



EGP fact-finding mission to Hungary - Report

Context

In June 2014 the *European Green Party* received an application for membership from a Hungarian political party, *Párbeszéd Magyarországért - PM (Dialogue for Hungary)*. At this time, the *European Green Party* already had two member parties from Hungary: *Zöld Baloldal - ZB (Green Left)*, a full member since 2009 and *Lehet Más a Politika - LMP (Politics Can Be Different)*, a full member since 2011. Even though *Zöld Baloldal* withdrew its EGP membership in 2015 the Committee decided not to proceed with the application request of *Párbeszéd Magyarországért* citing concerns of the party meeting all membership criteria at the time.

Nevertheless, *Párbeszéd Magyarországért* and the *European Green Party* stayed in contact and members of the party were regularly invited to attend EGP events. In October 2022 *Párbeszéd* renewed its membership request to the EGP. The *European Green Party's* Committee made the unanimous decision to proceed with the application after thorough considerations. The application is due to be voted upon by the delegates to the 37th Congress of the *European Green Party* to be held between 2-3 June 2023 in Vienna, Austria.

As a next step a fact-finding mission was organised to Budapest, Hungary on 3-4-5 February 2023 with the participation of EGP co-chair Thomas Waitz, EGP Secretary General Benedetta De Marte and EGP Committee member responsible for the Visegrád Four countries alongside Thomas Waitz, Małgorzata Tracz.

The present report summarises the findings of the fact-finding mission.

Short history of the party

Párbeszéd Magyarországért - PM (Dialogue for Hungary) is a Green and left of centre party that was founded in 2013 after a party split occurred in *Lehet Más a Politika - LMP (Politics Can Be Different)*. Following *LMP's* election to the National Assembly during the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections, differences appeared in the party regarding electoral coalitions and strategies that led to 8 out of the party's 15 MPs and several members leaving the party and starting a new one.

In 2016 the party changed its name to *Párbeszéd - P (Dialogue)*. Since July 2022 the party has been led by MPs Bence Tordai and Rebeka Szabó.

Párbeszéd contested the 2014 Hungarian parliamentary election within the 5-party *Összefogás (Unity)* coalition consisting of left of centre social democratic and liberal parties. On the national list of *Összefogás* the party managed to elect 1 MP, Tímea Szabó for the 2014 - 2018 mandate.



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Párbeszéd participated in the 2014 European Parliamentary elections in coalition with the centrist - liberal *Együtt – A Korszakváltók Pártja (Together - Party for a New Era)* gaining 7.3% and one mandate. Following the elections, the leader of the joint list, former Hungarian Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai renounced his seat in favour of Benedek Jávor, who thus became a Member of the European Parliament. MEP Jávor sat in the Greens/EFA Group in the 2014 - 2019 mandate.

During the 2014 local elections *Párbeszéd* ran once again as part of the social democratic and liberal coalition *Összefogés (Unity)*. During these elections, the party's then co-chair, Gergely Karácsony was elected mayor of Zugló, the 14th district of Budapest, thus gaining a seat in the General Assembly of Budapest for the 2014 - 2019 mandate.

For the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections *Párbeszéd* formed a coalition with the *Magyar Szocialista Párt - MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party)* and stood a common list with Gergely Karácsony as the leader of the list and the alliance's candidate for Prime Minister. During these elections *Párbeszéd* managed to increase the number of their MPs to 3, including winning the party's first first-past-the-post constituency. The 3 MPs of *Párbeszéd* were joined by an independent and a *Socialist* MP and together they formed the party's first parliamentary group in the National Assembly for the 2018 - 2022 mandate.

The *Socialist - Párbeszéd* alliance was kept for the 2019 European Parliamentary elections as well. The joint list gained 6.6% and one mandate for the *Socialist Party*. Thus, MEP Benedek Jávor lost his seat in the EP.

For the 2019 local elections the 6 main opposition parties in Hungary agreed on a common electoral alliance in most cities - including in the capital city Budapest. For the Lord Mayor position of Budapest a two-rounds primary election was organised among the participating parties. The primaries were won by *Párbeszéd* co-chair and then mayor of the 14th district Gergely Karácsony, who was subsequently elected Lord Mayor of Budapest in October 2019. *Párbeszéd* also gained the mayorship of the 1st district of Budapest, thus having 2 seats in the General Assembly of Budapest, alongside several Deputy Mayor positions in Budapest districts and in the two countryside cities of Szeged and Dunaújváros for the 2019 - 2024 mandate.

The 6-party alliance was maintained for the April 2022 parliamentary elections as well. Here *Párbeszéd* supported candidates carried three first-past-the-post constituencies, while the party gained two seats from the common list as well, increasing the number of their total MPs to 6 for the 2022 - 2026 mandate.



Short overview of the political situation in the country

- Unitary parliamentary republic with unicameral parliament
- Population: 9.7 million
 - 98.3% Hungarians
 - 3.2% Romani
 - 1.8% Germans¹
- NATO and EU member (since 1999 and 2004 respectively)
- Not a member of the Eurozone. Has a free floating currency, the Hungarian forint.
- The country's estimated nominal GDP for 2022 was 195.6 billion USD and 410 billion USD taking purchasing power parity into account. It ranks 57th in the world in terms of nominal GDP per capita, and 42nd when taking PPP into account. The service sector gives a little more than half of the economic output in the country (57%), followed by industry (24.6%) and agriculture (3.4%).
- According to Eurostat in 2021 19.4% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Currently the country has the highest inflation rate in the EU standing at 26.2%.
- *Transparency International's* [Corruption Perception Index](#) for 2022 ranks Hungary as 77th out of 180 countries in the world achieving 42/100 points. The EU average here is 66/100, placing Hungary 27th out of 27 EU countries.
- *Freedom House's* [Freedom in the World report for 2022](#) designates Hungary as "partly free", giving it a total score of 69/100 (26/40 in political rights and 43/60 in civil liberties). For comparison Poland received a "free" designation and 81 points (34/40 in political rights and 47/60 in civil liberties).
With Hungary's score, which is repeated after 2021, the country remains the only EU country to be ranked "partly free" by *Freedom House*. The organisation's [Nations in Transit report for 2022](#) designated Hungary a "Transitional or Hybrid Regime".
- *Reporters Without Borders' 2022 World Press Freedom Index* ranks Hungary as 85th out of 180 countries, giving it a score of 59.8/100. For comparison, 66th place Poland has a score of 65.64/100 and 56th place Romania has a score of 68.46/100. In Hungary's case the [country specific report](#) criticises the concentration of around 500 pro-government media outlets in a single foundation, the arbitrary cancellation of broadcasting licence of an independent radio channel, the wiretapping of journalists' phones via a spyware software and the discriminatory allocation of state advertising for the benefit of pro-government outlets.

Politics

- Currently the country is led by a right-wing coalition government composed of:
 - *Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance* (-)
 - This party also gives the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán
 - *Christian Democratic People's Party - KDNP* (EPP)

¹ During censuses and microcensuses in Hungary citizens may declare multiple ethnic identities. This is why the total sum exceeds 100%.



- There are seven opposition parties in the parliament:
 - *Democratic Coalition - DK* (PES)
 - *Momentum Movement* (ALDE)
 - *Hungarian Socialist Party - MSZP* (PES)
 - *Jobbik - Conservatives* (-)
 - *Dialogue - P* (-)
 - *LMP - Hungary's Green Party* (EGP)
 - *Our Homeland Movement* (-)
- The last four national elections (2010, 2014, 2018, 2022) and the last four European Parliamentary elections (2004, 2009, 2014, 2019) were all won by the *Fidesz - KDNP* (-, EPP) alliance. The last four national elections were all won with a $\frac{2}{3}$ supermajority, which allowed the governing majority to change the constitution, change any law and nominate any state official on their own.
- The next general election is scheduled for Spring 2026, while the next European Parliamentary and local elections are going to be held on the same day in May 2024.
- The political discourse in the country is currently dominated by the government's campaign against EU sanctions on Russia. As at the time of writing Hungary has the highest inflation in the EU, while the local currency is losing value compared to the EUR in an economic environment that is quite dependent on imports, the cost of living crisis is more amplified in Hungary than elsewhere in the Union. Therefore the government is scapegoating EU sanctions on Russia for radically increasing the prices of consumer products and energy.

European Parliament

- The country elects 21 MEPs with a 5% national threshold.
- Currently it has 13 non-attached, 5 S&D, 2 Renew, 1 EPP MEPs

Main political values in programme

The following are elements of the electoral manifesto "*Everybody counts!*" of the *Párbeszéd - Magyar Szocialista Párt* alliance from 2018, which was led by Gergely Karácsony as Prime Minister candidate. Elements from the manifesto of *United for Hungary*, the broad six-party alliance formed for the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary elections are not adequate for representing the values of *Párbeszéd*, as not only all six parties, but also the centre-right Prime Minister candidate had a considerable influence over the contents of the latter.

The party stands for a strong welfare state with a needs based redistribution system. It emphasises the importance of introducing a basic income scheme for Hungary, as well as increasing the minimum wage, the minimum pension and the state recognising caring for elderly or sick relatives at home as a job. The party wants to alleviate the housing crisis in Hungary by increasing the number of state built and owned real estate, by introducing rental regulations and by fighting evictions and homelessness. The party plans to increase the share of renewables in the Hungarian energy mix, provide state subsidies for the energy



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efficient renovation of homes, develop the public transportation and cycling infrastructure, promote a circular economy and phase out the combustion engine from Hungary by 2040.

The party aims to reintroduce progressive corporate taxation to Hungary alongside a tax on offshore incomes and on environmental pollution and to phase out corporate tax relief for supporting spectator sports. The party supports the gradual decrease of mandatory working hours and strengthening trade unions. *Párbeszéd* wants to reform the education system to avoid overcrowded schools, ethnic and economic background based segregation, decrease dropouts and make sure that getting a person's first degree is free of charge. Furthermore the party plans to fight the gender pay gap and violence against women in Hungary, extend parental leave to the father and introduce a minimum quota for women in election candidacies. Lastly, the party firmly stands on an anti-corruption and participatory democratic platform.

Existence of youth wing

Párbeszéd's youth organisation is [Zöld Front Ifjúsági Mozgalom](#) (*Green Front Youth Movement*). The organisation was dormant for a while, because the original members aged out of the organisation, but it was re-founded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently it has around 30 members. *Zöld Front* works on a broad range of topics from regulating short term real estate rental to alleviate inequalities in the housing market to sex workers rights. The organisation gets some funding from *Párbeszéd* and is invited to the party's board meetings. Members of *Zöld Front* attended FYEG events in the recent past and the organisation is interested in building ties to FYEG.

List of organised meetings during the fact-finding mission

- Ákos Éger, Executive Chairperson, [Friends of the Earth Hungary](#)
- MPs Tímea Szabó, Rebeka Szabó, Bence Tordai, Sándor Berki, András Jámbor, [Párbeszéd group in the National Assembly](#)
- The board of *Párbeszéd*
- Mátyás Maksi, Acting Head of the European Commission representation in Hungary
- Dániel Mikecz, Research Fellow at the Institute for Political Science, Senior Researcher at the [Republikon Institute](#)
- Dr. András Bíró-Nagy, [Policy Solutions](#)
- Ágoston Sámuel Mráz, [Nézőpont Institute](#)
- Ferenc Büttl, Chairman of the Board, [Progressive Hungary Foundation](#) (*Párbeszéd's* political foundation)
- Gergely Karácsony, Lord Mayor of Budapest, *Párbeszéd*
- Katalin Cseh, Member of the European Parliament, *Momentum* (ALDE)
- Menta Móra and Lili Forján, co-chairs of *Zöld Front*
- Gábor Horváth, deputy editor-in-chief, *Népszava* (daily print newspaper)
- Richárd Barabás, Deputy Mayor of the 11th district of Budapest and V. Naszály Márta, Mayor of 1st district of Budapest, *Párbeszéd*
- Zsolt Szabó, Deputy Mayor of Dunaújváros, *Párbeszéd*
- The board of *LMP - Hungary's Green Party*



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- MPs Péter Ungár and Máté Kanász-Nagy, [LMP - Hungary's Green Party group in the National Assembly](#)
- dr. Tivadar Hüttl, [Hungarian Civil Liberties Union](#)
- Zsófia Banuta, [Unhack Democracy](#)

Findings from the above meetings

From talking to several civil society stakeholders, academics, journalists and political actors (listed above) during EGP's fact-finding mission to Hungary, EGP's delegation learned the following:

- Following the historic defeat of the opposition in the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary elections, opposition parties and party politics in general are even more held in contempt by the general public than before and voters are becoming increasingly apathetic.
- *Párbeszéd's* membership and support base is mainly concentrated in the capital city of Budapest.
- *Párbeszéd* has credible and known politicians with recognisable personalities, but few signature policy issues attached to their name.
- *Párbeszéd* struggles to translate the popularity of its individual politicians into electoral support for the party.
- The interlocutors the delegation talked to generally evaluate the tenure of Gergely Karácsony as Lord Mayor of Budapest positively and they recognise the ways how he tries to change municipal politics into a more participative, consultative and sustainability focused exercise.
- Most interlocutors identified the problem of one opposition party, the *Democratic Coalition* (PES) pursuing a hostile and forceful strategy of becoming the hegemonic player of the opposition by devouring smaller parties or co-opting their politicians, which causes an existential threat to smaller parties and the Green representation in the country.
- Several interlocutors emphasised the salience of Green topics in the Hungarian public discourse at the time of the visit, including local protests against lithium-ion battery factories, the deregulation of wood felling and the over-construction of natural water shores. The electoral impact of these topics remains to be seen.
- Several interlocutors pointed out the difficulty in having European Parliamentary and local elections on the same day in 2024, namely that due to the majoritarian nature of local elections opposition parties need to cooperate, but due to the proportional nature of European Parliamentary elections, parties can freely compete, and it is hard to do and explain to the voters both at the same time.
- According to a recent survey 70% of opposition voters wish for less fragmentation on the side of the opposition. The upcoming European Parliamentary elections can be seen in this light as a decision on which parties should exist and which should cease to exist.

Note: Notes taken during the interviews with stakeholders are available upon request.



Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

EGP has a long lasting positive cooperation with *Párbeszéd* going back to the founding of the party.

Although the party is relatively small it has shown endurance, durability and strategic foresight in the last years managing to increase their parliamentary representation from election to election and securing the seat of the Lord Mayor of Budapest and mayor of the 1st district of Budapest in 2019.

The party's activities are evaluated positively by the Hungarian interlocutors the European Green Party's delegation talked to and the party's politicians are popular among the electorate.

The party's Green profile recognition could use reinforcement, but the policies the party advocates for are clearly in line with those that the European Green Party stands for.

Recommendation

The Committee of the European Green Party believes that *Párbeszéd* meets EGP's membership criteria.

The Committee of the European Green Party sees the extension of the Green European family to more parties in the Southern and Eastern part of Europe as desirable.

The Committee of the European Green Party further notes that upon consultations with EGP's existing Full Member Party in Hungary, *LMP - Hungary's Green Party*, it sees no opposition to *Párbeszéd*'s Associate Membership in the European Green Party.

Considering all the above, the EGP Committee recommends to the delegates of the 37th EGP Congress to accept *Párbeszéd* as an Associate Member.