



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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The Results of the Parliamentary Elections in Hungary

by Rafał Morawiec

The decisive victory of former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ party in the second round of parliamentary elections makes it the only political force in the EU that will single-handedly have a constitutional majority. This gives it the powerful electoral mandate that is needed to resolve the country's many important problems—especially economic ones. On the other hand, it also entails a higher risk of unfulfilled electoral promises and the potential disappointment of FIDESZ's highly varied electorate.

As expected, the second round of elections held on 25 April confirmed FIDESZ's decisive electoral victory. Preliminary data indicates that Orbán's party will have 263 out of 386 seats in Hungary's single-chamber parliament, which gives it a constitutional majority (258 seats). The remaining seats were won by smaller groups, among them the Socialists (MSzP), who have been in power for the past 8 years and who, with 59 seats, managed somewhat better result than the extreme right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), which won 47 seats. Another party, with a liberal and environmental profile, Politics Can Be Different (LMP), managed to get into parliament, with 16 seats.

For one political force to obtain a constitutional majority is an exceptional event, not only in the history of democratic Hungary, but throughout the EU, where coalition governments predominate. This holds many advantages for the winning party: it doesn't need to conduct negotiations with potential coalition partners; the government can be formed immediately; and its makeup can fully reflect the policy aims formulated before the elections. This will also be the case for the FIDESZ government, which is expected to include politicians from the first Orbán cabinet (1998–2002). It is already known that János Martonyi will be, once again, Minister of Foreign Affairs; György Matlocsy will be Minister of Finance; while Sándor Pintér will be Minister of Internal Affairs.

Such far-reaching power entails great responsibility, however, as well as a greater than usual risk of failure. The "frontal attack" on bureaucracy announced by Orbán, the fight against corruption and in-depth reforms of the state accompanied by a reduction of taxation constitute the essence of his program. At the same time, it was an adequate response to the expectations of society, which is tired after 8 years of Socialist governments. FIDESZ is facing challenges, however, and their scale exceeds that of the problems Hungarian governments had to face until now. This concerns especially finding a way out of the deep economic crisis with which Hungary has been struggling for over 10 years. For this reason, the first task of the new government will be to get the agreement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to increase its budget deficit, a move which, in conjunction with lower taxes, is meant to contribute to increased economic growth. It is not known, however, if the IMF will agree. If it refuses, the Orbán government will either be forced to continue the policy of reducing expenditures, a policy which was rejected by society, or to embark on a dispute with international institutions, something that would result in cutting Hungary's economy from outside financial support.

Orbán's government will be facing equally important challenges in foreign relations. From the Polish point of view, the new Hungarian government's declarations about taking stronger action on behalf of energy security and a closely related "redefinition" of Hungary's relations with Russia should be viewed positively. So should the declaration about reinforcing trans-Atlantic relations and regional cooperation—also within the V4. More doubtful is the declared intention to strengthen the so-called "national policy," a key element of which is the protection of the Hungarian minority in neighbouring countries, something that has on many occasions been the cause of tensions in the region, especially in relations with Slovakia. Attempts to meet electoral promises, in keeping with which Hungarians in other countries would be able to obtain Hungarian citizenship could be a source of renewed tensions.