible to qualify for the bottom Euro-destructive category as only parties that refuse to participate in EP elections out of principle belong here and there was no such parliamentary party in Hungary in 2009. On the other hand there has been no Federalist party either as the researchers did not find a party that would fully meet relevant criteria, offer a coherent federalist vision and be ready to put aside the prerogatives of the nation state. The researchers registered, quite numerous, europhobe statements of Jobbik while eurooptimist positions were most common for the DK and the LMP.

The relatively most frequent score was 7 (soft europragmatist) as this PERC category included acceptance of the status quo of the EU, desire to utilise the existing framework and respect for the EU legal system, which is how a large part of Hungarian politicians talk about the integration. Quite a few statements fell into the 6th category (europragmatist) mainly because of attitudes focussing on the utilitarian, financial aspect of the EU membership or because of an excessive stress on the national interest.

Looking at particular parties Jobbik provided the most stable „performance”. Its politicians only rarely make the „mistake” of presenting European integration more positively than what it is typical of their usual hard euroscepticism although there have been a few exceptions here, too. The researchers found relatively most constructive ideas promoting further integration in case of the LMP even though in selected narrow questions the party toyed with ideas countering the integration process. The final average for the governmental party covers internal divisions as the research identified two wings in Fidesz: a less visible, euro-constructive one and noisier, europessimist one led by Viktor Orbán.

In four cases the researchers modified averages produced based on electoral manifestoes, other documents, and speeches in the European and Hungarian parliaments as well as media presence. This was not needed in case of Jobbik as this extreme party coherently in its own way represents its negatives views on the EU.

For Fidesz the researchers negatively rated the deterioration of the party's attitude towards the EU and the fact that the euroscepticism is represented by the Prime Minister himself.

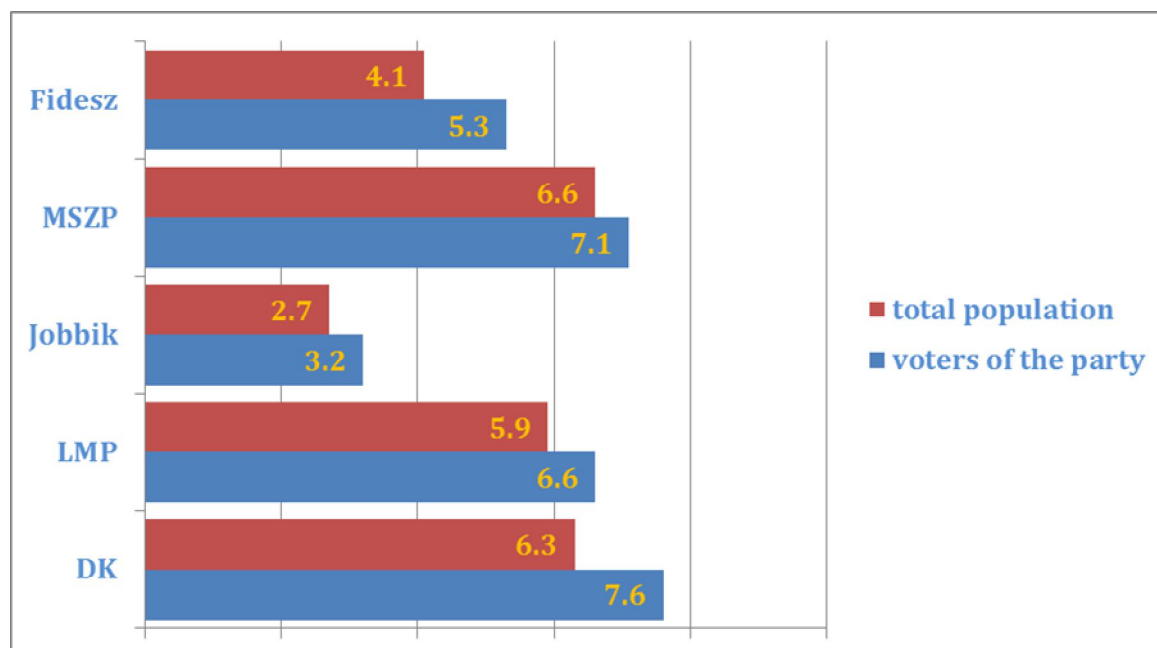
With regards to the MSZP the researchers appreciated that the socialist MEPs, with a few exceptions involving statements on agricultural subsidies, have demonstrated commitment to the EU. At the national level however the party carefully avoids taking position in debates concerning the future of the EU while the instrumental treatment of the EU by the leader of the party had left its mark on the party line.

The DK uses (positively) the term „federation” most often when talking about the future of the EU; however, it does not fill the term with concrete proposals. The party stresses most the connection between a positive attitude towards the EU and the position vis-a-vis the ruling party.

Only in the case of the LMP the researches corrected the indicator upwards. This was caused by the evolution of the thinking of the party about the EU that has taken place over the last three years. The 2010 electoral manifesto offered a coherent set of views on the EU, the party also consequently presented a number of specific federalist ideas at various public fora.

As the 4<sup>th</sup>, additional part of the project the research team ordered an opinion poll from a professional firm to investigate how the public sees the EU-attitudes of the 5 parties examined in the PERC-research. The poll served as a valuable comparison between the results of the researchers and the perception of the people. The results of the poll conducted by the Medián Kft. are summarised in the below table.

## What is the view of the Hungarian parliamentary parties on the EU?



\*Averages on a 1-10 scale, 10 = very good, 1 = very bad



From a comparison of results of the PERC research and the poll it is clear that for each of the parties the research team evaluated the attitude towards the EU higher than how the population sees it. The smallest differences were noticed for Jobbik and the MSZP and the highest for Fidesz. The motivations of the participants in the poll are not known but one can suppose that their perceptions have been shaped by the parties' statements in the media, which suppressed an important component of the PERC evaluation namely the parliamentary activities of the parties, particularly in the EP. Taking these into consideration brings about a more realistic picture of the parties' attitudes towards the EU both in terms of the absolute scores and the ranking of the parties.

The research team described its aims, methodology and findings – including the opinion poll – in a 150-page study providing information sources in a 20-page long Appendix. The volume was printed in 100 copies and placed in the PDF format on the website of HES ([http://europatarsasag.hu/images/2012dec/perc\\_web.pdf](http://europatarsasag.hu/images/2012dec/perc_web.pdf)). The results of the research were introduced at a press conference held in Budapest on 5 December 2012 (the report and photos from the press conference can be accessed on the HES website <http://europatarsasag.hu/hu/rendezvenyek/2012/a-perc-a-sajto-elott>).

At the press conference the research team stated that an important question for the forthcoming year is whether the attitude of the parties towards the EU will change due to the 2014 European and national election campaigns as well as how big a role (if any) the EU issues will play in the intensifying party

competition. Given that the voters will consider the relationship between the EU and Hungary as a factor in their voting decision the HES plans to repeat the PERC research in the period preceding the 2014 election campaigns.

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