

Historical Outline of the Development of the Hungarian Party System¹

Dr. Csaba Fazekas² & Dr. Sándor Fekete³

Abstract

Paper deals with the formation and changes of the political party system of Hungary. The face and program of the political parties were closely connected to the specialities of the different political systems or regimes followed by each other. First organised political parties appeared before the 1848 revolution and new constitution. In the age of Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy Hungary had a very special political system, from this emerged the most important speciality, a 'parallel party system', because in the focus of political life was the so-called 'public law system', the relation to the 1867 Compromise. After the defeat of the World War I the independent and smaller Hungary became an authoritarian, right-wing political system ('Horthy era') with a powerful and unchangeable governing party with other oppositional parties. After 1945 in the shadow of sovietisation the democratic parties wanted to stop the communists, but it was unsuccessful, from 1949 Hungary became a Soviet type dictatorship, a one-party system. Some political parties re-established in the years of 1956 revolution, after the soviet occupation until the end of 1980s we cannot speak about political parties. In the years of transition formatted a new party system with three poles: liberalism, conservatism, social democracy. This party system was permanent until the new political changes ('second transition') of 2010.

Keywords: history of political parties, party systems in different historical periods, liberalism, conservatism, social democracy, compromise, public law system, autocracy, sovietisation, one-party system, transition, democracy, pluralism

Introduction⁴

In what follows, we are making an attempt to give an overview of the development of the party system in Hungary from the mid-19th century to the end of the 20th. From several aspects, Hungary displays similarities with the emergence of West European party systems while some fundamental characteristics can be revealed in most historical periods. Our overview is based on the assumption that party structure is closely related to the constitutional structure and political system of the relevant country. The landmarks in Hungary history (1867, 1920, 1945, 1989), which can be defined well chronologically, arose following such historical events which, at the same time, involved the total transformation of political systems, i. e. real changes of regime. Accordingly, the most important conclusion is that in the past, the Hungarian party system usually did not develop in an organic way but only followed the political changes mostly forced on the nation, which made an attempt to adapt to them.

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² Associate professor, University of Miskolc, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Hungary, bolfazek@uni-miskolc.hu

³ Assistant professor, University of Miskolc, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Hungary, bolblack@uni-miskolc.hu

⁴ About the theories of the party systems and political structures for this work we have used: Hloušek – Kopeček, 2010.; Cabada–Hloušek– Jurek, 2014. The introductions and methodological chapters, the case studies gave a very good frame for the historical viewpoint and comparisons.

If political parties are primarily regarded to be such organised social groups the purpose of which is to grab power (majority in parliament), it is obvious that the parliamentary system, the room for manoeuvring of the executive power is closely related to what strategy they select to obtain the majority of votes. The changes of regime rapidly following each other in 19th and 20th century Hungarian history also led to the emergence of political party structures of a totally different character.

1. The 'glory days' of party formation⁵

'The public opinion as a big question mark asks every party with the voice of conscience: »Party! Tell us: Who are you? What do you want?« And the parties know, they have to answer these questions. And respond all of them on his own way. That is true, only who respond, can count on the appreciation of the invisible power: the public opinion.' – wrote Lajos Kossuth, famous Hungarian politician in 1847, his paper 'Interpretation of the Hungarian political parties'.

As an outstandingly important event in the period of the 1848 revolutions, the monarch practically gave a new constitution to Hungary on 11 April, 1848. The acts declaring the abolition of serfdom, the abolition of noblemen's privileges and civic equality of rights created a new political system for the country, also defining a constitutional parliamentary system and an independent national government. The first political parties were formed as a part of the political process leading to the April acts. First, the Conservative Party (KonzervatívPárt) was established in November 1846, setting as its basic objective the preservation of the political system in addition to safeguarding the traditional conservative values. They formulated such economic objectives, mainly striving to improve living standards, which did not affect a social system based on privileges and Hungary's positions within the Habsburg Empire. As a reaction, liberals established the Opposition Party (EllenzékiPárt) in March 1847, the programme of which was completely implemented with the acts of April 1848. The new Parliament and government organised following the change of the political system in 1848 grew out of this Opposition (liberal) Party. A few months was not enough for a new party structure to evolve. From September 1848, a war of independence was going on under the leadership of Lajos Kossuth, in which Hungary fought for the protection of the April acts. The Viennese court suppressed the war of independence with Russian assistance in August 1849 and cancelled the country's constitutional independence. At the time of the civil war, the liberals, supporting the Hungarian government, were not organised into an independent political party (and it was not necessary for political stability, either) but a Radical Party (Radical Párt) was established in April 1849, wishing to carry the revolution further, e.g. by proclaiming the republic. On the other hand, the Peace Party (Békepárt) comprised those representatives who argued for a compromise with Austria.

After 1849, the Viennese court introduced authoritarian rule in Hungary (Bach regime). There was no public life up to the end of the 1850s. It was then that Ferenc Deák became a central figure in Hungarian political life. He suggested that instead of another revolution the nation should await the proper moment to enforce its demands. It was then that the slogan expressing Hungarian political ambitions very well was coined: 'Nemengedünk a 48-ból!' (We will never give up the results of 1848.) This meant that Hungarians expected the complete restoration of the acts of April 1848.

After the collapse of the authoritarian system, Austrian emperor and King of Hungary, Franz Joseph I of Austria summoned the Hungarian parliament to meet in order to clarify the legal relations between the Habsburg Empire and Hungary. At the time of the session of Parliament, two political parties were established, not along ideological divides but in the strategic issue in what way to achieve the restoration of the 1848 constitution. The Resolution Party (HatározatiPárt) thought it to be proper to submit a demand to the monarch while the Petition Party (FeliratiPárt), led by Ferenc Deák, wanted to submit a request to him. Unable to resolve this political dilemma, the leader of the Resolution Party, László Teleki committed suicide before the vote was cast and thus, the Petition Party won but the monarch refused to accept even this and dissolved Parliament.

After lengthy negotiations between Ferenc Deák and the court in Vienna, the period of political uncertainty ended with the Compromise of 1867. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, formed as a result, created considerable constitutional independence for Hungary (the country had its own government and parliament), which, however, did not mean the complete restoration of the April acts.

⁵ The political programs of the pre-revolution years in details see: Dénes, 2006. For the conservatives e.g.: Fazekas, 1998.

2. The Age of Dualism (1867–1918)⁶

The Compromise of 1867 between Austria and Hungary resulted a very specific type of constitutionalism and parliamentarism in the Eastern part of the Empire. In the centre of the political life and the organising element of the race between political parties was not founded on political ideas or ideological political programs. The power which established the governmental and oppositional positions was so-called ‘public law question’. It means the relation to the system of the system of the 1867 Compromise. The oppositional parties were not satisfied with the independence of the country and criticized the Compromise, on the other hand the government wanted to keep the system without any change. The opposition wanted to change the system and felt, Ferenc Deák and followers gave up important points of 1848 Constitution. In the circumstances of ‘public law question’ there was no chance to develop a Western type political party system. There were not e.g. ‘clear’ liberal or conservative political parties, a lot of conservative politicians supported the liberal governmental policy. We can speak about a special ‘parallel party system’ during the 51 years when Hungary existed as a part of the dual monarchy. There were a lot of political parties and associations which wanted to represent different ideological attitudes or interests of social groups – but they could not take part in parliament life, or partly, because the political life was founded on the special ‘public law question’. For these viewpoints we to count that the Hungarian electoral system was very retrograde in compare with the development with Western countries. Less than 10 % of the adult population had right for vote and up to the end of the monarchy there was opened and not secret electoral system in Hungary.

The party which gathered round Ferenc Deák (Deák Party, DeákPárt) was not strong enough to efficiently counter those opposing the ‘public law question’. Between 1867 and 1875 the Hungarian political system was characterized by a lot of instabilities. The new political parties could not make quite and safe political atmosphere in the parliament. KálmánTisza, leader of an important oppositional party, Left Middle (Balközép) had left behind his oppositional sentiments and joined to the Deák Party. Tisza established a new Liberal Party (Szabadelvű Party), the official name was the Hungarian version of ‘liberal’, they called the new party ‘free-thinker’. With fusion of Left Middle and Deák Party in 1875 Tisza managed to realise the kind of stabilization. He recognized the importance of a large governing party which guaranteed the majority in the parliament. Up to 1905 the Liberal Party won all the elections with big majority. Tisza’s strong government, which enjoyed the firm support of parliament, made it possible for the numerous acts on modernisation, while it integrated the conservatives who wished to preserve the Compromise unchangeable. The major force of the ‘public law’ opposition, Independence and 48 Party (Függetlenségű 48-as Párt) often stood on the same liberal platform as the government. The strong foundation of the party system on ‘public law’ illustrated by the fact after the defeat of the Liberal Party in 1905 (and ensuing traditional government crisis) Sándor Wekerle became the prime minister of a cabinet dominated by the Independence and 48 Party. Wekerle was a politician of the Liberal Party, and the emperor Francis Joseph I did not allow to format a government which not accept the system of 1867 Compromise. In 1910 István Tisza (son and follower of Kálmán Tisza) reorganized the Liberal Party under the name of National Labour Party (NemzetiMunkapárt). The new name of the party shows alone that after the turning of century conservative, national attitudes became more important, e.g. growing intolerance towards national minorities.

Among the ‘parallel parties’ one of the most important was the foundation of Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MagyarországiSzociáldemokrataPárt, MSZDP) in 1890. The Western influence was obvious, the Hungarian workers’ movement had very close connections to Austria. The Hungarian social democratic party fight for the general and secret right for voting but did not play a substantial part in parliamentary politics in compare with Austrian party. Due to the specialities of the social structure of the country, parties such the Independent Socialist Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Független Szocialista Párt), the objective of which was organise agricultural workers and peasantry, were accorded at least as much importance as the social democrats.

On the right wing of the political life appeared and became popular for a short period the National Anti-Semite Party (OrszágosAntiszemitaPárt), which connected the critique of modernisation and capitalism with the anti-Jewish attitudes of the society, especially the poor nobles and representatives of the losers of the social changes. The (Catholic) People’s Party ([Katolikus] Néppárt) from 1895 organised the religious society and wanted to represent the ecclesiastical interest in public life. Catholic politics represented a conservative attitude and was loyal to the Habsburgs.

⁶ About the transformation of the liberalism and the political parties in the era of dualism see: Szabó, 2006. In a shorter form and comparison for the Austrian parties: Fazekas, 2008.

They expressed their allegiance to the system provided by the Compromise, which led to their participation in government between 1906 and 1910. The Hungarian Christian socialists followed the Austrian example and formed a political association in 1907.

Approximately from the beginning of the 20th century a group of intellectuals tried to renew the liberalism. The 'old' liberal politicians moved to nationalistic directions, because they feared from the national minorities the Hungarian supremacy in the country. The National Civic Radical Party (OrszágosPolgáriRadikálisPárt) in opposite of this viewpoint wanted to open to the interests of non-Hungarian nationalities and keep the territorial unity of the country with some federative elements. The nationalities (Romans, Slovaks, Serbs etc.) organised special national political parties, but usually boycotted the Hungarian parliament elections.

The years of the World War I resulted some changes in the party system of Hungary. A group of opposition from the Independence and 48 Party in 1916 made a new formation and declared to exit from the war, new democratic reforms etc. The so-called Károlyi Party (KárolyiPárt) was formulated with the leadership of MihályKárolyi, who became the leader of the revolution in the end of October 1918. Károlyi and his followers recognized the anachronistic structure of the monarchy and believed that Western type democratic reforms could save Hungary after a loosed war, e.g. the general and secret suffrage. This could be renewing and modernizing the party system, too. In the Autumn of 1918 the independence from Austria and the declaration of republic did not was enough to keep the territorial loses of Hungary. Károlyi wanted to organise new elections but he did not have time to make it. After the war the extremists became more powerful, among them the Communist Party of Hungary (KommunistákMagyarországiPártja, KMP) who wanted to follow the example of the Russian Bolsheviks. In 21 March 1919 the communists with a coup d'état got the power and for a few months made the first dictatorship in the 20th century. It was a one-party system, the communists (with the help of unified social democrats) made the forbidding of all political parties and tried to organise an extremist dictatorship by a party state.

3. The interwar Hungary (1919–1945)

Hungary was a looser country after the World War I. After the two big change of system (democratic republic and the Soviet type council republic) there was a big political crisis. The only one power centre was erected around the person general Miklós Horthy. The interwar Hungary is often characterized as 'Horthy system' or 'Horthy regime' because Horthy was the head of state, as the governor of the re-established Hungarian Kingdom. Hungary in the Trianon peace treaty (4 June 1920) loosed the two-third of the former territory and several million of the inhabitants included almost three million Hungarians. In the independent but smaller Hungary in 1919–1920 Horthy and his followers made a totally new political system. In Hungary there were a lot of historical debates about the real character of the Horthy system, because it is clear that the system had a lot of democratic, modern elements, but had a very strong autocratic character.⁷

In the Horthy era, Hungary can be described as being under an authoritarian political system, operated under a multi-party parliament and government. At the same time, the rule concerning the right to vote were far from democratic, with State institutions serving the governing conservative party. After a hectic period of stabilization in 1921 the prime minister IstvánBethlen recognized the necessity of a powerful governing party. He incorporated the two big major winner parties of the 1920 elections: Christian Nationalist Unity Party (Keresztény-NemzetiEgyesülésPártja) and National Smallholders Party (OrszágosKisgazdapárt). The new party was called in the public life as 'Unity Party' ('EgységésPárt').⁸ The name of the governing party was changed two times until the end in October 1944, but the party system did not. From 1922 to the end of the period, the governing party had an overwhelming majority in the parliament, which made it practically impossible to transform the existing political system. Between the two world wars, the history of Hungary was basically determined by its defeat in World War I, the consequent taking over of a considerable part of both the territory and the population of the country by the neighbouring states as well as its new small country status. The governing party and Miklós Horthy kept the power in strong hand, and the political system was totally unchangeable. From 1922 the government set back some elements do the anachronistic election system. (E.g. opened elections in the countryside, higher census etc.) In the party system there were a lot of political parties and formations most of them could get parliamentary mandates, but it was unimaginable that an oppositional party get into governmental position after an election.

⁷ For the interwar Hungary in general with the face of political system and parties: Macartney, 1961.; Rotschild, 1974.; Sakmyster, 1994.; Fazekas, 2015.

⁸ The formation of the government party and IstvánBethlen's policy: Batkay, 1985. Romsics, 1995.

The regime had its own official ideology, too, called 'Christian nationalism'.⁹ The starting-point of the forefathers of this ideology was that the liberal legislation of the period before 1918 was to be blamed for the weakening of the 'spiritual unity' of the Hungarian nation, which could only be guaranteed by Christianity. Therefore, after 1920, church and state worked closely intertwined with the whole of the regime having a 'Christian character', which meant nothing else but the assumption of a total sharing of interests between the historical Christian Churches (Roman and Greek Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran) and the Hungarian state. This 'Christian nationalism' included a moderate Anti-Semitism from the very beginning. Religiousness and the presence of the churches, and especially, that of the Catholic church, penetrated the whole society and public life – in opposite with the former 'liberal' historical period.

Near the governing party grew up different types of political parties. An own group was the different 'Christian' (Christian Socialist etc.) parties, which had very interesting position.¹⁰ The governing party proclaimed himself as a political representor of Christianity, so the other organisations and associations usually supported the governing party in the parliament, sometimes drew up oppositional opinions about the policy of government. The most important 'Christian' party was the Christian Economic and Social Party (KeresztényGazdaságiésSzociálisPárt).

Democratic critiques of the Horthy regime appeared on the site of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary (MagyarországiSzociáldemokrataPárt). Liberalism was a marginal phenomenon of the Horthy era. Liberal formation was e.g. National Liberal Party (NemzetiSzabadelvűPárt), around KárolyRassay's person, but in the parliament, there were only a few representatives in every period of the regime.¹¹ Right wing and democratic opposition was only the re-established Independent Smallholders Party (FüggetlenKisgazdapárt) from 1930. In the years of the World War II a new anti-Fascist cooperation came into being between the smallholders and social democratic party.

The biggest opposition in the Horthy era – especially in the second half of the 1930s – we can find on the extremist right side. There were most than hundred parties or political organisation which were dissatisfied with the level of anti-Semitism, wanted to force the government to do more radical steps in the building of autocracy. In the first decade the most important extremist party was the Hungarian National Independence ('race-defender') Party (Magyar NemzetiFüggetlenségi [fajvédő] Párt). In the wide-spread name of the party the 'race' meant Christianity, with no regard to the concrete (Catholic, Calvinist or Lutheran) Churches. After the successes of the Nazi dictatorship of Germany Ferenc Szálasi's political party, the Arrow Cross Party – Hungarist Movement (NyilaskeresztesPárt – HungaristaMozgalom) became more and more popular. The arrow cross followers wanted to copy the methods of Hitler's Germany and the Nazi Party. (E.g. wearing a uniform, using the symbols etc.) Nevertheless, Szálasi's party declared a lot of 'Hungarian' specialities, differences from Nazis, e.g. accentuated the strong Christian roots of his party. When the governor, Miklós Horthy wanted to exit from the World War II and the German alliance on 15 October 1944, his attempt became unsuccessful. Germans removed Horthy and gave the power to Szálasi, who build a German type dictatorship on the territory which was not occupied by the Soviet army. It was an extremist one-party system; all the other political parties were persecuted by the arrow cross authorities.

4. The years of limited democracy (1945–1949)¹²

After World War II, the attempt of a democratic restart was fundamentally limited by the fact that the country was under Soviet military occupation. Only such parties were allowed to take part in the first parliamentary election which had not got compromised in the Horthy regime. It was the debut of the allies of the Soviets, the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar KommunistaPárt, MKP) on the political scene. Besides this party, the Social Democratic Party (SzociáldemokrataPárt, SZDP) and the National Peasant Party (NemzetiParasztpárt, NPP) were considered left wing formations. The Independent Smallholders Party (FüggetlenKisgazdapárt, FKGP), which was first an opposition party and then persecuted in the Horthy regime, got 57% of the votes but under Soviet pressure, it had to set up a coalition government together with the left-wing parties. In this government, a dominant role was played by the communists. The result indicated that a large part of the society voted for the Smallholders Party for lack of another alternative. The communists were unable to seize power only with democratic methods as it was shown by the results of the 1947 elections, as well. In this election, several other non-left-wing democratic parties could also take part.

⁹ About the 'Christian nationalist' ideology: Hanebrink, 2009.

¹⁰ For the 'Christian' parties in general: Fazekas, 2001. In the 1930's in details: Petrás, 2011.

¹¹ For the position of liberalism and liberal parties in the Horthy Era: L. Nagy, 1983.

¹² For the history of this period including the history of political parties see: Borhi, 2004.

For example, the Democratic People's Party (Demokrata Néppárt, DNP), following the patterns of western Christian democrats, got almost 15% of the votes, and the Hungarian Radical Party (Magyar Radikális Párt, MRP), the Christian Women's League (Keresztény Női Tábor, KNT) etc. could also send some representatives to Parliament. The Smallholders Party was put under considerable pressure: the communists achieved that this party, having strong support, broke up into several parts. (This was the communists' notorious 'salami-slicing' tactics.) The communists committed electoral fraud on a large scale, eliminating several thousand votes under transparent pretexts, and still had only slightly more support than in 1945.

After this, several democratic politicians left the country and emigrated to the west. The communists' total takeover could not be prevented in the parliamentary elections. Under Soviet pressure, in 1949, the parties took part in the parliamentary elections together in an umbrella organisation named Hungarian Independent People's Front. In this, the remaining parties only played a minor role besides the communists. In the period of dictatorship that followed, the non-communist parties crumbled and their leaders who had not left Hungary were persecuted.

5. From the communist one-party system to the change of the political system

As early as in June 1948, the Social Democratic Party was forced to unite with the Hungarian Communist Party. Thus, a Soviet type state party was established under the name Hungarian Working People's Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP). In August 1949, a Stalinist type dictatorship was introduced in Hungary under the leadership of general secretary Mátyás Rákosi. ('Stalin's best Hungarian follower.'). During the hardest years of Stalinist dictatorship, there was no pluralism whatsoever in the country. After Stalin's death, a reformist group was formed around communist Imre Nagy, which could temporarily take steps towards some kind of 'humanised socialism'.

On 23 October 1956, a revolution broke out in Hungary against communist dictatorship. After the victory of the revolution, the party-state system collapsed, and the government set up under reform communist Imre Nagy's leadership declared the independence of the country, leaving the Soviet bloc and establishing a new, democratic political system. The revolution was suppressed by Soviet military invasion on 4 November. This was followed by the restoration of communist dictatorship, led by János Kádár. The bare 12 days of the revolution was not enough to establish a new political system so one can only guess exactly what kind of political system could have been formed in the country leaving the Soviet bloc. (It is for certain that the dominant personalities of the revolution had a vision of a special Hungarian democracy and did not intend to return to the system of pre-war Hungary.) It is important, however, that during those few days of freedom, there started the process of forming a new party structure, which primarily involved the restoration of the democratic parties that had existed after 1945. The Independent Smallholders Party, the Social Democratic Party and the National Peasant Party were re-established (the latter adopted the name Petőfi Party in the spirit of a new beginning) but in the beginning, the democratic change of the political system was also accepted by the communist party. On 1 November 1956, they announced reestablishment and a total break with dictatorship under the name Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) with János Kádár's leadership (At that time, Kádár said: 'We are going to be a small but honest party.' Later, neither half of this sentence proved to be true.) However, in this short period, the determining institutions of the revolution were not the political parties, but the self-government and interest groups formed from workers: workers' councils and national committees. Although the party leaders of the period between 1945 and 1949 reappeared in political life, there was simply no time to reorganise the parties and establish a new, democratic political system.

Following the suppression of the revolution, Kádár restored the one-party system and many of the leaders of the democratic parties emigrated to the west for good. After this, no attempt to establish new parties can be mentioned until the change of the political system. However, it is important to note that keeping the framework of communist dictatorship, Kádár created a special type of socialism in Hungary. In order to avoid the breakout of another revolution, he formed an alliance with the society, and considerably raised living standards with artificial methods. The system of 'Goulash Communism' had repercussions on the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, as well. The composition of the party, having as many as about 800,000 members in the 1980s, was extremely heterogeneous. Platforms were formed within the party, particularly there was a dividing line between 'reformist' communists and 'old' communists, rejecting any reforms. The 'reform circles' formed from the former had a significant role in the erosion of the regime and a peaceful transition to democracy. In 1988, they achieved that Kádár resigned and a reformist government was set up under the leadership of Prime Minister Miklós Németh. Unlike other East European regimes, in Hungary, there were no revolutionary events leading to the change of the political system and the collapse of the party state.

There was a long transformation process in which the reformists of the communist party also took part. In the years preceding the change of the political system, democratic political organisations were already formed or re-established. In the beginning, they did not even intend to participate in the process of democratic restructuring as parties but rather as movements or associations. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, MDF) was established in September 1987 while the Network of Free Initiatives (Szabad Kezdeményezések Hálózata, SZKH) was formed in March 1988. From them, the largest political parties of the transformation process: the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum and the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ) arose. At the beginning of 1989, well before the adoption of the democratic constitution and the first elections, Hungary practically became a country with a multi-party political system again. (For example, there were already formal meetings between the leaders of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.)

During 1988 and 1989, basically two patterns of party formation could be seen: the re-establishment of the old, 'historical' parties and the emergence of completely new democratic parties, born under the political conditions of the late 1980s. As regards the former, the re-establishment of the Independent Smallholders Party (Független Kisgazdapárt, FKGK), the Christian Democratic People's Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP) and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (Magyar Szociáldemokrata Párt, MSZDP) were important events at the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989. These parties had massive historical traditions and it was precisely these traditions that represented serious difficulty in the way of the formulation of political programmes that could have proven useful in the 1990s. It is no coincidence that in these parties, there were divisions and breaches after the first free elections. The Social Democratic Party was unable to get into Parliament. Its place was occupied by the Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP), having been formed from the state party and monopolising the representation of social democratic values for long. Among the new parties, besides MDF and SZDSZ, the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, FIDESZ), established in March 1988 as a political organisation of the young generation, played an important role from the beginning.¹³

The amendment of the constitution providing the base for the change of the political system in Hungary was elaborated in the negotiations between the old and new democratic parties and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in autumn 1989. A new, democratic constitution was passed, the first free elections were scheduled for the spring of 1990, and on 23 October 1989 (on the anniversary of the revolution in 1956), the republic was proclaimed. It is characteristic of the Hungarian conditions that the powerful party of state socialism was not dissolved after the change of the political system but already as part of the transformation process. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party declared its dissolution on 7 October, 1989. The Hungarian Socialist Party, which was established subsequently, came into being mainly with a social democratic programme as a party committed to democracy. The 'old' communists established a left-wing extremist party with the later name Workers' Party (Munkáspárt) and were the only political actors who rejected the change of the political system.

6. The structure of the modern Hungarian party system (1989–2010)

The biggest change in Hungarian political life came about in 2010 involving a total transformation of the party system. One can even speak about a kind of 'second transformation of the political system' with regard to the fact that the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz, in association with the Christian democrats: Fidesz-KDNP), led by Viktor Orbán, won the election with extraordinary support and passed a new constitution, which led to the complete change of both the 1989 constitution and the political system of the 'third republic'.¹⁴

After 1989, the basis of the Hungarian party system was determined by the struggle of three political poles, having approximately the same weight: 1. Right-wing – conservative pole: here belonged the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). 2. Left-wing – social democratic pole: Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). 3. Liberal pole: Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz). The structure and balance of these three poles basically remained intact until 2010 in spite of the fact that considerable rearrangements took place. Among these, the most important was the change of profile of Fidesz. After 1994, the party led by Viktor Orbán clearly gave up its liberal programme.

¹³ The years of the transition was represented in detail e.g.: Stumpf, 1995. Bába, 2011.

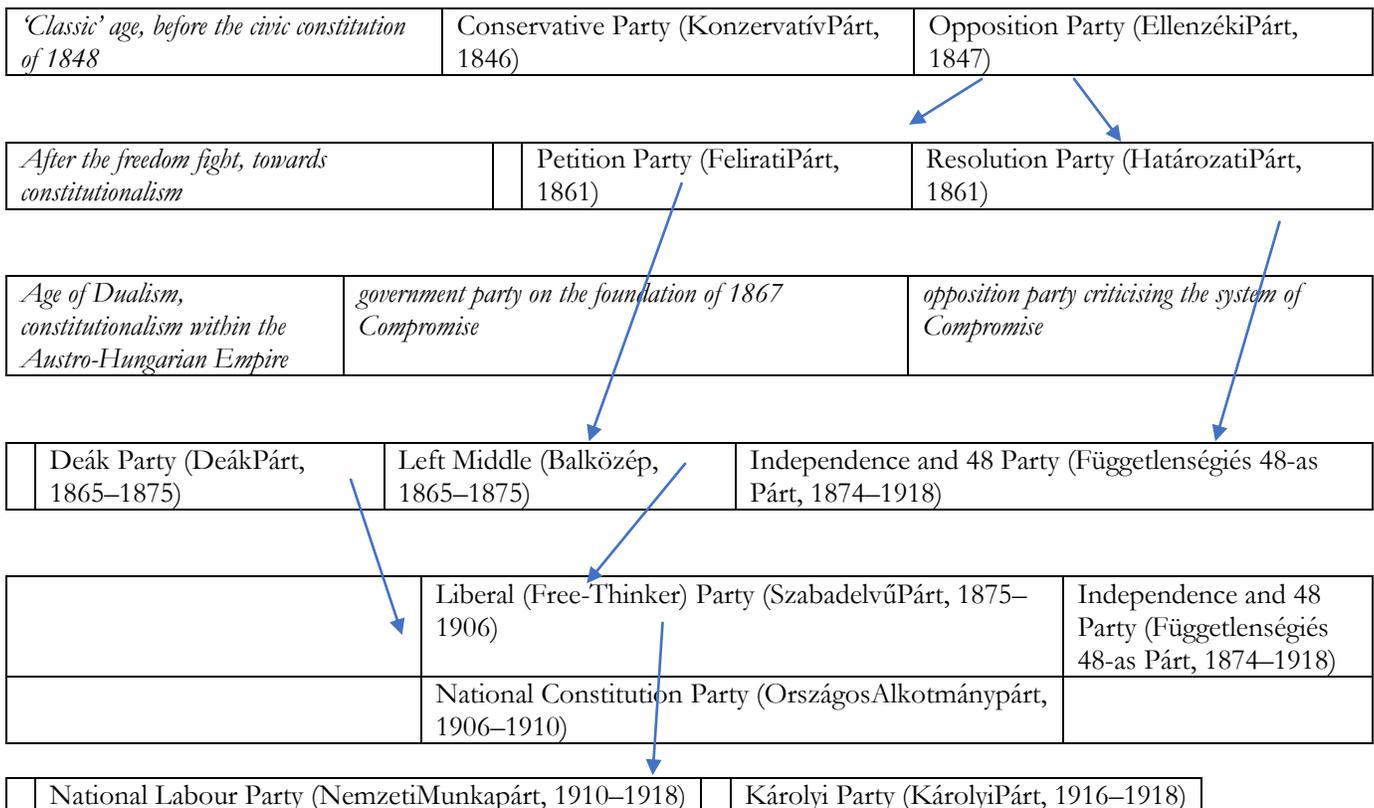
¹⁴ About the party systems of the post-Communist countries we have used for this work: Spirova, 2007. The cleavages and transformation of the Hungarian party system after the transition see e.g.: Tóka, 1997.; Márkus, 1998.

It not only went over to the right wing having national, Christian and conservative slogans but became its leading force parallel with MDF losing popularity and the Smallholder and Christian Democratic Parties hit by internal crises and being able to preserve their political weight only temporarily, with the help of Fidesz. In the 2000s, from among the right-wing initiatives independent from Fidesz, only MDF could achieve – short-lived – success in the 2006 elections.

Further general characteristics of the party system between 1990 and 2010:

1. Although there were several cases of the replacement of the governing coalitions in office in the elections (1994, 1998, 2002), the political system remained unchanged. The branches of power operated in a balanced way, and the Constitutional Court supervised legal order firmly. In other words, the rearrangements between the parties, the shifts in some party profiles and their break-ups or losses of support had no repercussions on the political system. The democratic state preserved its stability and the political crises could not make it stagger either, for example, no by-elections had to be held.
2. The balanced character of the political system was reinforced by the fact that after the elections, every government was set up in the form of coalitions (this was so even in 1994, when the Hungarian Socialist Party could have formed a government alone). In other words, no party was able to dominate the whole of the political system alone.
3. The extremist political parties could not gain considerable support. The extreme left-wing party (communists) never got enough votes to get into Parliament. The Workers' Party was continuously present in public life and took part in every election with decreasing popularity. (In 1994, it was the Hungarian Socialist Party that profited from the upsurge of the nostalgia for the Kádár regime.) From among the extremist right-wing formations, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (Magyar IgazságésÉletPártja, MIÉP), formed by politicians leaving MDF, got into Parliament for a cycle, but overall, extremists remained marginal all through the period.
4. In addition to the large parties of the above three poles, smaller political parties, for example 'occupation parties' (e.g. Agrarian Alliance, Agrárszövetség), regional parties (e.g. For Somogy County Association, SomogyértEgyesület) etc. were continuously formed. Although they were able to get a few mandates but any attempts outside the large parties remained superficial phenomena in the period with the new formations being unable to exert an influence on the party system.

Appendix. The most important political parties of Hungary, 1846–2010



<i>Parties of the 'parallel party system' of Age of Dualism:</i>	National Anti-Semite Party (Országos Antiszemita Párt, 1883–1892) Independent Socialist Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Független Szocialista Párt, 1897–1905) Social Democratic Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt, 1890–1919) (Catholic) People's Party ([Katolikus] Néppárt, 1895–1918) National Civic Radical Party (Országos Polgári Radikális Párt, 1914–1919) Parties of national minorities
	Communist Party of Hungary (Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja, 1918–1919)

<i>Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1919 (extremist left one-party system)</i>	Socialist Party of Hungary / Socialist-Communist Workers' Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Szocialista Párt / Szocialista-Kommunista Munkások Magyarországi Pártja, 1919)
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<i>Interwar Hungary ('Horthy era' autocratic right-wing system, 1919–1944)</i>	<i>Governing parties:</i> Christian Nationalist Unity Party (Keresztény-Nemzeti Egyesülés Pártja, 1919–1922) National Smallholders Party (Országos Kisgazdapárt, 1919–1922)
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	'Unity Party' ('Egységes Párt', 1922–1932)
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	Party of National Unity (Nemzeti Egység Pártja, 1922–1938)
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	Party of Hungarian Life (Magyar Élet Pártja, 1939–1944)
	<i>usually government supporter 'Christian' parties:</i> Christian Economic and Social Party (Keresztény Gazdasági és Szociális Párt, 1925–1937)

<i>Oppositional parties</i>				
	<i>Left</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Extremist Right</i>
	Social Democratic Party of Hungary (Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt)	National Liberal Party (Nemzeti Szabadelvű Párt, 1928–1944)	Independent Smallholders Party (Független Kisgazdapárt, 1930–1949)	Hungarian National Independence ('race-defender') Party (Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi ['fajvédő'] Párt, 1924–1928)
				Arrow Cross Party – Hungarist Movement (Nyilaskeresztes Párt – Hungarista Mozgalom, 1939–1944)

<i>Arrow Cross Dictatorship (extremist right one-party system, 1944–1945)</i>	Arrow Cross Party – Hungarist Movement (Nyilaskeresztes Párt – Hungarista Mozgalom, 1939–1944)
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<i>The age of 'limited democracy' (formally democratic system, in the shadow of Sovietization, 1945–1949)</i>	Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, 1944–1948) Social Democratic Party (Szociáldemokrata Párt, 1944–1948) Independent Smallholders Party (Független Kisgazdapárt, 1930–1949) National Peasant Party (Nemzeti Parasztpárt, 1939–1949) Civic Democratic Party (Polgári Demokrata Párt, 1944–1949) Democratic People's Party (Demokrata Néppárt, 1945–1949)
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<i>First period of communist dictatorship ('Rákosi regime', extremist left, Stalinist left-wing one-party system, 1948–1956)</i>	Hungarian Working People's Party (Magyar DolgozókPártja, 1948–1956)
<i>Re-establishment of parties in the days of revolution (1956)</i>	Social Democratic Party (SzociáldemokrataPárt) Independent Smallholders Party (FüggetlenKisgazdapárt) Petőfi Party (PetőfiPárt) Democratic People's Party (DemokrataNéppárt) Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar SzocialistaMunkáspárt, 1956–1989)
<i>Second period of communist dictatorship ('Kádár regime', left-wing one-party system, 1956–1989/1990)</i>	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar SzocialistaMunkáspárt, 1956–1989)

<i>After the transition (democratic multi-party system, 1990–2010)</i>	<i>Extremist left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Extremist right</i>
	Workers' Party (Munkáspárt, 1989–)	Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar SzocialistaPárt, 1989–)	Association of Free Democrats (SzabadDemokratákSzövetsége, 1988–2010) Association of Young Democrats (FiatalDemokratákSzövetsége, 1988–)	Hungarian Democratic Forum (MagyarDemokrataFórum, 1987–2011) Independent Smallholders Party (FüggetlenKisgazdapárt, 1988–) Christian Democratic People's Party (KereszténydemokrataNéppárt, 1988–)	Party of Hungarian Life and Justice (Magyar IgazságésÉletPártja, 1993–) Movement for the Best Hungary (Jobbik MagyarországértMozgalom, 2003–)
				Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz – Magyar PolgáriPárt, 1995–)	

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