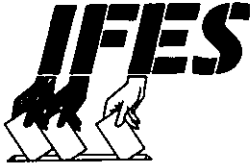


Date Printed: 11/03/2008

JTS Box Number: IFES_5
Tab Number: 20
Document Title: Hungary Election countdown: An Update on
1990 Parliamentary Elections
Document Date: 1990
Document Country: Hungary
IFES ID: R01657



* B B 1 0 F D B A - 3 7 E 2 - 4 0 E 4 - B 3 C F - 1 6 4 5 0 6 4 1 1 9 1 B *



International Foundation for Electoral Systems

1620 I STREET, N.W. • SUITE 611 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006 • (202) 828-8507

**HUNGARY ELECTION COUNTDOWN:
AN UPDATE ON 1990 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

By
Ceci Cole McInturff
Executive Vice President

For the
International Foundation on Electoral Systems

March 8, 1990

F. Clifton White Resource Center
International Foundation
for Election Systems
1101 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

**SCAMMON
COLLECTION**

BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

F. Clifton White
Chairman

Patricia Hutar
Secretary

Robert C. Walker
Treasurer

James M. Cannon

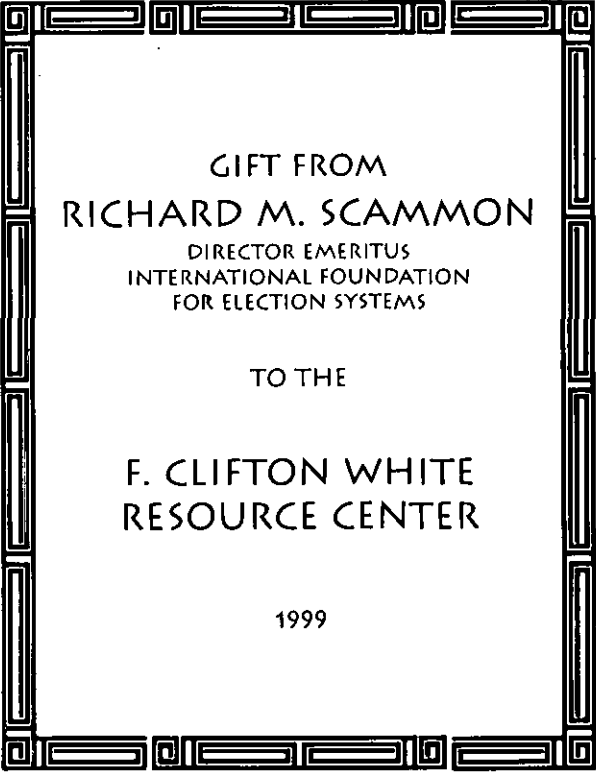
Charles T. Manatt

Richard M. Scammon

Richard B. Stone

Randal C. Teague
Counsel

FAX: (202) 452-0804



GIFT FROM
RICHARD M. SCAMMON
DIRECTOR EMERITUS
INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION
FOR ELECTION SYSTEMS

TO THE

F. CLIFTON WHITE
RESOURCE CENTER

1999

HUNGARY ELECTION COUNTDOWN:
AN UPDATE ON 1990 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

1. SCOPE

Since the original assessment of Hungarian electoral law was produced in late 1989, return trips to Hungary have provided opportunities to chart substantial shifting in the political situation there. As elections for Parliament approach on March 25, events have continued to develop quickly, and in relative terms to the rest of the region, Hungary's electoral situation remains at a fairly sophisticated level.

In February 1990, I returned to Hungary to speak at a two-day colloquium on election law open to all political parties and featuring Democratic and Republican election experts, Hungary's National Electoral Commission Chairman, and its Director of the Elections Office of the Interior Ministry. Additional briefings with political party representatives and candidates also were held.

In March 1990, consultants Maxene Fernstrom and Rich Galen returned to Hungary to oversee production of public service announcements by the National Electoral Commission which explain the vote procedure and urging voter turnout, as well as to meet with political party representatives and candidates.

Both trips were sponsored by the National Republican Institute for International Affairs.

Information included in this report was obtained chiefly from these two trips.

2. SUMMARY DEVELOPMENTS AS OF 1990:

. Partisan Shifting:

As expected after last November's referendum, the former-majority Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) has seen its public support drop as the Association of Free Democrats (SDS) has seen its grow, so that both are now rated relatively evenly and appear headed to elect substantial blocs within Parliament.

[MDF has, however, begun to address a number of its weaknesses outlined in the original report: it publicly pledged not to ally in Parliament with HSP under any condition, has somewhat addressed alleged anti-Semitism within some of its ranks so that this appears to be a declining public concern regarding this party, and has hired a full-time, English-speaking "mediagenic" campaign manager, Count Stephen von Bethlen.]

The largest late surge of growth of support is now occurring for the Independent Smallholders (the former smallholders party has split into two branches since November: Independents and Nationals), which now holds greater support than FIDESZ.

March poll measurements of party support are:

Median:		Gallup:	
SDS	20 %	SDS	19 %
MDF	16.6	MDF	18
Ind. Smlholders	13.1	Ind. Smlholders	16.8
HSP	9.1	----	
Undecided	27.0	----	

Overall, of the numerous parties which existed late last year, a core group of 12 has filed sufficient numbers of candidates to qualify for the so-called national list, meaning each earned the right to place a representative on the National Electoral Commission and will have its national votes pooled to compete for a percentage of a bloc of 58 parliamentary seats the law mandates will be awarded based upon national totals.

. Parliamentary Prospects:

As is evident, the reformed former communist party (HSP) has lost substantial support. Expectations are that parliamentary election results will lead to a ruling coalition between SDS and MDF (difficult to envision lasting given the deep-seated animosities between these two largest parties) or between MDF and the Independent Smallholders.

. Increased Focus On April 8 Runoffs:

Given Hungary's complicated new election law and its three methods of being elected to Parliament, as well as a still

relatively large number of competitors per district on March 25, it is now estimated that in 78% of districts nationwide a runoff will be held -- most likely on April 8. Should any of these districts not attain the mandatory turnout threshold and thus require an additional runoff, it would not be held until the already-scheduled local elections in November 1990.

. Likelihood of Fraud:

While the original report's general conclusion that centrally-organized fraud on a scale to alter the election's outcome is not likely in Hungary, a late breaking development is of potential concern regarding the computer program used in counting votes March 25.

A disagreement has arisen in early between the Ministry of Interior, responsible for administering the elections, and the Office of Population Control, the division which actually houses the computer technicians and hardware through which the population is counted, determinations of turnout and meeting the mandatory threshold are made, and votes ultimately counted.

The validity of the computer model used to count votes in the November referendum was called into question and a proposal made to create an entirely new system of vote counting within weeks of the election. The Minister of Interior (formerly the Deputy Minister, promoted early this year upon revelation that the former Minister was having opposition political parties bugged), moved to bring the Population Office under his control. SDS held a news conference saying these events jeopardized the validity of the entire March 25 process.

Knowing how these issues have been resolved will be critical to all election observers in Hungary for the 25th.

While there were problems with the vote counting last November (U.S. Embassy-Budapest Political Officer Tom Lynch estimates as many as 200,000 ballots were not counted; the election was decided by some 6,000 votes), these are believed to have been related to a confusing ballot, lack of public understanding of the new election process, many voters' casting of the sample rather than the official ballots (samples were mailed to voters pre-referendum by the government), and some local officials' mischief in a very few areas. However, at this sensitive time so close to the election, a major change in the way votes are counted and such high level tension between key administrators of the vote are of serious concern.

Much less seriously, and perhaps to be expected, as of February as nomination cards were being signed and collected, reports became more numerous of minor break-ins to party local headquarters and of voters being coerced into handing over unsigned nomination cards, etc.

The major parties collectively and voluntarily passed the attached Code of Ethics in February 1990.

. Role of National Electoral Commission:

While still a strategically placed element in the new Hungarian elections process, the National Electoral Commission has been shadowed since November with questions about its effectiveness given its inability to impact the long delay between poll closing and announcement of results in November.

[This delay, as it turned out, was due to the former Interior Minister's imposing himself between the Office of Population Records, doing the counting, and the Press Office, from which the Electoral Commission as well as the media was getting its information. This issue of where the Commission - whose job it is to ensure no tampering takes place while counting votes at the national level - will get its information on the March 25 count remains unclear.]

New concerns about the Commission regard the level of stress being placed upon its Chairman, Dr. Pal Kara, particularly given the above-mentioned potential change in computerization and the resulting pressure this controversy places upon the Commission, which is charged with addressing all unfairnesses within the process. What is not at question is Kara's personal commitment to ensuring the success of this process. Up to this point, however, with one staffer and three additional members sharing a large burden of intense criticism from affected constituencies in this model situation, Kara has appeared at break-point.

Per the election law, representatives of all 12 parties qualifying for the national list have been added to the Commission, bringing its total membership now to 17.

. Media: Domestic

Up to the time that recent and above-mentioned computer controversies erupted, Hungary's electoral process has developed well on most fronts excepting one: the media.

It is still controlled by the government to a large extent (though Rupert Murdoch recently acquired a daily newspaper there). It is still overseen, though not censored per se, by the Media Board of Governors, comprised of government and certain political party officials and which issues statements after-the-fact about what coverage was or was not appropriate, effectively leading to "self censorship."

While access to television for paid advertising is at a workable stage for the larger parties who can afford it, regarding Hungarian media news coverage there still is little understanding of the nature of press/government adversarial relationship nor much demonstration of investigative reporting. Government control aside, the individuals involved have little experience with these concepts

and appear to benefit greatly by the rare opportunities to observe international press representatives.

There are concerns that given the system's complexity and reliance on massive runoffs, and given public expectations of having election results announced and Parliament seated quickly, the lack of media coverage or analysis of the process's mechanics may lead to a breakdown in public confidence, increase in public suspicion, etc.

[The National Electoral Commission deserves great credit, here for dealing with this public education need by producing several public service announcement spots reiterating three points:

- Voting is no longer compulsory;
- Voting will now be secret;
- Voting will not be complicated or difficult (and hopefully walking through how to vote);
- Counting of votes will be fair.

Another PSA is in production to urge Hungarians to vote April 8, on the expectation that there will be massive runoffs.]

Given the importance of free and aggressive press coverage not only to ensuring fairness and accuracy in the electoral process but to voter education and public participation, short- and longer-term training is needed quickly in this area.

. Media: International

A related point regards the is that an expected avalanche of international media expected into Hungary just prior to the 25th, given its election's historic value and the fact that is being held early: second in the region after East Germany on March 18. A "verdict" of sorts may be delivered on how democracy is progressing in Eastern and Central Europe based upon these early contests. Again, given the Hungarian electoral law's complexity, likelihood of massive runoffs, etc., preparing for in-depth formal briefings for reporters on the system and process can be critical to assisting free and accurate coverage and communication to the world of this election.

While an international media center was set up fairly well for the November referendum by the government, the process by which that media was given information and briefed ahead of time on what to expect was quite poor. More is at stake on March 25, and this need should be addressed.

. Process concerns:

Again, up until recent computer controversies erupted, remaining concerns toward assuring free and fair elections in Hungary on March 25 centered upon two things:

- How to ensure last November's extended delay in announcement of results is not repeated;

[Relevant factors toward such a solution: National Electoral Commission, Minister of Interior, Office of Population Records].

- How to increase public understanding of process and ensure that they have confidence in the newly-elected government, believing it was elected freely (and presuming that it will have been);

[Relevant factors toward such a solution: National Electoral Commission, international media briefings, the political parties' voter education efforts.]



HUNGARIAN ELECTORAL CODE OF ETHICS

The political organizations and persons participating in the proclamation are convinced that

- the fairness of the elections - from the point of view of the present and future of Hungary, the self-esteem of the nation and its international respect - is of decisive significance;

- a government able to operate can only be established following indisputably fair elections;

- a Parliament and government representing the genuine will of the people, able to raise the Hungarian society from the moral, economic and political crisis, can only come into existence if the population of the country truly sense the historical significance of the first free parliamentary elections since four decades and are willing to actively participate in them;

- the society will only take actions if it can get to know political forces which are driven not by a selfish desire for power but the sincere wish to serve the nation, and which try to gain as many votes as possible not through deception and misleading, by discrediting their enemies and resorting to unlawful means but they attempt to win the confidence of the citizens by sincerely revealing their intentions and objectives, abilities and potentials, if it encounters candidates who run the elections not merely driven by their personal ambitions but being committed to the future of their country, with proper dignity.

Taking the above considerations as a starting point, the organizations and persons participating in the proclamation; sensing the responsibility conferred upon them for the fate of the Hungarian nation and the future of the Hungarian Republic - recognizing the necessity of self-restriction - accept the ethical rules worded in the following as obligatory.

I.

1. The political organizations and persons participating in the proclamation fully adhere to the laws of the republic, refrain from criticizing the elections laws, do not make proclamations which might doubt the weight and significance of the elections.

II.

2. The rules of the codex are obligatory to all the participants in the elections (the organizations running candidates; independent candidates, press, radio, television and their organizations - hereafter: parties) who or which accept them by sending their proclamations to the Independent Lawyers Forum. Making use of their influence, the parties actively participate in having the rules of the code got to know, accepted and adhered to.

3. The Independent Lawyers Forum keeps records of the proclamations and informs those interested as well as publicity

about the records.

4. The organizations participating in the proclamation undertake the responsibility for their members, commissionaires and supporters to adhere to the rules of the code. The independent candidates participating in the proclamation are also responsible for the operation of their commissionaires and supporters. The parties furnish the persons acting on their behalf and in their interest with power of attorney.

5. The parties oblige themselves to have outsiders adhere to the obligations included in the code until they have obviously violated the provisions of the code.

6. Should any of the parties violate the provisions of the code, it does not authorize the others to act in a similar manner.

7. The provisions of the code are valid for the parties from the day they make their proclamation until the final results of the elections are made public.

III.

8. In the course of securing recommendations, the parties refrain from all the activities which result in disturbing the private life of the voters.

9. The exclusive aim of the recommendation slips is to produce lawful candidates, therefore the parties are to refrain from collecting the recommendation slips in an autotelic, competition-like manner.

10. It is forbidden to collect recommendation slips which have not been filled out.

IV.

11. The objective of the election campaign is that the parties should introduce their own candidates, present and interpret their programmes and political aims. During the campaign they are to refrain from discrediting each other.

12. In the course of the election campaign it is forbidden to accuse the candidates of having committed criminal acts, refer to their earlier conviction in case of exemption (rehabilitation), doubt their goodwill, use data pertaining to their private life against them. (Discredit)

13. Presenting and evaluating the earlier political activities of the candidates do not belong to the sphere of the concept of discredit.

14. The parties consider it the requirement of elections ethics that the independent candidates should inform the voters about

their sympathies with any of the political parties or enjoying their support, in a manner true to reality, making use of all the means available to them.

15. The parties consider it necessary that the principles objectivity, impartiality and well-balanced character should manifest themselves in the formally neutral (non-electoral) programmes of television and the radio. The persons participating in these programmes are not to wear party symbols or conduct electoral propaganda. At the same time the parties make joint efforts in their manifestations to mobilize the citizens to participate in the elections.

16. The parties urge and make sure that - according to the local agreement of the organizations concerned - a proportionate opportunity of appearance should be received by all the local candidates and organizations in the local papers, radio and television programmes.

17. The parties deem it desirable that the political parties should voluntarily restrict the quantity of their paid electoral advertisements made public on the radio and on television - under a separate agreement.

18. The parties refrain from disturbing each other's electoral meetings or other events, distracting them from their objectives



or using them for their own purposes.

19. Our national symbols are free to be used by the organizations participating in the elections in their campaigns under equal conditions, their expropriation is forbidden. The parties are not allowed to use each other's symbols.

20. The parties are obliged to indicate their names on their electoral propaganda materials.

21. The parties are to refrain from removing, distorting each other's posters and representative propaganda materials, and from expropriating the places suitable for placing posters. Those violating the latter prohibition may not object to their posters concerned being covered by the posters of others - to the extent inevitably necessary. In other cases it is forbidden to cover posters by sticking other posters onto them.

22. Posters may be placed onto walls or fences of buildings of private ownership only with the approval of the user.

23. All the electoral propaganda materials placed in public are to be removed from the area within 100 meters of the voting places 30 hours prior to the beginning of the voting. In case this is failed to be done by those having placed the materials, anyone is authorized to do so.

V.

24. The parties are to delegate as many well-prepared persons as possible from among their members to the electoral bodies who are to adhere to the rules of the ethics code in the course of their work, and refrain from wearing party symbols in the course of the elections procedure.

25. The parties are to take into account the considerations of economy in utilizing the subsidies allocated from the budget for the purposes of the elections.

26. The parties undertake to investigate the violations of the ethics rules realized in their interest, hold those committing the violations responsible, in graver cases withdraw their commissions or prohibit their further participation in the elections, and inform the party having suffered from the violation of the rules about the measures taken.

27. The party having suffered from the grievances undertakes to make the events public only in case no measures have been taken or in the case of significant or repeated violations of the ethics rules.

28. The parties consider it desirable that the mass communication media should only broadcast in relation to ethics affairs with the approval of the party having suffered the

grievances.

29. In the case of ethics conflicts, the parties may set up an ad hoc committee from the representatives of the parties running candidates in the given constituency. The committee decides the debate on the basis of a consensus.

30. The local organizations of the parties participating in the proclamation may agree upon further ethics rules among each other and with others.

In relation to the elections, the parties attach a special significance to celebrating March 15th in a manner deserved by its significance. They will do everything within their reach to allow the holiday to strengthen national consciousness and serve the co-operation efforts of the Hungarian nation. They waive the potentials of using the jointly organized events as a means of direct election propaganda.

It is necessary to display to the whole world that the Hungarians are able to co-operate in order to save themselves and their nation. Recalling the event of March 15th 1848' should assist the Hungarian people in really sensing their own strength, as well as recognizing the enormous significance of the free elections able to turn the fate of the nation, and the possibility that has opened up before the people to take

possession of their homeland.

On behalf of the Independent Lawyers Forum:

Dr. Imre Konya

Dr. Gyorgy Pal Bartfay