Slovakia and Hungary: two different cases of party system change and persistence after 2000[1]

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Abstract: The early months of 2014 have been marked with two important elections in two of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries. Both have been first order elections with very high stakes. Slovak presidential election was to be a test of Robert Fico's risky maneuver, his attempt to capture the presidential office from amidst his PM mandate. Hungarian legislative election was to decide whether Viktor Orban's unprecedented 2010 triumph would be reaffirmed or not. One of these electioans has been characterized by astonishing result continuity (in comparison to the previous election), while the other one by a fundamental change. Contraintuitively, however, this article aims to show that it is Hungary, the country displaying election outcome stability, which has actually been undergoing a party system change. And, conversely, in case of Slovakia, the country with a seemingly discontinuous election outcome, it would be at least premature to envisage a fundamental party system change. This article, obviously, goes beyond a narrow 2014 comparison of two single electoral events where, moreover, two different types of elections took place. It sets the current stories into context, i.e., analyzes both party systems, compares their differing logics and offers some tentative explanations for their divergent dynamics of development.

Keywords: party system; elections; Slovakia; Hungary; fragmentation; electoral system; personalization; personification

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to show largely different dynamics of party system developments in two neighboring countries, Hungary and Slovakia, and achieve a better understanding of these developments in terms of party system change and persistence.

Conceptually, the notion of party system is based on Sartori's theory,[2] while, more narrowly, party system change and persistence (stability) are used in Mair's perspective of stable equilibrium.[3] In a more recent study published in English I focused on a Czech-Polish pair comparison aiming to explain the Czech party system deconsolidation and Polish party system stability in the recent period.[4] Moreover, I have discussed the Czech Republic elsewhere quite extensively using a similar approach.[5] Here I am partly drawing on those previous texts, following similar conceptualization, and shifting my focus to the remaining two countries of V4 group.

In terms of political system and political institutions, there are various common features and similarities between Slovakia and Hungary: a concentrated

2 Sartori defines party system as a "system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition". See GIOVANNI SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge 1976, p. 44.

3 See PETER MAIR, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Oxford 1997, p. 63.

4 JIŘÍ KOUBEK, Czech and Polish Neighbours: Switching the Sides of Stability and Instability?, *Przeglad europejski* 3/2012, pp. 18–41 available online at http://przegladeuropejski.wdinp.uw.edu.pl/zasoby/pliki/Numery%20w%20pdf/PE%20nr%203-2012.pdf [2014-06-07]. The article works with a conceptual distinction: *personification* (when personal aspect is underpinned by ideology and this personalistic embodiment of a program helps simplify and visualize the political message), and *personalization* (when personalistic appeals run counter the programmatic and ideological distinctions. Emphasis on personalities, preferably independent and nonpartisan ones, tends to weaken and delegitimize established political parties). Personification usually helps polarize, clarify and structure the spectrum, while personalization often has fragmenting impacts. In addition to this conceptual distinction, several institutional factors are explored (electoral system and calendar, etc.).

5 J. KOUBEK, České sněmovní volby 2010 z hlediska stability a změny stranického systému. Veto hráči, personalizace, lokalizace a fragmentace, *Politologická revue* 1/2010, pp. 111–127. In this article, published in Czech very soon after the 2010 parliamentary election I am analyzing that election and resulting Czech party system change as an interplay of several factors: personalization and local fragmentation of Czech politics, proliferation of veto players and dense electoral calendar. The subsequent developments only confirmed these conclusions as shown in some of my more recent texts published in Czech, e.g. J. KOUBEK, Většinový systém a rizika lokálně personální fragmentace, in: *Většinový systém pro sněmovní volby? České zkušenosti a debaty*, ed. Stanislav Balík, Brno 2013.

character of the political system with clear domination of Prime Minister, unicameral parliament, a fairly low number of veto players,[6] governmental durability and stability, a narrowed chain of delegation and accountability[7] and strong personalisation of executive decision-making, etc. Some other factors, however, such as electoral system or the method of presidential election (direct vs. indirect) puts them clearly apart. These differences and similarities are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: *Political systemic context in Slovakia and Hungary*

	Slovakia	**Hungary**
Electoral system*	PR	Mixed
Electoral system-specification	Highly proportional	Highly majoritarian
Legislature	Unicameral	Unicameral
Electoral calendar (subnational levels)	Not concurrent	Concurrent
President elected:	Directly	Indirectly
Presidential powers**	Weak	Weak

* used for the more powerful (lower) chamber if bicameral

** based on Siraoff's method of measurement of presidential powers, see ALAN SIRAOFF, Comparative presidencies: The inadequacy of the presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary distinction, *European Journal of Political Research* 3/2003, pp. 287–312.

All above explored institutional features are relevant and important for our analysis. They are strongly related to the number and power of veto players[8] in politics. The weaker the president, and the more unified legislative power (ideally unicameral), the less the veto players. The electoral calendar of sub-national politics matters for the overall electoral cycle of a country. The more concentrated the electoral calendar on the other levels (or, more generally, the less electoral events outside the parliamentary/lower chamber election), the less broken the cycle is. The political institutional features are *not* used in this text as the main independent variables. Electoral system is a partial exception.

6 For the concept see GEORGE TSEBELIS, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton 2011.

7 KAARE STROM, Parliamentary Democracy and Delegation, in: *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, eds. K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, T. Bergman, Oxford 2003. Strøm shows that narrowing of the chain of delegation and accountability on its way from voters via deputies and parties to the PM and beyond is a typical feature of parliamentary regimes. The purer the parliamentary regime, and the more majoritarian-leaning the party system, the more narrowed the chain. And in Tsebelis' terms, the less the veto players.

8 See TSEBELIS, *Veto Players*.

Out of the Slovak-Hungarian differences summarized in the table above, the top two lines are by far the most significant ones. The contrast between the Slovak highly proportional PR system and the Hungarian highly majoritarian mixed system is obvious, with a considerable impact on some party systemic features explored in this article (particularly those format-related).

Some other important factors are suggested, though, such as logics of personalization as opposed to logics of personification (to help understand different dynamics of party system reconstruction) or path dependency (to help understand different meaning and robustness of right-left polarity in the two countries).

In the text to follow, two separate case studies are presented first in chapters 2 and 3, Slovakia and Hungary. Their aim is to analyze the logics of the respective party systems and, especially, their dynamics of persistence and change. For this reason, the chapters are organized chronologically. The party system reconstructions in the two countries are the crucial turning points (critical junctures, using a path dependency language) on which there is the main focus.

A comparative chapter 4 follows, analyzing five main areas of difference between Slovak and Hungarian party system. The aim here is to suggest some tentative explanations for the different logics of both party systems and the different patterns of their development.

Slovakia: early stability with "post-millennium reconstruction"

In a long term perspective, Slovak party system stands out in three aspects. First, it is the rapid emergence of stable political parties many of which persisted for almost two decades. Second, it is the asymmetric format of the party system. This pattern has only been disrupted at the moment of reconstruction. Third, it is the long time prevalence of logics of personalization and, related to this, quite late ascendance of right-left polarity. This only happened as a part of the post-2002 reconstruction.

Slovak party system before its reconstruction

As early as in the founding democratic election of 1990, a robustly structured party configuration emerged, with four very stable core parties. Two of them were close to subcultural parties (one representing the catholic segment,[9] the

9 I am using the term segment in a different and broader meaning that it was originally coined by Val Lorwin. See VAL LORWIN, Segmented Pluralism: Ideological Cleavages and Political Cleavages in Smaller European Democracies, *Comparative Politics* 2/1971, pp. 141–175. I am far from implying anything close to segmented pluralism in Slovakia. By

KDH,[10] the other representing the post-communist one, the SDL[11]). The third one was an example of ethnic minority representation.[12] The fourth party, the nationalistic SNS,[13] fell somewhat short of either subcultural or particularly

segments, or subcultures I mean parties that are based on politically, or more precisely said *electorally* well integrated groups with clearly developed political preferences and identities and stable voting behavior. In other words, they are strong identity parties. The analytical perspective of this article is not based on cleavages (see SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET, STEIN ROKKAN, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives*, New York 1967, or STEIN ROKKAN, The Structuring of Mass Politics in the Smaller European Democracies: A DevelopmentalTypology, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2/1968, pp. 173–210) but rather on the Sartorian notion of dimension of competition and party system approach (see above). For an interesting adaptation of Rokkanian approach to the analysis of CEE countries see HERBERT KITSCHELT, ZDENKA MANSFELDOVA, ROMAN MARKOWSKI, GÁBOR TÓKA, *Post-Communist Party Systems, Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge 1999.

10 Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH) is a conservative, right of centre party that exists until now and whose electoral results are the most stable of all Slovak parties (see the table below).

11 Party of Democratic Left (Strana demokratickej ľavice, SDL) is a much more ambiguous case of a subcultural party. Unlike the Czech Communist party (KSČM), and like their Polish and Hungarian counterparts, Slovak Communists underwent a social democratic mutation immediately after the democratic transition in the early 1990s. Unlike the Polish SLD and Hungarian MSZP, however, Slovak postcommunist left never managed to build a broader, more catch-all basis of support. It never really became a hegemon of the left. This was achieved only later by its splinter party, Smer, under Robert Fico's leadership. Our assumption is that SLD's ascendance into a powerful broad left-dominating party was preempted by the rise of Vladimír Mečiar's movement (see below). It is exactly the SDL's narrower voter base that leads me to interpret the party, cautiously, as a quasi-subcultural party with a well integrated support. Its (post)communist nostalgic unifying sentiment, so strong in Czech KSČM, was however weakened by the SDL's social democratic mutation.

12 It was mostly a stable coalition of parties rather than a single party. In the early 1990 the two members of this coalition were the MKDM (Hungarian Christian Democratic movement) and Együttélés (Coexistence). The basis of representation was mainly the sizeable Hungarian speaking minority, even though the latter movement claimed a broader representative formula – minorities in general. Before 1998 election, in a response to the Mečiar-designed electoral reform introducing increased legal thresholds for coalitions, the "Hungarian" parties merged into the SMK (Party of Hungarian Coalition, Strana maďarskej koalície). Before the 2010 election the party was split into a more moderate Most-Híd (this means "Bridge" in Slovak and Hungarian) and a more nationalistic SMK, which has, however, failed to be represented in the parliament since then.

13 Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS) was actually not that far away of a subcultural party – especially due to its linkages to various nationalistic associations and civil society groups. In a way, it could even be considered as an ethnic representation group – representing a narrowly defined (authentically) Slovak identity.

ethnic base of representation, but still with a fairly stable core of voters mobilized by a very radical appeal.

Besides these four smaller strong-identity parties, a powerful movement emerged in the early 1990s whose political appeal was predominantly personalistic – Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS.[14] This highly pragmatic catch-all movement was able to meet wide Slovak demand for a strong leadership and all-encompassing national appeal at the times of statehood crisis of federal Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s.

Not at least, there has been one more, much less stable component of Slovak party politics: liberal right-of-centre "urban" sector of party spectrum. This sector was strongly present in the VPN umbrella movement, then, in 1992 election, it almost disappeared, being fragmented into several parties. Before the 1994 election it reemerged as Democratic Union (DU),[15] which later became one of the main pillars of the broad "anti-Mečiar" alliance called SDK.[16] And after the disintegration of this alliance, it became the core of the right-wing SDKÚ party.[17]

As stated above, another characteristic feature of the Slovak party system is its asymmetric format for the most of post-1990 period until now. Nothing comparable can be identified in the strongly bipolar Hungarian party system, or in the robustly multiparty Czech system, or unstable fragmented (and later bipolarly structured) Polish party system. In Slovakia, this asymmetry is

14 Movement for Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko, HZDS) was the strongest faction of the disintegrating VPN movement (Verejnost proti násiliu, Public against Violence), which had been the umbrella movement of the anticommunist opposition in the founding democratic 1990 election.

15 Interestingly, the DU (Demokratická únia) originated as a cluster of various splinters from both HZDS and SNS.

16 Slovak Democratic Coalition (Slovenská demokratická koalícia, SDK) was a five-member union of DU, KDH, DS (Democratic Party, a right wing conservative party), social democrats and greens. The latter three parties were minor parties so the centre of gravity of the SDK was clearly right-of–centre. It did not actually enter the 1998 election as a coalition but an ad hoc electoral party as a response to the "anti-coalition" Mečiar's electoral reform (see also note 14 above for its impact on Hungarian parties' coalition).

17 Despite the original agreement of the SDK founding parties that this ad hoc electoral party would be dissolved into the founding parties after the 198 election, the SDK leader, Mikuláš Dzurinda did not follow this agreement and established the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (Slovenská demokratická i krestianská únia, SDKÚ) the core of which was the original DU (and partly also DS and KDH, he himself had been a KDH member). Mikuláš Dzurinda became prime minister after the 1998 election. If the SDK had really been dismantled as originally agreed the single largest party in Dzurinda's broad governing coalition would have been the SDL which would have probably claimed the office of PM.

almost a constant – just the former dominant player[18] from the 1990s, HZDS, was gradually replaced by Smer-SD[19] party after the turn of millennium.

As for the party system format,[20] thus, Slovakia is a case of asymmetric multipartism with a fairly stable core of minor parties but with a change on the position of the dominant player.

Party system reconstruction after 2002

The de facto electoral defeat of HZDS in 1998 opened the way to the party system reconstruction which took place in the 2002–2006 term. Hand in hand with the gradual decline of the HZDS, another strongly personalistic political project emerged, the Smer party. After its disappointing 2002 election performance it quickly started to gain force, reaching up to almost 30% of vote in 2006 election and winning ever more in each subsequent parliamentary election (see the table below).

The claim that Smer-SD can be conceived of as a *functional* replacement for HZDS (i.e. *not* in terms of the two parties' programs, ideologies, etc., but in terms of their *systemic* roles) may be supported by at least two arguments: (1) the electoral geography of the two parties which is really similar,[21] and (2) their alliance patterns that are identical.

The change in the identity of the dominant player is only one aspect of the reconstruction – the format-related one. More important is, however, the mechanics-related[22] aspect of the reconstruction. Only this makes it a genuine reconstruction. The change consists in shifting the logics of the competition from a predominantly personalistic division (Mečiar vs. "anti-

18 The table below shows that with the exception of 1998 and 2002 elections, the gap between the winning party and the second party was always minimum 10 percentage points. In four cases it was minimum 20 (or almost 20) points and in one these cases, the 2012 election, it has even been 35 percentage points!

19 Smer was a splinter from SDL established before the 2002 election by current Slovak PM Robert Fico. The party later adopted a social democratic identity although originally it was a centrist pragmatic "third way" party that combined some "law and order", anti-corruption and anti-established-parties appeals. The main reason for this splinter was that Robert Fico and his faction in SLD had been unsatisfied with the SLD presence and status in the broad "anti-Mečiar" governing coalition in 1998–2002.

20 More on Sartori's concept of party system format see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 128–129.

21 See the maps available at the website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=4490 [2014-06-07].

22 More on Sartori's concept of party system mechanics see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 128–129.

Mečiarists") to a right-left based pattern of inter-party competition.[23] This happened due to (1) radical neo-liberal reforms (a flat tax, e.g.) introduced by then right-wing governing coalition, (2) Smer's successful self-presentation and self-definition as the only authentic oppositional party in the 2002–2006 period (as opposed to more pragmatic and accommodation-striving HZDS) and (3) its adoption[24] of a social democratic identity in response to those radical reforms.

Some features of the party system have not changed, though. First, it is the strongly personalized and pragmatic character of the party playing the dominant role. Second, it is its patriotic (or even modestly nationalistic) flavor, underpinned by both Smer's and HZDS' alliance with the nationalistic segment (SNS). Thirdly, and not surprisingly, it is the tendency of all other parties to group themselves against the dominant player.

Thus, the logics of the Slovak party system has been a more or less stable alliance of two segments, "Hungarian" and Catholic (KDH) plus the liberal "urban" sector against the dominant player, be it the HZDS or Smer, while the nationalistic segment has always been in alliance with the dominant player.[25]

From this *general* point of view, the mechanics of the Slovak party system has been rather stable and well predictable, in spite of frequent format changes (newcoming and disappearing parties, especially in the liberal "urban" sector).

23 Borrowing a conceptual distinction from my above mentioned article on the Czech Republic and Poland, there was a shift from the logics of personalization to the logics of personification. See the footnote 4 above.

24 The internally contradictory expression "identity adoption" is used deliberately here to suggest the ambiguity of Smer's social democratic turn.

25 The post-communist leftist segment does not fit that easily into the otherwise clear pattern. Obviously, the Smer can be plausibly considered to be a continuation of the post-communist tradition, so nowadays (since 2006) this segment finds itself in the role of the hegemon. As for the SDL, in 1994–2002 the party was on the "anti-Mečiar" side but with a continuous and ever-escalating intraparty conflict, resulting ultimately, in 1999, into Smer's exit. And in the early 1990s, the party's position *vis a vis* the hegemon had been even more ambiguous.

Table 2: *Evolution of Slovak party system*

	1990	1992	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012
HZDS		37,26	34,96	27,00	19,50	8,79	[4,32]	
SMER					13,46	29,14	34,79	44,41
KDH	19,21	8,89	10,08	*(SDK)*	8,25	8,31	8,52	8,82
SDL*	13,35	14,70	10,41	14,66				
SNS**	13,94	7,93	5,40	9,07	*(6,97)*	11,73	5,07	[4,55]
SMK***	8,66	7,42 *(9,71)*	10,18	9,12	11,16	11,68	8,12 *(12,45)*	6,89 *(11,17)*
DÚ/SDKÚ			8,57	*(SDK)*	15,09	18,35	15,42	6,09
VPN	29,35							
SDK				26,33				
ZRS			7,34					
KSS					6,32			
SOP				8,01				
ANO					8,01			
SAS							12,14	5,88
OĽaNO								8,55

Note: only parties above 5% of vote are displayed, also for the 1990 election when the legal threshold was lower. The only exceptions to be displayed in the table (in square brackets) are the HZDS and SNS after their failures to be reelected (2010 and 2012, respectively).
Source: data from the website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, available online at http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=4490 [2014-06-07].
ZRS: Association of Slovakia´s Workers, a far left splinter from SDL.
KSS: Communist Party of Slovakia, a faction of the previous Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) that refused the social democratic mutation as exemplified by the SDL
SOP: Party of Civic Understanding, a centrist party established by Košice mayor and later the first directly elected Slovak president Rudolf Schuster. The message of the party was to bridge the then so sharp division between "mečiarists" and the anti-Mečiar bloc.
ANO: Alliance of New Citizen, a liberal party established by an entrepreneur an owner of Markíza television P. Rusko
SaS: Freedom and Solidarity, a right wing party established by a neoliberal economist and entrepreneur R. Sulík
OĽaNO: Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, an anti-established-parties movement established by an entrepreneur I. Matovič (in 2010, several OĽaNO people ran on the SaS list)

* in 1990 KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia)
** In 2002 election, SNS was split into two parties, none of them managing to be represented. The figure in parentheses shows the combined electoral support for both parties (i.e., for the whole nationalistic segment)
*** 1990 and 1992 Együttélés-MKDM coalition. 1994 Hungarian Coalition (MK), comprising of Együttélés, MKDM and MPP (Hungarian Civic Party). 1998–2006 SMK. 2010 and 2012 Most-Híd. Figures in parentheses show the electoral weigh of the *whole* Hungarian segment in the cases when it was divided. In 1992, it is the sum of Együttélés-MKDM coalition and MPP (failed to be elected). The 2010 and 2012 figures are the sums of the Most-Híd (represented in parliament) and SMK (not reelected). More about Hungarian minority parties see also note 11 above.

The table shows that the Slovak format has usually been six-member (slightly lower, five-member in the first two elections). It also shows that the only exceptions to the asymmetric pattern of the party system were the reconstruction-related elections: the 1998 election (when the HZDS was still powerful but it had already had a numerically equal challenger, SDK) and the 2002 election (when the HZDS was not so all-powerful anymore and the new dominant player, Smer, had not assumed its power, yet).

Another typical feature, as described above, is the vote stability of the four strong-identity (segmental or quasi-segmental) parties. Hungarian segment and the KDH are the most striking examples of low volatility.[26] The only deviation of KDH's standard 8% result was the founding democratic election.[27] The SNS' mild U-shape curve, with its bottom in the 1994,[28] reflects the sudden loss of the party's *raison d'être* after the Czechoslovak federation was partitioned and the statehood struggle was won (from the SNS' perspective) and its subsequent rediscovery when the party began playing the Hungarian card (or, more generally, the minorities card). As for the SDL, the line of stable party's results could actually be extended up to the 2002 election when those results were almost replicated by the initial electoral performance of Smer. The subsequent rise of Fico's party was clearly at the expense of the declining ex-dominant player, the HZDS.[29]

The table also illustrates a continuous peripheral turnover of the party system, a number of various "one-off" parties, often belonging to the liberal "urban" sector (ANO, SaS), but also to the moderate (SOP) or radical left (ZRS, KSS). It must be emphasized, as well, that the table does not capture quite a number of parties that have just fallen short of the 5% legal threshold. Thus, it does not give a complete image of party system fragmentation.

26 On concept of electoral volatility and ways of its measuring, see STEFANO BARTOLINI, PETER MAIR, *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability*, Cambridge 1990.

27 At that time the KDH included a significant part of the former anti-communist dissent opposition. In this respect, the VPN fell short of a perfect umbrella movement and hat to share its role with KDH.

28 There are actually two lows of the curve (leaving aside the party´s gradual pass-away after 2010. The second bottom, 2002, reflects the intra-party crisis resulting in splitting the party into two, both failing to be reelected.

29 This is not a mere speculation derived from the parties' percentage results. As already noted above, the hypothesis is very clearly supported by the electoral geography patterns.

Post-2010 change?

The aim of this article is not to explain the persisting system's asymmetry or its persisting logics (see above, a stable alliance of various segments against the dominant player plus nationalists). This would probably have to involve some political sociology or political culture explanations.[30] The aim is to provide some tentative explanations for the most recent (post-2010) developments and answer the question whether it qualifies as party system change.

First, it must be emphasized that there does *not* seem to be a fundamental change in terms of a system reconstruction – something comparable to the 2002–2006 shift. The erosion of the system seems to be asymmetric (perhaps not surprisingly in an asymmetric system), or even partial. It primarily concerns the liberal "urban" sector that falls increasingly prey to various anti-established-party challengers. Looking back to 2002–2010 elections the parties of this sector could have had credible ambitions to constitute a major party system pole; one that would aspire to match the role of the Smer-SD. Slovakia would then possibly move closer to a bipolar system. In light of this ambition, the current state of the right might seem to be a striking contrast. But still, taking into consideration the fragility and vulnerability of this "bloc", the risk of the collapse of the ambition has always been considerable.

Second, and seemingly contradictorily to what has just been argued, the composition of the 1990s core has undergone a significant change by 2010–12. Both SNS and HZDS have disappeared from the spectrum of relevant parties. The case of HZDS can be explained quite easily. A failure of a purely personalistic project came together with the failure of its leader and founding father. And as already discussed above (the party system reconstruction and change of dominant players), the HZDS was *functionally* replaced (i.e., in its party system role) by Smer-SD. As for the SNS, its demise need not mean, to be stressed, that the nationalistic segment has disappeared forever. Currently, it is squeezed out by Smer's extraordinary power. On the other hand, the demand for nationalistic program still exists in Slovakia, which can be exemplified by astonishing success of a truly extremist nationalistic politician, Marián Kotleba, in the 2013 regional election.

As far as the change of the party system's core is concerned, also the "Hungarian" segment split before the 2010 election, after the previous promising (if "forced") integration of 1998. And more importantly, it is the

30 Tentatively, these could include ingredients like conservative left, populism, "patriotic" left, generally conservative political culture, a demand for a strong leader, etc.

new splinter party (Most-Híd) that has survived, *not* the old SMK. On the other hand, the new party has been led by the old SMK's leader so there is a clear personal continuity.

Third, no significant change to the logics of the system, i.e. "Smer-vs.-others competition", can be observed so far. The right wing (especially the liberal "urban" sector) is in the process of decomposition and regrouping. The identity of some players may undergo other changes. Yet, the Hungarian and probably also the Catholic segments are the stabilizing anchors of the quite fixed alliances. And not at least, the Smer-SD will probably continue to be the main integrative force for its right-of-centre opponents. Broadly speaking, the alliances remain stable so far, despite the Smer-SD's attempts to open a gate towards the KDH.

Presidential arena

A possibility that a current pattern of competition could be in short- to mid-term perspective replaced by another dimension, such as "politics vs. antipolitics" or "parties vs. antiparties", exists. Nevertheless, I do not consider it very likely to happen. There seems to be, indeed, an accelerating dynamics of right wing decomposition after 2012. It would be premature, however, to draw any far-reaching conclusions about system reconstruction (or even collapse) from the 2014 presidential election.

True enough, the combined share for the three *relevant* non-partisan (and, in a way, anti-party) independent candidates,[31] i.e. 57 % in the first round, seems to signal a profound change. The 3,33 % for the official candidate of the united right wing opposition[32] is a clear warning for this established-parties-based opposition. On the other hand, some contextualization is needed to provide this tempting image of change with proper dimensions.

First, and most specifically, the 2014 election has been a symbolic second round to the 2012 parliamentary election. Then, to be reminded, Smer-SD had won an absolute majority of seats, something unprecedented even in an asymmetric party system. Obviously, a midterm election has turned into a plebiscite about the single party government and power-seeking PM Fico. Messages addressing the problem of (alleged) absolute concentration of power and appealing to more balance and equilibrium have been used successfully in

31 It should be reminded, though, that one of the two most successful non-party candidates, Radoslav Procházka, was a skilful party politician (KDH) not so long before the election.

32 It was the KDH candidate Pavol Hrušovský, supported by so called People Platform, a project uniting three right-wing oppositional parties (KDH, Most-Híd, and SDKÚ).

the presidential campaign, not so much surprisingly. A greater surprise could have been the PM's decision itself to raise the stakes, undergo the huge risk and run for the presidency.

Second, and more generally, the pattern of Slovak presidential elections seems to be a hybrid between first- and second-order types of elections. The turnout (relatively low, but still much closer to parliamentary election that EP or regional election) and the attraction of the office for the dominant Slovak politicians (not only Fico in 2014, but also Mečiar in 1999 and 2004) speak in favor of a first-order election. Voting behavior and results speak in favor of a second-order election.

None of the directly elected presidents so far has been a candidate of a major established party (or, at least, of a system core party). Before elected president, Rudolf Schuster had been a leader of a typical "one-off" party that disappeared soon after his run off victory.[33] Ivan Gašparovič had represented a splinter from HZDS, called symbolically HZD, which did not succeed in overcoming the legal threshold in parliamentary elections.

In fact, it is this "outsider" character of elected presidents which is the only coherent feature of presidential elections. Otherwise, no clear pattern can be identified. Out of the two directly elected presidents who had already finished their mandates, one managed to be reelected (Gašparovič), the other did not. Out of the four direct elections thus far, two followed, more or less, the general tendency of previous legislative elections (1999, 2009), while the other two were rather "opposition-seeking" votes.[34]

Anyway, the legislative and presidential elections in Slovakia seem to be two parallel existing separate arenas with very different sets of players. Even the candidates of the stable-core (segmental) parties do not usually match their parties' outcomes achieved in the legislative election. From this point of view, the 2014 election has followed the pattern of separate arenas.

It could be argued that the extent of the anti-party mood (or, at least, of non-party vote) has been quantitatively incomparable to the previous presidential elections. And that, thus, dawn of established parties could be envisaged. This is by definition an open question that will only be answered after some time. It is just to be pointed out here that (1) such a conclusion now would be premature and (2) that, hypothetically, a contrary conclusion could be also

33 In 1999, however, he was a candidate of the *whole* governing coalition, an echo of the post-Mečiar and anti-Mečiar unity.

34 But this tendency to favor the opposition was far from installing a model of genuine cohabitation. The post-2014 situation will probably be no exception.

drawn from the 2014 election. It might also prove to be a trigger for right wing regrouping, reintegration and reconsolidation.

Slovakia – summary

Slovak party system cannot be labeled as a case of a party system change (in terms of reconstruction), yet. The 2014 presidential election outcome reflects a deep crisis of a *part* of the Slovak party spectrum. This crisis has lasted, however, at least since the 2012 legislative election (if not since the beginning of the right wing parties' coalition cabinet in 2010).

None of the constant features of the Slovak party system has been, so far, affected by this crisis. These features are: the asymmetric format of the system, a presence of various durable (segmental) parties with low electoral volatility, a fairly robust mechanics of the system (stable alliances disrupted only by peripheral turnover of the parties, mainly in the liberal "urban" sector) and right-left pattern of competition (since the post-2002 party system reconstruction).

Moreover, it must be reminded that the alleged change is taking place in the "wrong" arena. As shown above, presidential elections have *always* brought results and trends somewhat incompatible with the parliamentary arena where the party system really has its battlefield.

A serious challenge to the system could prove to be various anti-established-party movements and projects as suggested by the success of OĽaNO in 2012 election (or even SaS in 2010 election) and several independent presidential candidates in 2014. Unless these tendencies break the asymmetric and right-left pattern of the system (and until the pattern persists that they either soon disappear or get integrated into the system after some time) they do not constitute a force powerful enough to invoke a party system reconstruction comparable to 2002.

Hungary: a late party system reconstruction

For the major part of the postcommunist period, Hungary represents one of the most robust party systems in the CEE region and definitely the most stable one in the V4 group. Unlike the Czech Republic, it displays an extraordinary stability of alliances. Unlike Slovakia, there has been no party system reconstruction until as late as 2010, and almost no turnover of parties (i.e., no "one-off" parties coming and going). Thus, both format[35] and mechanics have been considerably robust.

35 An important starting advantage of Hungary was that there had already been clearly defined (if not well established and entrenched) political parties as early as at the moment of the

Applying stricter standards, the period of Hungarian party system stability ought to be limited to 1998–2010 only. These stricter standards capture (1) significant electoral volatility in the initial period (compounded by the majoritarian effects of the electoral system and lack of players' experience with this system) and (2) the "identity shift" of one of the major parties, Fidesz in 1994–1998.[36]

After 2010, Hungarian party system has undergone a fundamental change that qualifies as a party system reconstruction. However, it is only the 2014 election result that makes this assertion valid. Before the 2014 "verification", the 2010 electoral earthquake of Hungary could still be regarded as an anomaly, as a temporary (or even episodic) deviation from the uniform tendency of bipolar and rather symmetric right-left competition.

The aim here is, obviously, not so much to assess the early 1990s developments that may just be bracketed as the initial party system construction period. The aim is to analyze the post-2010 change, to define the "new" party system and suggest some explanations for this change. To start with, though, it seems reasonable to revise briefly the main parameters of the Hungarian party system in its stable 1998–2010 period.

The pre-2010 period: stability of format

From 1998 to 2010 Hungary was characterized by bipolar tendencies in a fairly limited format (both underpinned by the electoral system's majoritarian distortions). The same set of parties that formed the stable 1998–2010 party system had already existed in the transition period. In this aspect, Hungary clearly stands out, which Linz and Stepan emphasize in their analysis of Hungarian transition and consolidation.[37] As Mlejnek put it, Hungary skipped

round table transition. Some parties disappeared after that obviously but all of the parties existing in the peak period of stability (1998–2010) had had their roots *in* or even *before* the transition.

36 In Czech literature, the evolution of Fidesz is often reduced to the "conservative mutation" of the late 1990s and it is, thus, presented as a one-off shift. See, e.g., J. MLEJNEK, Brzda, plyn, nebo deformátor? Maďarský smíšený volební systém a jeho dvacetileté působení na tvar maďarské politiky, *Acta Politologica* 1/2009, pp. 1–28. Another perspective is offered by Szabó who shows Fidesz's history as a continuous sequence of transformations, the above mentioned one being just one out of at least six. See MATE SZABO, From a suppressed anti-communist dissident movement to a governing party: the transformations of FIDESZ in Hungary, *Corvinus Journal of Sociology & Social Policy* 2/2011, pp. 47–66.

37 See JUAN LINZ, ALFRED STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Baltimore 1996, pp. 293–316.

the stage of forum type party.[38] A party that bore (and still bears) the word "forum" in its name, the MDF,[39] *did* have somewhat heterogeneous profile in the early 1990s, but still, it clearly fell short of a broad anticommunist oppositional umbrella movement such as the (Czech) Civic Forum, (Slovak) Public against Violence or (Polish) NSZZ Solidarność (in its 1989–1990 form).

Besides the MDF, two more parties represent the late 1980s birth of dissent anticommunist oppositional party politics. These parties are SZDSZ[40] and Fidesz.[41] Like the MDF, both managed to persist for the whole pre-2010 period (one of them even beyond). Unlike the MDF, they initially represented the liberal and urban version of Hungarian anticommunist opposition. In the early 1990s they were considered parts of the same (liberal urban) political camp. Nevertheless, after SZDSZ's entering the Socialist-led governmental coalition in 1994 and after Fidesz's turn to the right their trajectories have become sharply divergent. Also their electoral success differs enormously. While the SZDSZ sunk to a status of a small party in 1998 and even an irrelevant party after 2010, the Fidesz became one of the two major parties in 1998–2010 and the hegemon[42] of the whole party spectrum after 2010.

38 J. MLEJNEK, Brzda, plyn, nebo deformátor?, p. 5.

39 Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar demokrata forum, MDF) emerged in the late 1980s as a group of conservative and moderately nationalistic Hungarian dissidents and intellectuals representing above all the rural periphery. The MDF won the first democratic election in 1990 and formed a coalition government under its leader Jozef Antall, together with two more conservative right wing parties. In 1994 the party suffered significant electoral defeat from which it never recovered. In 1998 it was replaced by Fidesz as a leader of the right wing camp and it repeatedly became its junior coalition partner on both electoral and governmental level. By 2010, the MDF lost its relevance on the national level.

40 The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) represents a centrist social-liberal group that was established in 1988 by leading Hungarian liberal dissidents and intellectuals. The SZDSZ has always been strongly urban-based (or even more narrowly Budapest-based). In both 1990 and 1994 it ended up as the second largest party with around 20% support. In late 1990s the party shrunk to just slightly above the 5% hurdle. In 2010 it failed to be reelected and did not run in 2014 election.

41 Originally established in late 1980s as the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ), a student liberal urban-based anticommunist movement, it gradually abandoned its generational character and evolved into a conservative Christian nationalistic rural-based party. Under charismatic leadership of Viktor Orbán, it won the 1998, 2010 and 2014 election and was only narrowly defeated in 2002 and 2006.

42 The term "hegemon" is used here just to make a conceptual distinction from the term "dominant player" used consistently in the Slovak chapter above. The aim is to capture two crucial differences: time and intensity.. While in Slovakia the term "dominant player" was related to the "moderately" asymmetric format of party system, which was its more or less constant feature, in Hungary the Fidesz's hegemony is much shorter and applies to the post-

The main rival of Fidesz in 1998–2010 was the MSZP,[43] usually labeled by its opponents as post-communist or even communist. As a result of mid 1990s collapse of what could have been a liberal camp it was the MSZP who absorbed a large bulk of the culturally liberal urban electorate. The party's strongholds have traditionally been Budapest and some other large cities such as Miskolc, Pecs, Szeged, etc.

The last group of Hungarian parties, a much less successful one, is the "historical" parties. The inverted commas suggest that it has rather been *attempts* (with temporary success) to revive some pre-war political parties, such as Christian democrats, social democrats or agrarians. The social democratic attempt failed at the very beginning. The agrarians, FKGP,[44] and the Christian democrats, KDNP,[45] only managed to persist as independent parties in the 1990s – in both cases as small parties. The FKGP did not survive its problematic governmental performance (especially the corruption scandals of the party's leader Torgyán) in Fidesz-led 1998–2002 cabinet. The KDNP disappeared from relevant parties' spectrum even one election earlier, in 1998. Unlike the FKGP, it managed to recover – however not as an independent party but rather as and quasi-coalitional appendix of Fidesz in 2010 and 2014.

2010 period. At the same time, however, it is a much stronger case: prevalence of one party having two-third (constitutional) majority in the parliament. It is to be stressed that the term hegemon is *not* to imply anything even remotely similar to the Sartori's or Wiatr's hegemonic party system, see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 230–238. If Fidesz were to continue its absolute majority victories, at least once more, Sartori's term predominant party system could stand for consideration. More on predominant party systems see ibid., pp. 192–201.

43 Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP) was a result of a social democratic transformation of the former communist party (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party). More precisely, it was just the most reform-minded faction of the communist party that carried out this transformation. Another faction, led by the former communist party leader and PM Károly Grósz, attempted to reestablish the party under its old name but without any electoral success. The social democratic MSZP was, on the contrary, one of the most successful parties in Hungary. Since its initial defeat in the opening democratic election of 1990, it has never become a small party. It won the 1994, 2002 and 2006 elections, forming the government (in 1994 with an absolute majority of seats) and in the others (1998, 2010, 2014) it became the second largest party.

44 Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) was to be a symbolic continuation of the party that succeeded in defeating the communists in the first post-WWII election. Rural populism became its strategy in the 1990s and the party joined both the MDF-led and Fidesz-led governments in 1990 and 1998 respectively.

45 Christian Democratic People Party (KDNP) also joined the first of the two 1990s conservative coalition governments. Its electorate was absorbed, however, by the rising Fidesz as early as in 1998.

Table 3: *evolution of Hungarian party system*

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014
Fidesz(v)	8,95	7,02	29,48	41,07	42,03	**52,73**	45,04
(s)	*5,44*	*5,18*	*38,34*	*48,70*	*42,49*	*68,14*	*66,83*
MSZP(v)	10,89	32,99	32,92	42,05	43,21	**19,30**	25,67
(s)	*8,55*	*54,15*	*34,72*	*46,11*	*48,19*	*15,28*	*19,1*
MDF(v)	24,73	11,74	2,80		5,04		
(s)	*42,49*	*9,59*	*4,40*		*2,85*		
SZDSZ(v)	21,39	19,74	7,57	5,57	6,50		
(s)	*23,83*	*18,14*	*6,22*	*5,20*	*6,21*		
KDNP(v)	6,46	7,03					
(s)	*5,44*	*5,70*					
FGKP(v)	11,73	8,82	13,15				
(s)	*11,40*	*6,74*	*12,44*				
MIÉP(v)			5,47				
(s)			3,63				
Jobbik(v)						**16,67**	20,30
(s)						*12,18*	*11,56*
LMP(v)						**7,48**	5,36
(s)						*4,15*	*2,51*

Note: The table shows both the percentage of vote and the percentage of parliamentary seats. In the Slovak party system table, this was not necessary as the Slovak electoral system is highly proportional.
(v) = percentage of votes (derived from the PR-based component of the system: until 2014 regional party lists, after 2014 national party lists)
(s) = percentage of seats
Source: data from the website of the National Election Office, available online at http://www.valasztas.hu/en/ogyv2014/index.html [2014-06-07].

As for the format, the table above reveals three notable features of Hungarian party system in 1998–2010. First, there was a fairly low electoral volatility; especially in terms of percentage of votes (how the electoral system translates votes into seats is another matter, see below). Interestingly, almost no new parties managed to enter the system in that period. The only exception, the MIEP,[46] was a splinter of MDF and it only survived one term in parliament.

46 Party of Hungarian Life and Truth (MIEP) was established by the leader of the radically nationalistic and anti-Semitic faction of MDF, Istvan Csurka. Represented in the parliament just in 1998–2002, it is the only Hungarian one-off party. However, there is some personal and even organizational continuity with the later Jobbik movement.

Second, the bipolar Fidesz-MSZP competition was strikingly symmetric. The gap between these (only) two credible adepts of victory, again in terms of percentage of *vote*, was never wider than 3 percentage points (in the 2002 and 2006 election it was actually just around 1 point). On the other hand, the gap between them and the other parties, i.e. between the defeated one of the "big two" and the third largest party, was always more than 15 percentage points, but usually minimum 30 points.

Third, the Hungarian party system was always a very concentrated system. The sums of the two largest parties percentages of votes were above 80% in 2002 and 2006 elections and above 60% in 1998. Unlike the low volatility and symmetry, concentration has continued also into the post-2010 period.

The combination of these three features, low volatility, extraordinary symmetry and concentrated bipolar format, is quite unusual not only in the CEE region but even in Europe as such. Actually, it would have been quite typical for some European countries – but back in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Stable mechanics in 1998–2010: bipolar left-right competition and lasting alliances

In terms of mechanics, the Hungarian system has been fairly stable for the whole post-1990 period. On one pole, there was always a socialist-liberal alliance, governing three times so far: 1994–98 (when the coalition with SZDSZ was even numerically unnecessary for the MSZP), 2002–2006 and, reelected for 2006–2010. Moreover, this alliance continues in the new post-2010 system. It lacks, nevertheless, its former status of one of the main two poles of the system, i.e. one of the credible victory-candidates.

On the other pole, there was always an alliance of right wing conservative (Christian, rural, anticommunist) forces led by one powerful party. In the initial period, the MDF was the leader, its power being strongly distorted by the electoral system. During the 1994–1998 term, when right wing was in opposition, it was functionally replaced by Fidesz who has been the leader of the right since then.

The logics behind this symmetric bipolar concentrated system with stable alliances has been stable, as well: a right-left competition which is, like in Poland,[47] *not* primarily socio-economic but rather value based or "cultural".

47 A good analysis of Poland after its party system reconstruction is to be found in KRZYSZTOF JASIEWICZ, "The Past Is Never Dead." Identity, Class, and Voting Behavior in Contemporary Poland, *East European Politics and Societies* 23/2009, p. 491. For the previous period, see JACEK BIELASIAK, Past and Present in Transitional Voting. Electoral Choices in Post-

Anticommunism, nationalism, Christian conservatism, and, at times, rural populism, are the driving forces of the right, while the opposition to these (cultural liberalism, urban cosmopolitism and conciliatory approach to the communist past) mark the politics of the left.

An important difference from Poland concerns the composition of alliances. While stable, left-right and value-based in *both* countries, in Poland they were, besides this, also "genetic". The division between post-communists and post-Solidarity was never bridged. At least not until the Civic Platform invited the Polish Peasant Party to the ruling coalition in 2007.[48] In Hungary, on the contrary, post-dissent SZDSZ joined the post-communist led government as early as in 1994. And this alliance has persisted until now.

What is also typical for Hungary is strong polarization between the two dominant poles, which is contradictory to classical econometric (post-) Downsian theories of bipolar centripetalism and median voter theorem. Hungary exposes the limits of these positivist or rational-choice theories and shows the importance of constructivist and language-based way of analysis. It exemplifies the significance of, to use Peter Mair's terms, language of politics.[49] An excellent analysis of this two-party polarization, its connection to politics of history and the role of informal politics and personalization in this process is Simon and Bozoki.[50] Using another conceptualization, Hungary could be

Communist Poland, *Party Politics September* 5/2002, pp. 563–585, or VOYTEK ZUBEK, The Reassertion of the Left in Post-Communist Poland, *Europe-Asia Studies* 5/1994, pp. 801–837, or Szczerbiak's texts that focus on dimensions of competition. ALEKSANDER SZCZERBIAK, Interests and Values: Polish Parties and Their Electorates, *Europe-Asia Studies* 8/1999, pp. 1401–1432. And, A. SZCZERBIAK, Old and New Divisions in Polish Politics: Polish Parties' Electoral Strategies and Bases of Support, *Europe-Asia Studies* 5/2003, pp. 729–746. A more Rokkanian and cleavage-focused perspective is offered by TOMASZ ZARYCKI, Politics in the Periphery: Political Cleavages in Poland Interpreted in Their Historical and International Context, *Europe-Asia Studies* 5/2000, pp. 851–873.

48 But by that time, the "genetic" division had already lost much of its meaning and intensity. The post-communists had collapsed as one of the two main poles, the SLD had shrunk to a small party, the PSL had lost much of its post-communist label and the PO was not fiercely anticommunist (it has never been such really consistently).

49 See Mair's famous analysis of Irish politics where language of politics as applied especially by Fianna Fail party is taken as an independent variable. PETER MAIR, The Autonomy of the Political: The Development of the Irish Party System, *Comparative Politics* 4/1979, pp. 445–465.

50 A. BOZOKI, E. SIMON, Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Hungary, in: *Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. G. Meyer, Opladen – Farmington Hills 2008, pp. 143–190. On the role of politics of memory, specifically a mnemonic battle of 1956 revolution legacy, see ZOLTÁN CSIPKE, The Changing Significance of the 1956 Revolution in Post-Communist Hungary, *Europe-Asia Studies* 1/2011, pp. 99–128.

classified as an example of logics of personification, as opposed to the logics of personalization.

Post-2010 reconstruction: what happened and why it happened

The format-related aspects of the 2010 change of the Hungarian system are the most obvious ones and the table above illustrates them clearly. The system has shifted from a bipolar symmetric format with fairly low volatility to a highly asymmetric unipolar one, which is, again, only moderately volatile (measured as 2010–2014 volatility, of course[51]).

As far as the identity and stability of individual parties as "system units" is concerned, the direction of the change is also quite evident. None of the two once stable small parties, MDF and SZDSZ, has survived. Thus the system has become even more concentrated. Of the "old core" parties, only the two largest have persisted, Fidesz and MSZP. The others have disappeared, with the questionable exception of KDNP that has been effectively "swallowed" by Fidesz.

In contrast to the previous (i.e., 1998–2010) patterns of development, a new party, Jobbik,[52] successfully entered the system. Moreover, it managed to be reelected, i.e. it did not replicate the one-off record of its functional predecessor, the MIEP. And on top of that, in both 2010 and 2014 elections Jobbik's performance of 15–20 % of vote was far from a small or weak party.

The system ceased to be a symmetric bipolar format, evolving into a highly asymmetric triangular constellation in which one party, Fidesz with two thirds of parliamentary seats in both 2010 and 2014 elections, is considerably stronger than *all* other parties combined.[53] And its neighbors are two oppositional parties of similar size, MSZP and Jobbik. The fourth and last parliamentary party, the LMP,[54] is so weak that it is close to the status of an irrelevant party.

The consequences of the above mentioned format changes for the system mechanics have been fundamental and far reaching. At the first sight, the

51 The extraordinarily high 2006–2010 volatility reflects the fact of a fundamental reconstruction of the whole party system.

52 Movement for a Better Hungary (in the shorter version Jobbik) is a far right party led by Gábor Vona that is profiled on protest language, antisystem critique and anti-minority (above all anti-Roma) sentiments. At the same time the party is strongly anchored in the Christian conservative values.

53 To borrow a Sartori's concept, the system has at least started shifting potentially towards a predominant party system. To confirm this tendency, however, at least one more parliamentary election would have to replicate Fidesz's absolute majority. More on predominant party systems see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 192–201.

right-left polarity remained unchanged, just with the centre of gravity as if shifting massively to the right. Nonetheless, the new distribution of power and the new set of players have changed the logics of this competition entirely.

In 1998–2010, but also before that, Hungary's system was based on the competition of two alternating blocs, each of them led by one dominant party. In Sartorian terms, this was a classical situation of moderate pluralism.[55] Somewhat contradictorily to that, the system was displaying high polarization and the ideological distance between left and right was rather increasing in time than contrary, especially after 2006. Anyway, right-left based politics of two blocs was in line with the symmetric and concentrated format of the system.

After 2010, this has changed completely. Instead of oppositions concentrated in coherent blocs, a divided (bilateral) opposition to all-powerful Fidesz can be observed, an opposition that cannot join its forces to replace the government. The power of the "standard" oppositional party, the MSZP, has almost been matched[56] by an at least medium-size party on the right margin (i.e., Jobbik), something inconceivable in the pre-2010 party system.

The ascendance of Jobbik marks a fundamental change not only in arithmetic terms. The extravagant political language of the party has shifted the borders and limits of what is regarded as possible and acceptable. In light of Jobbik's politics, Fidesz, a party labeled by many in the West as right-wing populist, controversial, etc., suddenly appears moderate. Indeed, Fidesz has become the *metric centre* of the new Hungarian party system, which is only compounded by its supermajority status. For a voter reluctant to embrace either Jobbik's radicalism or liberal left discredited as unsuccessful and corrupt, Fidesz seems to be a safe vote. Moreover, it is a vote for a strong and efficient government led by single charismatic leader.

54 Politics Can Be Different (LMP) is a green liberal centrist party that could be conceived of as a functional substitute of SZDSZ. Following the collapse of socialist-liberal bloc, the LMP found its electoral niche in 2010. Surprisingly, it managed to be reelected in 2014, no matter how narrowly. Even this extra-weak party thus confirms the Hungarian system's tendency *not* to produce genuinely one-off parties.

55 More on moderate pluralism see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 173–185

56 This observation also sustains a closer look. In 2014 election single member districts (*all* of them won by Fidesz with the exception of 10), the MSZP-led coalition ended up second in 55, while Jobbik in 41 out of 106. This really does not make a great difference. The remaining 10 are those where Fidesz came second (all of them won by the MSZP-led coalition). Jobbik confirmed its strong positions in the north-eastern parts of the country, partly overlapping with the strongholds of once powerful MSZP.

Turning the focus to the "why" question, three main factors are to be mentioned, each of them related to the respective apexes of the triangle. First, to start with Fidesz, it is the leadership factor. To explain Fidesz's success, it is insufficient to focus solely on the fact of the charismatic personality of Viktor Orbán. After all, Fidesz was led by Orbán at times of a *small* party (1990, 1994), then at times of one of two equal major parties, but often the *losing* one (1998–2010) and now at times of a super-dominant party. Some structural aspects of leadership behind this contingent (personality) factor must be taken into consideration. By this I mean especially (1) the longevity of party leadership, then, and related to this, (2) a capacity of political learning, (3) a tendency of strategic long-term thinking and perspective, and (4) underpinning the leadership by a strong ideological construction.[57] All these leadership assets are best personified precisely by Orbán. He is, indeed, one of the region's long time party leaders, his career dating back to the late 1980s.[58] The process of his political learning included also his first PM term in 1998–2002.[59]

The second factor is linked to the left. The fact of policy and political non-success of the last MSZP-led governments has been successfully re-framed by Hungarian right in terms of a substantial and fundamental failure of left. Socialists and liberals, nicknamed often just (post)communists, have been endowed with an image of a substantially and inherently corrupt and failed entity. There has been a strong moral input to this: leaking of PM Gyurcsány's "famous" lies about the real state of the economics of the country, compounded by a cluster of symbolic coincidences and meanings.[60] Not at

57 The last point refers primarily to the Hungarian right, notably Fidesz. More on the strongly ideological character of right wing parties in Central European comparative perspective see SEAN HANLEY, ALEKSANDER SZCZERBIAK, TIM HAUGHTON, B. FOWLER, Explaining the Success of Centre-Right Parties in Post-Communist East Central Europe: A Comparative Analysis, *SEI Working Paper* 94/2007. To compare to Czech right-wing politics, see S. HANLEY, From neo-liberalism to national interests: Ideology, strategy, and party development in the euroscepticism of the Czech right, *East European Politics & Societies* 3/2004, pp. 513–548.

58 Making a reference to the region, by which the CEE is meant, some other examples of leadership continuity may be mentioned: Donald Tusk, Jaroslaw Kaczynski and Robert Fico.

59 A valuable analysis of Orbán's first PM term was elaborated by Bozoki and Simon in their above mentioned chapter on Hungary called "Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Hungary". Two skills should be paid particular attention: Orbán's mastering of informal political techniques and his talent for political language (a good sense of efficient shortcut, metaphoric, ability to "sell" his discursive inventions to the media, etc)

60 The coincidence with the 50th anniversary of 1956, Gyurcsány's usage of the same words by which the Hungarian media in 1956 admitted having lied "in the morning, in the day and at night", etc.

least, those arrogant, corrupt and politically incompetent socialists, as they were depicted by their opponents, were at the same time exposed and targeted as elitist and oligarchy-leaning *nouveau riches* (or more precisely, *ancient-nouveau riches*, with their suspicious connections and other advantages inherited from the communist past). The same "liar" Gyurcsány was, after all, one of the wealthiest Hungarians.

In both the moral denouncement and anti-oligarchic (anti-neoliberal) targeting of the left, a remarkable parallel may be drawn to 2003–2005 Poland; its Rywin affair and the collapse of Polish left. Comparably to Kaczynski twins' project of Fourth Republic, also Orbán was promising something substantially more than mere electoral victory and government change in 2010. What he was announcing was a profound shift away from so called post-communism, a *de facto* regime change.[61] In this sense, Fidesz presented itself as an antisystem opposition.[62]

Thirdly, and turning to Jobbik, Hungary in the mid 2000s was a case of an economic failure (or stagnation, at best) and of growing social tensions which brought to the forefront, among others, the sensitive Roma issue. Jobbik, with its radical messages and solutions, was profiting strongly from this. Not coincidentally, its electoral map mirrors the socioeconomic patterns of the country. Its strongholds have been the structurally weak and peripheral regions of the east Hungary with high proportion of unemployed and socially excluded population.[63] If the claim suggested above about pre-2010 Fidesz[64] as an antisystem party might seem controversial, Jobbik is a very clear and unambiguous case of antisystemness.

61 For an illustration of this anti-system and highly polarizing political language, see, e.g. „Orbán: Hungary must close post-communist chapter", available at http://www.politics.hu/20111117/orban-hungary-must-close-post-communist-chapter/ [2014-06-06].

62 More on antisystem parties see G. SARTORI, *Parties and party systems*, pp. 132–133. To avoid any hint of misunderstanding, an antisystem party by Sartori does not mean an anti-democratic party. It only means a party that "*undermines the legitimacy of the regime it opposes*". See ibid., p. 132. For a more refined conceptualization of antisystem party see GIOVANNI CAPPOCIA, Anti-System Parties: A Conceptual Reassessment, *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 14/2002, pp. 9–35.

63 This does not necessarily mean that Jobbik supporters *themselves* are economically more frustrated than Hungarian average. Actually, Csaky's analysis suggests the contrary. "Although often depicted as uneducated and coming from lower-income backgrounds, Jobbik supporters are in fact younger, better educated, and more well-off than average voters of the two major parties, Fidesz and the Socialist Party (MSZP)." See ZSELYKE CSAKY, *Hungary: Jobbik and the 'Enemy Within'*, available at http://www.freedomhouse.org/blog/hungary-jobbik-and-%E2%80%98enemy-within%E2%80%99#.U1mn-6Ii5fw [2014-06-06]. The

Hungary: a system with "strong" intervening institutions

In this section a brief look is to be taken on another constant feature of Hungarian politics, which is evident from the table above but which does not fall into the narrow category of party system. It is the way how party system outputs have been formed (deformed?) by the political system inputs.

Two points need to be discussed here: the Constitution as a means of "freezing" the new system and, more narrowly, electoral reform as a way of soft electoral engineering and manufacturing supermajorities.

First, it must be acknowledged that the pre-2011 Hungarian constitution, which was actually the heavily amended 1949 constitution, had already contained a large scope of areas where qualified two-third majority was needed.[65] The fundamental novelty arising in 2010–12 was not so much the fact that the new constitution even further extends this scope[66] but that the constitution was effectively adopted by one party's will and that the same party was capable of adopting new legislative quickly in many of these crucial areas. Thus, it managed to lock the political and institutional setting, or in other words, to freeze the policy consequences of its unique supermajority.[67]

point is that in regions where Jobbik is particularly strong, people live in closer contact with economic deprivation translated most visibly into Roma issue.

64 As for the post-2010 Fidesz, Sartori himself provides clear guidelines how to treat an antisystem movement that manages to capture the system. In his analysis of French Gaullists, classified explicitly as an antisystem party during the Fourth Republic, the conclusion goes unmistakably: the Gaullists ceased to be an antisystem party by changing the system. "Gaullists were anti-system under the Fourth Republic, but impersonated the new system, i.e., the Fifth Republic." See G. SARTORI, *Parties and party systems*, p. 159.

65 This was originally meant as a (post)transition check on potential majoritarian, winner-take-all approach to politics and was to motivate the players across the spectrum to consensus-seeking. The assumption behind this, obviously, is that it would be extremely rare (if not impossible) for *single one* party to achieve this supermajority on its own. More on the context of amending the 1949 constitution at the round table negotiations see JUAN LINZ, ALFRED STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, pp. 293–316. Focusing more specifically on electoral system, see LASZLO BRUSZT, DAVID STARK, Remaking the political field in Hungary: from the politics of confrontation to the politics of competition, *Journal of international affairs* 1/1991, p. 201–245.

66 Media law, law on churches, state citizenship (granted to Hungarians abroad), family and its protection, ethnic minority rights, army, secret services, constitutional court, state prosecutor, central bank, supreme audit office, budget council (an non-elected body with a veto in budget issues *vis a vis* the deputies), regulation and funding of political parties, self-government, general guidelines of fiscal, health and pension policies, emergency rules, etc.

67 The current constitution of Hungary has many more controversial points, most of them summarized and criticized in so called "Tavares report", see *Situation of fundamental*

Second, a more specific part of this process of redrawing the political-institutional map of the country was the change of the election law. This electoral reform qualifies as an electoral system change, even though it did not bring Hungary out of the category of mixed systems with strong majoritarian tendencies.[68] The reform has probably contributed to the fact that Fidesz, despite scoring 45% of votes "only", has been able to reaffirm its two-third majority of seats.[69]

Following Massicotte's and Blais' approach, the pre-reform *supermixed* electoral system has turned into a *correction* system.[70] The pre-2014 system consisted of three components: one majoritarian (plurality-majority two-round), one proportional representation (PR)-based, and one compensational (also PR-based). The majoritarian and PR-based component were separated from each other, thus so far Massicotte's and Blais' system of "*superposition*". However, the third, compensatory component was interconnected with *both* those components, its main function being to *correct* the disproportions arising from the majoritarian component,[71] hence, Massicotte's and Blais' system of "*correction*". And it was precisely this combination of *two* different mixed techniques, correction and superposition, that classified that system as supermixed.

rights: standards and practices in Hungary, available online at European Parliament website: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2013-0315&language=EN&ring=A7-2013-0229 [2014-06-06]. As for the "constitutional locking", the "Tavares report" enumerates 49 cardinal laws adopted within a year and half after the adoption of the new constitution (see section *Extensive use of cardinal laws*, paragraph AH of the "Tavares report").

68 In Shugart's and Wattenberg's classification, Hungary, both before and after the reform (the reform, of course, is not covered in Shugart's and Wattenberg's 2001 book), falls into the category of mixed member majoritarian systems with partial compensation. See M. SHUGART, M. P. WATTENBERG, *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems. The Best of Both Worlds?*, Oxford 2001, pp. 9–25. In Benoit's chapter on Hungary in this book, the Hungarian system is called "mixed mixed-member system", see ibid., p. 477.

69 The probabilistic formulation reflects the fact that it cannot really be "proven" what the outcomes would have been had the majoritarian component of the system remained two-round, rather than first past the post.

70 For Massicotte's and Blais' types of mixed electoral systems see L. MASSICOTE, A. BLAIS, Mixed Electoral Systems: A Conceptual and Empirical Survey, Electoral Studies 3/1999, p. 341–346.

71 This was achieved by adding the defeated parties' candidates' votes (plus the elected candidates' surplus votes) into the base used for calculating the numbers of compensation seats. Only those parties qualified to the both PR-based components that overcame legal thresholds: 5% for individual parties, 10% for 2member coalitions and 15% for 3member coalitions. By surplus votes for elected candidates, I mean the difference between the

This was changed by the electoral reform and in this sense the new law really simplified the system. To mention the most significant modifications only, the reform (1) changed the majoritarian formula from two-round to first-past-the-post (or single member plurality),[72] (2) increased the weight of this majoritarian component by diminishing the overall size of the parliament and not following this diminution faithfully in the majoritarian component,[73] (3) in consequence of above mentioned, redrew the single-member constituencies (i.e., carried out redistricting)[74] and (4) eliminated the PR component (or, merged it with the compensatory one).[75] Some minor changes include introducing postal ballot[76] and setting lower barriers for ethnic minority lists.[77]

total number of elected candidate's votes and the number of votes needed for victory. If a candidate, e.g., got elected winning 105 votes, with the second most successful candidate winning 100 votes, the number necessary for election was 101 and the surplus votes are 4. The second candidate, obviously, would pool *all* their 100 votes to the calculation base (in case, of course, that their party overcame the legal threshold).

72 It must be noted, however, that some plurality (i.e. *not* absolute majority) element had already been present in the old system which stipulated, by law, at least three candidates proceeding into the run-off, thus far from guaranteeing (or "enforcing") absolute majority for the ultimate winner in the district.

73 The total number of parliamentary seats decreased from 386 to 199, while the number of majoritarian seats dropped from 176 to 106, their share increasing from 45,6% to 53,3%.

74 Even though the PR-component based on regional lists (on the level of 20 administrative units) was abolished by the reform (see below), the single-member districts must *still* fit neatly into those 20 units, i.e. the boundaries must not cross cut. This obviously presents a considerable constraint (and setback) for achieving and maintaining good symmetry of electoral districts (i.e., avoiding malapportionment).

75 The remaining maximum 93 seats (with the caveat of minority seats, see below) of the Hungarian parliament are allocated on the basis of (1) the votes for the national party lists and (2) wasted votes for the unelected candidates from the single member constituencies, plus the surplus ("unused") votes for those elected. Thus, there is no change in the construction of the *method* of the compensation (correction). The key change is, however, that this compensation is newly related to much larger proportion of the parliament. This modification thus went in the contrary direction to those above mentioned.

76 This is particularly important in combination with Hungarian ethnic minorities abroad enfranchised by the new citizenship law.

77 There is a trick, though, in this seemingly multicultural novelty. The minority list lowered barrier seems generous at the first sight: one quarter of the simple quota. But the actual "PR votes" are *not* the base used for calculation (i.e., the base is *not* the sum of votes for the national list). It is, again, the same basis used for the calculation of compensation seats. To remind, the base is "inflated" by the votes for the eliminated single-member district candidates and the surplus votes for the winners. In 2014 election the difference between the real calculation base and what would probably have been a "fair" base was approximately 3,3 million votes. See the National Election Office data, available online at http://www.valasztas.hu/hu/ogyv2014/861/861_0_index.html [2014-06-06].

Summarizing the main directions[78] of change, the electoral reform underscores the majoritarian character of the Hungarian mixed electoral system (extends the share of the majoritarian component) and by replacing the two-round[79] formula with the first-past-the-post one it crucially changes the strategic incentives of coalitional behavior. Until 2014, the major parties were *not* forced to form pre-election coalitions in order to maximize their power in the first round. The system led them to establishing alliances with the major partner(s) *between* the rounds.[80]

In the reformed system, the first-past-the-post formula presents a strong incentive to avoid vote splitting by collecting broad coalitions of similar-profile parties. This is exactly what MSZP did in 2014 in its efforts to challenge Fidesz. A five-member coalition was formed, as late as January 2014, i.e. only

78 The issue of redistricting is largely left aside in this article as it would require a more thorough and rigorous analysis. The accusations by Fidesz opponents of gerrymandering are too serious for a researcher to be able to neglect such analysis. In this article there is no space for it. Anyway, some general observations may be made. There is some asymmetry in the size of electoral districts (affecting the weight of votes in consequence). There is also some tendency for typical pro-Fidesz districts to be somewhat smaller in population (i.e. slightly overrepresented) as compared to constituencies where the Fidesz usually scores below average. For instance, all districts in regions Csongrád, Heves, Nográd and Komárom-Esztergom have more than 80 000 registered voters. Most districts in regions Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok come close to this size. All these are 2010 Fidesz's below average regions (and electoral geography has got quite a stable pattern). Another Fidesz's weak point, Budapest is not particularly underrepresented in terms of numbers of registered voters but as it consistently displays significantly higher turnout the underrepresentation is rather *de facto*. Western Fidesz-leaning regions like Tolna, Vas, Somogy have all their districts under 70 000 and some other like Fejér, Gyor-Moson-Sopron or Veszprem just slightly over this figure. On the other hands, the small pre-2014 districts showed even bigger asymmetry – however without any clear bias. See a table on Hungarian electoral website http://www.valasztas.hu/en/parval2010/298/298_0_index.html [2014-06-07].

79 For a generally critical approach to two-round systems, see SARAH BIRCH, Two-Round Electoral Systems and Democracy, *Comparative Political Studies* 3/2003, pp. 319–344. For a contrary opinion see G. SARTORI, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, New York 1994.

80 Even this way, the old electoral system was a strong intervening institutional factor. Mlejnek, e.g., criticizes it for distorting what could have been a naturally tripolar system and deforming it "artificially" into a strongly polarized bipolar system. See J. MLEJNEK, Brzda, plyn, nebo deformátor?, p. 2 and 21.This "artificiality"-involving argument (assuming probably also some objective "naturality") does not seem completely convincing, even though Mlejnek's criticism of a majoritarian-leaning system could otherwise be shared. A more plausible case could be made that it was actually the major parties' language of politics and strong systemic polarization that crushed the potential third (liberal) pole at the very outset.

a few months before the election, after long negotiations and quarrels between its to-be members. The leftist pole, once so coherent and robust, suddenly resembled a chaotic tangle of various groups.

Admittedly, the backbone of the coalition was the MSZP, while the other four members seemed to be rather its minor appendices.[81] On the other hand, some of them were led by distinct and ambitious leaders, including two former leftist PMs.[82] Moreover, the polls had consistently been suggesting that the minor centre-left parties could "waste", if they ran independently, approximately 15% of vote.[83] This wasting obviously refers primarily to the first-past-the-post component of the electoral system. In the PR-based national lists even these minor parties could win some seats provided they overcame legal threshold. Anyway, if MSZP efforts to challenge and defeat Fidesz were to look credible and serious, collecting and concentrating all votes akin to socialist *before* the election was a highly rational and highly urgent strategy.

It is not possible to make a direct argument that introducing one-round election *as such* has benefited Fidesz and harmed other parties. For it would inevitably be a speculation to try to project the current first-past-the-post outcomes into the previous two-round formula. It would be highly tricky to try to assess, e.g., whether the MSZP-led coalition could have achieved more than its actual 10 seats (in the majoritarian component) had the system been two-round as in 2010.[84]

81 This is at least what the composition of the centre-left coalition's 2014 national list suggests. The first five positions have been occupied by the parties' leaders but the rest of the list has been clearly dominated by MSZP candidates.

82 A group called Democratic Coalition (DK) has been led by Ferenc Gyurcsány and another one, named Together 2014 (E14), by his successor, technocratic caretaker PM Gordon Bajnai. Another member of the left-centre coalition has been Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP), established by 2008–9 SZDSZ leader Gábor Fodor. The last member, called Dialogue for Hungary (PM), was a splinter from Greens (LMP) that left them after LMP had decided *not* to join the broad left-centre coalition.

83 According to December 2013 poll carried out by Medián, Gyurcány's DK scored 6% of those declaring they would definitely vote and that time E14-PM alliance scored 8%. To mention also the party that finally did not join the coalition later, LMP's popularity was at 1%. The sum of these potentially wasted centre-left votes was 15%. See http://hvg.hu/itthon/20135152_median_fidesztulero [2014-06-07]. Another poll (by Századvég) from the same time shows a sum of 12% for E14-PM, DK and LMP. See http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20131228_2_szazalekot_mert_fodor_gaboreknak_a_szazadveg [2014/06-07].

84 Into some degree of plausibility, a contrary projection may be done: "re-counting" 2010 results (within the majoritarian component all the time, of course) as if they were first-past-the-post. In such a case, two of the three non-Fidesz seats (out of the total 176!) would have gone to Fidesz. See the first-round first placed candidates in a table on the Hungarian electoral

Moreover, it is not the electoral reform on its own to be blamed[85] for the fact that Hungarian left has got structured in an unhappy way as a heterogeneous and incoherent five-member alliance. A crucial "precondition" for this grim left-centre's appearance was the previous (post-2010) disintegration of the left-centre, which was, in turn, a consequence of its previous *failure*. On the other hand, electoral system with its strategic incentives has definitely functioned as an important *intervening* factor.

Summary – Hungary

The aim of the Hungarian chapter was to show a reconstruction of one of the Europe's most stable party systems. The main features of the "old" pre-reconstruction system were its fairly low volatility, a concentrated, bipolar symmetric format plus a highly (and increasingly) polarized right-left competition based on stable alliances between stable parties. Politics in Hungary was structured into two blocs, each of them led by one strong party, MSZP and Fidesz.

The reconstruction turned this system into a strongly asymmetric triangular format with one super-dominant (hegemonic) party, Fidesz, and two roughly same size (i.e., medium to large) opposition parties, each on a different side of the hegemon. One of those was the collapsed second pole (MSZP) and the other was a new-coming far right party, Jobbik, whose political language meets the criteria of an antisystem opposition.

Three main factors of this reconstruction have been identified: a failure of the left (a combination of unsuccessful policies of MSZP-led governments and right wing's reframing of the left as inherently failed and corrupt), leadership (conceived also as a structural factor, not merely the phenomenon of Viktor Orbán's personality) and an increased demand for radical protest politics as a consequence of Hungary's grim economic situation since at least mid 2000s, demand materialized by rise of Jobbik.

It has only been the 2014 election as a significant verification test which makes it possible to put forward the party system change assertion as a plausible

website: http://www.valasztas.hu/hu/parval2010/354/354_0_index.html [2014-06-07]. The plausibility of such a modeling is apparently limited by the fact that, had the 2010 election been one-round the players could have re-grouped into coalitions to avoid vote-splitting precisely in a way how MSZP and its minor partners did in 2014.

85 More generally, the author of this article is somewhat skeptical to electoral engineering and stands much closer to, e.g., Colomer's approach than to Duverger's. See JOSEP COLOMER, 'It's the Parties that Choose Electoral Systems (or Duverger's Laws Upside Down)', *Political Studies* 1/2005, pp. 1–21, and M. DUVERGER, *Les partis politiques*, Paris 1951.

claim. Before 2014 election, the 2010 electoral earthquake might still have been considered as a temporary deviation from the usual pattern of Hungarian politics. Fairly low 2010–14 volatility suggests that the 2010 result probably was to be a more lasting change.

Moreover, a strong intervening impact of electoral system has made the volatility even lower as far as the percentage of *seats*, instead of votes, is concerned. The Fidesz's plurality (45% of votes) has been translated into a manufactured two-third majority of seats. Rigorously, it is not possible to ascribe this effect to the electoral reform implemented before the 2014 election. It is beyond doubt, however, that the electoral reform has underscored the majoritarian character of the system and introduced strong incentives to pre-election coalition making, an example of which has been precisely the MSZP-led electoral coalition.

Another good example of strong intervening institutions is the new Hungarian constitution which has a considerable freezing (locking) effect due to its abundance of qualified majority requirements (so called cardinal laws).

Slovakia and Hungary in comparative perspective

In a comparative synthesis of the above two case studies, thus far self-standing stories, the primary aim is to achieve a better understanding of different patterns of party system *persistence and change*. The main focus is, thus, dynamic. Some static element of the analysis, yet, is needed as well to capture the logics of a party system in a defined time span, both in terms of format and of mechanics. The defined time span is structured here as pre- and post-reconstruction periods.

In this last chapter, five main areas of difference between the Slovak and Hungarian party system are explored. Two of them are format-related, two are mechanics-related, and one is dynamic (persistence/change-related).

Concentration of the party system

For Sartori, party system format is an important presumption for its mechanics. The idea is that the more parties (i.e., the more fragmented system) the more likely it is that all those parties have to stretch wide along the ideological scale (i.e., the bigger polarization).[86] Two words are crucial here: "presumption" and "likely". Sartori is far from a dogmatic Downsian and reflects well that

86 For interrelation of fragmentation and polarization, see G. SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, pp. 126–128.

the term party system *mechanics* should not imply that things really work mechanically. In his discussion of the relation between segmentation and polarization[87] he shows how a large number of relevant parties need not actually lead to a centrifugal system.

Hungary is a contrary example of a country where a very concentrated format has coincided with intensive polarization. Ironically, it could be said that the less relevant parties in the system, the larger the ideological distances between them (e.g., nowadays between Jobbik and socialist-led centre-left coalition).

Slovakia has consistently displayed much higher levels of fragmentation as the table below shows. The polarization in the 1990s was even higher than in Hungary as the dichotomy between "mečiarists" and "antimečiarists" was stated in strong terms of regime(s) and (non)democracy. In the 2000s, the system got depolarized despite the effective number of parties remaining high. Polarization is not the central focus of analysis in this article – here it departs from the Sartorian framework. The central focus is on dynamics of party system persistence and change.

Table 4: *fragmentation of party systems in V4 countries*

Parl. Election nr.*	*SK*	*H*
1	4,98	3,79
2	3,19	2,89
3	4,41	3,45
4	4,75	2,21
5	6,12	2,40
6	4,81	1,98
7	4,01	2,01
8	2,88	--
Average	**4,39**	**2,67**

ENP = effective number of parties – here in terms of *parliamentary* parties, counted on the basis of the percentage of seats achieved in the election (M. LAAKSO, R. TAAGEPERA, Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe, *Comparative Political Studies* 12/1979, pp. 3–27)

Sources: author's own calculations based on data from Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, available online at http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=4490 [2014-06-07], and Hungarian National Election Office, available online at http://www.valasztas.hu/en/ogyv2014/index.html [2014-06-07].

* In Slovakia elections 1990, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012. In Hungary elections 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014.

87 Ibid, pp. 312–314.

The table shows that in Hungary there has been an overall tendency towards party system concentration, even though the changes are not dramatic. In Slovakia, a bell-curve can be observed, instead. From 1998, the system was de-concentrating up to the reconstruction election of 2002 when the record-high value of 6,12 was scored. Since then, the ENP has been decreasing – up to the current 2,88 (very similar to 3,19 in 1992).

Why is there this marked difference between Slovakia and Hungary as far as the concentration or fragmentation of the system is concerned? The answer is not searched for in this section and it is delegated to the section below. The reason is obvious. Both format-related aspects of the party systems explored here (i.e., concentration and a/symmetry) are interconnected, therefore similar or same variables will be used explaining them.

A/symmetry of the party system

As demonstrated in the case studies above, Hungary was a clearly bipolar system in its stability period (1998–2010) and a strongly asymmetric system afterwards. Slovakia has tended, for the whole post-1990 period, to an asymmetric format, though less pronounced one than in post-2010 Hungary (and without *any* asymmetry in the two exceptional elections that anticipated and launched the process of reconstruction, 1998 and 2002). In the Slovak soft version of asymmetry, the majority status of the winning party has been an exception. In the post-2010 Hungarian hard type of asymmetry, the *super*-majority has been the *rule*.

Specifying the Slovak pattern as a *moderate* asymmetry (moreover with two elections as exceptions) and Hungarian as *strong* bipolarity followed by *strong* asymmetry (with *no* exceptions), it actually becomes obvious that the *both* format-related differences between Slovakia and Hungary explored in this and previous sections are interconnected. Higher concentration in Hungary corresponds with strong bipolarity and strong asymmetry, while somewhat larger fragmentation in Slovakia corresponds with a less pronounced form of asymmetry (disrupted, moreover, by the yet more fragmented 1998 and 2002 election).

It is, thus, reasonable to try to account for both features using the same variable/s. Not surprisingly, and following the path outlined in the case studies above, electoral system is suggested as such a most significant variable. It has already been discussed thoroughly in the section "Hungary: a system with "strong" intervening institutions" how the Hungarian supermixed electoral system, labeled as "highly majoritarian" in table 1 above, strongly shaped the party system towards more bipolarity via its strategic incentives and how the electoral reform only underscored its majoritarian character.

On the other hand, Slovakia uses one of the purest proportional systems in Europe. After the "Mečiar's" 1998 electoral reform, the whole country is a one-at-large electoral district.[88] Moreover, the only majoritarian feature introduced by that reform, a stricter additive legal threshold, was abolished[89] soon after the 1998 "antimečiarist" electoral victory.[90] This threshold had, nevertheless, reshaped the Slovak party system, at least in short term, for the single event of the 1998 election. Widely understood as a purposeful tool against then just formed "antimečiarist" broad coalition SDK, the electoral reform made the SDK members establish an *ad hoc* electoral party of the same name in order to bypass the 25% threshold that would otherwise have been applied to an overt five-member coalition. The Hungarian coalition, MK, responded in another way: its member parties merged into the SMK party.

In the medium and long term, however, Slovakia shows the superiority of the Colomer's logics over the Duvergerian one.[91] The continuation of the story was, indeed, about *parties making (choosing) electoral systems*,[92] rather than *ad vice versa*. The well-established logics of the "old" pre-reform multiparty system prevailed over electoral engineering; the hint of bipolarity (with SDK as one pole) quickly proved as an illusion and SDK was dissolved into the original coalition parties.[93] To sum up, Slovakia is a system *without* strongly

88 Also before the reform, the Slovak electoral system was highly proportional, with 150 seats to be divided into three electoral districts only (and a "soft" Hagenbach-Bischoff formula used to allocate the seats).

89 More precisely, Slovakia abandoned the hardest possible form of the additive threshold (5% for each additional party in the coalition) and returned to the pre-reform softer version of the differentiated threshold: 5% for single parties, 7% for two- to three-member coalitions and 10% for four-member coalitions.

90 The reform as such had been a compromise between the preferences of the dominant player, HZDS, wishing to introduce a majoritarian system, and its two minor coalition partners, pushing for as proportional system as possible. Ironically, the compromise as if reflected the will of the minor partners (one-at-large electoral district). On the other hand, there actually *was* some indirect majoritarian bonus in the reform. Slovakia as one-at-large district made it possible for a charismatic leader of a dominant political party to run as the party list leader in the whole country.

91 Duverger's position is summarized in his famous laws on electoral systems' impact on party systems. See M. DUVERGER, *Les partis politiques*, Paris 1951. Colomer turns this argument upside down and claims the primacy of the party system. See J. COLOMER, It's the Parties that Choose Electoral Systems, pp. 1–21.

92 An allusion to the name of Colomer's famous article, see note above.

93 The only difference from the pre-reform situation was the existence of a new party, SDKÚ, as an effort to continue the SDK ethos. But even this "old-new" party can plausibly be regarded as a functional replacement of the previous DU party. Also with the Hungarian political

intervening institutions, as opposed to Hungary with its majoritarian-leaning electoral system.

Is Hungary, thus, a contrary example of the prevalence of Duvergerian logics? Partly yes. It is beyond doubt that above described strategic incentives of a majoritarian-leaning electoral system shaped the party system strongly.[94] Taking into consideration Bruszt's and Stark's analysis, however, Colomerian logics may not be dismissed, either.[95] It was really political parties, quite early established and structured in transitioning Hungary, whose will and preferences the electoral law reflected. And the only difference with the 2012 electoral reform is that it reflects just *one party's* will.[96] Another powerful argument in favor of Colomer is that in 2010, the Hungarian party system change actually *predated* the electoral system change. And carried out by Fidesz, the latter "only" froze the former into place, at least for the time being.

Anyway, taking a position in the grand and general debate about the relation between the electoral and party system is not the aim of this article. It is sufficient for our analysis to conclude claiming that Hungarian electoral system has strongly helped concentrate the party system and establish its bipolar format, while in Slovakia such effect has been absent. In Slovakia, the only latently "distorting" feature is the fact that one (potential) charismatic leader covers the whole country (one-at-large district) as a party list leader. Strictly speaking, this is *less* an effect of an electoral system *per se*[97] than an effect of the *political culture* (personalisation of politics, strong demand for such powerful leaders, etc.).

The difference between the Hungarian strongly concentrated and mostly bipolar (or, most recently, strongly unipolar) format and the Slovak less concentrated and moderately asymmetric format obviously does not lie in electoral system solely. Other factors, such as structure of cleavages, leadership or ideology, must be taken into consideration, too. Some of them are discussed in the mechanics-related sections below.

representation, the party system logics prevailed over electoral system engineering. The "enforced" single-party unity gave way to the previous multi-party pattern after SMK split in 2010 and a new party, Most-Híd, emerged.

94 See also above mentioned Mlejnek's discussion of a deformed system.

95 Their analysis of the origins (and round table context) of the Hungarian electoral system shows that it was, indeed, parties who chose the electoral system, although Bruszt and Stark do not discuss directly the Duvergerian or Colomerian logics. See L. BRUSZT, D. STARK, Remaking the political field in Hungary, pp. 201–245.

96 Of course, another significant difference is that back in 1989 parties had neither good information nor a good estimate of their real electoral strength.

97 It must be added, that as such, it is counterweighed by the high overall proportionality.

Meaning and robustness of right-left axis

In both Slovakia and Hungary, politics is currently structured along a right-left axis. There are, though, crucial differences in terms of *meaning* of this axis (i.e., the contents, types of issues that it represents) and its robustness.

Beginning with the latter, by robustness I mean (1) how long the right-left polarity has been a dominant force in the respective party system (i.e., the right-left axis durability) and (2) how much or how often it is challenged by various outsider players who aim to penetrate the system by challenging and changing its right-left logics (i.e., the right-left axis stability).

As shown above in the case studies, while Hungary has been a right-left organized polity for the whole post-transition period, in Slovakia it only established itself as a part of the party system reconstruction in the post-2002 period. Also in terms of stability, in Slovakia there have been many more challengers and, even more importantly, the tendency seems to be upwards: the frequency and intensity of attacks on the right-left axis seems to be increasing (as shown above in the Slovak chapter).

As far as the *meaning* of the axis is concerned, in Slovakia it is primarily socio-economic. This meaning was established when Fico's Smer positioned itself clearly against the neoliberal economic reforms of the 2002–2006 right wing coalition government and underwent a social democratic turn.

In Hungary, on the other hand, the right-left axis is mainly cultural, value-based. It is an analogy of what is routinely called in Poland in quite strong terms as *worldview* divisions. On the right side of the polarity, principles like staunch anticommunism, Christian (Catholic) conservatism, nationalism and (into some degree) rural populism may be found. The left, on the other hand, represents the cosmopolitan, urban and secular values. In socio-economic terms, it has often been the Hungarian *left* to push neoliberal reforms, while right mobilizing against them.[98]

The analysis here may not go too far and deep in the search for the explanations for the right-left axis *meaning* (contents) difference. This would necessarily involve some historical, political-cultural and cleavage-based variables, which are aspects deliberately left somewhat aside in this article.[99] It is the *robustness* differences that may be more easily derived from the developments of the party systems as such. As this party-systemic aspect of

98 An example of this is a 2008 referendum organized by Fidesz against the medical fees.

99 Kitschelt et al offer a plausible hypothesis that after the fall of communism, some previous (deeper historical) features of party politics have been restored. See H. KITSCHELT, Z. MANSFELDOVA, R MARKOWSKI, G. TÓKA, *Post-Communist Party Systems.*

right-left polarity is strongly interconnected with the structure of alliances (coalition patterns), the search for explanations is fluently continued in the section below.

Coalition patterns

The structure of alliances in Slovakia and Hungary is fundamentally different at the first sight. In Slovakia, as illustrated in the case study chapter above, there has always been the alliance between the dominant player (be it the pragmatic personalistic project like HZDS, or the left-wing social democracy like Smer) and the nationalists. The counter-alliance has always been the Catholics (conservatives), liberals (centre-right "urban" sector of Slovak politics) and ethnic minority (Hungarian) representation.[100] To put it swiftly, nationalism has tended to ally itself with leftism, while conservatism with (neo)liberalism and urban cosmopolitism.[101]

In Hungary, a completely opposite situation may be observed. There has always been the leftist-liberal alliance against the conservative-nationalist one. In other words, if Hungary had shared the same pattern with Slovakia, it would not have been unconceivable for Socialists to join their forces with Jobbik (the *functional* analogy of the SNS) against the Fidesz. Or, even more speculatively, if Slovakia were like Hungary, the two probably most adversarial entities (social democrats and urban liberals) would be on one side against the rest of the spectrum. This provocative counterfactual comparison is to show how deep a party-system ditch the Danube River makes between the two countries.

Interestingly, in both countries the above described coalition patterns have survived the party system reconstructions, even though some half hearted attempts have been made in Slovakia to overcome the leftist-catholic cleavage. In Hungary, a caveat is needed, though. Speaking about conservative-nationalist coalitional pattern, there is obviously no alliance in the post-2010 period between the conservatives (Fidesz) and nationalists (Jobbik). Such an alliance is not arithmetically necessary and the two parties are staunch competitors over the conservative-patriotic electorate. Before 2010, the situation was different. No relevant nationalist party existed (with the ephemeral exception of MIEP) and the values of nationalism were subsumed

100 In 1994–1998 (2002), left was also part of this alliance but at the price of sharp internal tensions in the SDL, the product of which was the emergence of Smer in 1999.

101 And even when left was a part of the latter alliance (see note above) it was a more cosmopolitan and neoliberal face of the Slovak left which virtually disappeared after 2002.

in the conservative-patriotic message of Fidesz (and previously MDF, or other minor right wing parties).

The "why question" emerges here again. What makes the two countries (and party systems) that divergent as it becomes manifest in their structures of alliances? Why are the positions and linkages in the conservative-liberal-nationalist-leftist square so different? Why does nationalism tend to ally with the right in Hungary and with the left in Slovakia?[102] At certain level of generality, the search for answer could fall into the trap of essentialization of the ideologies, which is *not* the course that this article follows.[103] It focuses, rather, on the *relational* aspects of inter-party positions and interactions in the party system. This necessarily involves more space for time-contingent and arbitrary factors than in the more essentializing approach. Path dependency can be used as a suitable theory bridge between the party system analysis and this time-contingent factor to avoid a complete arbitrariness.

The critical juncture at the moment of the Slovak party system formation was such a coincidence of issues that made it highly likely for a leftist-nationalist alliance to emerge. In the early 1990s, the Slovak search for more autonomy (first within the Czechoslovak federation, later not necessarily so) overlapped with the Slovak resistance towards some agendas pushed strongly from the Czech side, then beginning to be dominated by the right: rapid free market reforms and "dealing with the past" (accompanied by adoption of some anticommunist laws).

Another critical juncture came later when some, even much more far reaching neoliberal reforms were pushed *from within* Slovakia by the reduced version of the alliance that had been formed against the former dominant player (HZDS) and defeated him in 1998.[104] At that time, in 2002–2006, another

102 Some important details are disregarded on this level of analysis. Just to remind, no relevant nationalist party exists now in Slovakia. In our argument, it is *functionally subsumed* in the Smer-SD politics. Also the above stated caveat of a lack of Fidesz-Jobbik alliance must be reminded here. On the other hand, this caveat may simply be bracketed as this alliance option has not been arithmetically necessary so far and nobody knows yet if it would be established were it needed in the future.

103 A possible track in the alternative line of analysis not taken here would be making a distinction between a young nation (Slovaks) on one side where an alliance of nationalist and leftist has been a "natural" consequence of the two emancipating missions, and old established (dominant) nation (Hungarians) on the other side where such an identity-forging alliance was not necessary and a conflict about the sets of *values* within a well established polity took place instead.

104 The main wave of neoliberal reforms came one term later, in 2002–2006, when this alliance could afford to dismiss all of its leftist elements (SDL had been pushed out by Smer by then).

dominant player gathered force, a player who resumed the old nationalist-leftist alliance (in a new constellation of players and powers, of course) in the resistance against the domestic right wing.

In Hungary, the sequence of critical junctures led to different outcomes. The first was in 1994 when the liberals accepted the socialist offer to form a (arithmetically redundant) governmental coalition. This acceptance must also be seen as a liberal response to their experience with the previous MDF-led right-wing conservative government – Antall's cabinet that attempted to restore some of the historical traditions (Horthy's legacy, e.g.) that the liberals definitely were not comfortable with.[105]

The second critical juncture came around 2010 when this socialist-liberal alliance (after it proved politically viable in longer-term prospect) was successfully labeled by their opponents as essentially corrupt and failing. The path dependency proved so strong, however, that this alliance survived the party system reconstruction.

Comparing the two sets of critical junctures, in Slovakia we can see a nationalist-leftist alliance opposing two neoliberal waves (the first pushed mainly from the Czech lands in the still federal context). In Hungary, the left has, on the other hand, become an *agent* of neoliberal policies – together with liberals. And the nationalist-populist resistance against these policies came from the right (quite in line with deeper historical leanings of the mainly rural-based Hungarian right).

Different dynamics of persistence/change

Hungary is a party system displaying long time stability followed with a late (post 2010) reconstruction. In other words, the Hungarian system (which was strongly shaped by the intervening institutions such as electoral system) resisted any reconstruction for a long time. Slovakia, on the other hand, is a case of relative stability in the initial period and a "post-millennium" party system reconstruction. In this, it fits into a similar pattern like Poland, Bulgaria or Lithuania. In all these countries, as if the "old system" of 1990s became depleted and "needed" a reconstruction around the turn of the millennium. In some of these countries, genuinely new political players (i.e., outsiders) were

105 More on using history as a polarization instrument in Hungary see A. BOZOKI – E. SIMON, Formal Institutions and Informal Politics in Hungary, pp. 143–190, or also L. BRUSZT, D. STARK, Remaking the political field in Hungary, pp. 201–245. More specifically on politics of memory see Z. CSIPKE, The Changing Significance of the 1956 Revolution in Post-Communist Hungary, pp. 99–128.

the leaders of this process (like Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in Bulgaria). In others, it was rather a regrouping, redefining and relabeling of the old players (Kaczyński and Tusk in Poland[106]).

Slovakia is, thus, a case of a "millennium" reconstruction, while Hungary a case of a late reconstruction (it came a decade *after* Slovakia). How can this Slovak-Hungarian difference be explained? The answer proposed here is based on a conceptual innovation already mentioned above. Slovak party system in the pre-reconstruction period was characterized by the prevalence of logics of *personalization*[107] which in turn means a late (delayed) ideological construction of identities in the system. The party system reconstruction was actually nothing else than such a process of *construction*.

Hungary, on the other hand, has been, since the very outset, a prominent example of logics of *personification* (i.e., a strong ideological construction as a fundamental part of the personalistic project).[108] The ideological element that pervaded the system proved powerful enough to provide for the system coherence until very recently. The downside of this was that this permanent ideological reproduction was based on a continuous polarization (as exemplified, e.g., by the 2006 events). Eventually, the bipolar system could not hold on resisting this constant polarizing pull, burst out[109] and changed its shape into an asymmetric tripolarism (i.e., almost unipolarism) as of nowadays.

This section does not aim (and does not wish to aim) to provide answers why the reconstructions came exactly when they came. It aims to explain why the Slovak one came significantly earlier than the Hungarian one. The variable of ideology (as an important component of the logics of personalization) is suggested as the dominant factor.

106 Even though the early phase of the reconstruction in Poland was also accompanied with the ascendance of some new (or "newer") protest players (Samoobrona, League of Polish Families).

107 There were, from the very beginning, some well-profiled subcultural parties, as shown in the Slovak case study above. Only KDH, though, was a programmatic and ideological party – much less the two "ethnicity-based" parties. But most importantly, that time *dominant player*, the HZDS (but also of the pre-2002 Smer), was characterized by significant ideological and programmatic vagueness.

108 More on this ideological character of right-centre parties see S. HANLEY, A. SZCZERBIAK, T. HAUGHTON, B. FOWLER, *Explaining the Success of Centre-Right Parties in Post-Communist East Central Europe*.

109 Jobbik's ascendance may be interpreted of such an ideological over-tension in the system – with the only caveat that Jobbik did not ascend at the expense of its ideological neighbor, but rather of the failed left.

Table 6: *general summary of party system patterns in Slovakia and Hungary*

	Slovakia	**Hungary**
Single-party majority governments	Yes (once)	Yes (twice)
Usual size of ruling coalitions	More than two	Two
Stability of composition of coalitions	Medium*	Stable
Meaning of right-left axis	Socio-economic	Cultural (value-based)
Robustness of right-left axis	Medium	Robust
Party system reconstruction	Yes ("millennium")	Yes ("late", post-2010)
Fragmentation	Medium-high	Low
Format	moderately asymmetric	strongly bipolar, to strongly asymmetric

Summary

Slovakia and Hungary: two different cases of party system change and persistence after 2000

Jiří Koubek

Slovak 2014 presidential election with its extraordinarily high score for independent nonpartisan and anti-established-parties candidates has aroused an impression of a profound change of Slovak politics going on. Hungarian 2014 parliamentary election, on the contrary, has brought almost no result discontinuity as far as the previous (2010) is concerned. The image of Hungarian politics as essentially frozen is thus hard to dismiss.

This article argues that to announce a genuine party system change in Slovakia seems at least a premature conclusion. On the other hand, the striking continuity in Hungary is actually a delayed message of a fundamental change that happened (and has only been confirmed now) in 2010.

As for Slovakia, the seemingly breakthrough 2014 electoral outcome has taken place in the *presidential* arena where the results have always been incompatible with the main Slovak electoral arena, i.e. parliamentary. Moreover, the presidential election outcome has not broken any of the main features of Slovak party politics: right-left competition with stable alliances, asymmetric format and coexistence of stable-core parties in some segments and rather unstable ones in the liberal "urban" sector.

Turning to Hungary, the frozen (or locked) character of its politics, as exemplified not only by the electoral non-change of 2014 but also, on another

level, by the 2012 constitution, should not deflect the observer from a crucial fact: it has been a fundamental *change* what has been frozen into place. A change that has entirely transformed the logics of inter-party competition: from a symmetric bipolar right-left to a highly asymmetric unipolar with centre of gravity heavily shifted to the right and the *metric* centre of the system embodied by the thoroughly rightist Fidesz party.

In both countries an anti-establishment protest-like opposition seems to be on rise. In Hungary it is radical and nationalistic. In Slovakia it is (so far) moderate and follows a general anti-party and anti-traditional-politicians sentiment. It is not beyond imagination in a foreseeable future, though, that the missing component in each of the countries could emerge. After all, in Slovakia this would just mean a return to one its patterns (existence of a radical nationalistic party). In Hungary, any powerful antiparty and non-ideological movement would be a novelty. But even a frozen country could soon come to follow other European countries' example.

This article has set the recent development in the neighboring countries into the context. In the two case studies, it first showed the main features of both party systems in terms of format and mechanics. In Slovakia, it was the moderately asymmetric format and a somewhat "fragile" (belated in its ascendance and at times vulnerable) right-left pattern of competition based on socio-economic issues. In Hungary, it was a stable bipolarity, reflecting a cultural (value-based) right-left conflict, transformed recently into a strong asymmetric format, shaped in both stages by strong intervening institutions.

In the final comparative chapter, the Slovak-Hungarian differences have been explored in more detail and some tentative answers have been suggested: electoral system for the format-related differences, divergent logics of post-1990 path dependency for the mechanics-related differences and, finally, *personalization/personification* distinction for the differences in dynamics (a late, post-2010 party system reconstruction in Hungary as opposed to an earlier, "millennium" reconstruction in Slovakia).