

QUESTIONS

- The passing of the new Constitution and some other legislative changes targeting the independence of the judiciary, central bank and the media have drawn criticisms worldwide. If you were to explain to an outsider what is happening in Hungary, what would you say?
- Victor Orban says he has the electoral support and people's consent to induce changes. How do you explain the internal dynamics that led to the landslide victory of Orban in 2000 elections, and that gives him the right to pursue majoritarian politics today? Is he still widely supported? Does he really aim for reconstruction of state institutions like judiciary, central bank, media and an autocratic regime ?
- Under the ruling of Orban, there is significant emphasis on creating conservative individuals, overemphasis on family values and the role of religion. Also, it seems there are attempts for a Kulturkampf. Dissident voices like Klub Radio have been forced to shut up and people in opposition are replaced by pro-government people. Is this "normal" for Hungarian politics?
- How do you evaluate the response of the EU? Was it timely and sufficient? Do you think it will be efficient to curtail the present shortcomings with a view to restoring the EU values?
- How do you evaluate the far-right Jobbik Party and burning of EU flags at the UMP meeting? The Jobbik leader openly declares they are anti-EU. They are neither liberals nor democrats and explicitly favours cooperation with Russia and Turkey referring to the Hun period and common history and ties. How should we read such remarks in an EU member state and the sudden interest in Turkey and Russia?
- You have attended the recent EP hearing on civil liberties. The EU does not seem to have a uniform opinion about how to handle things in Hungary unlike the Jorg Haider incident in the past.

Orban being vice-president of the EPP is certainly a factor. But does EU have less soft power or less influential politics of conditionality when it comes to EU Member States and not candidates?

- What lies ahead in your view given the upcoming national elections in 2014 and the current financial crisis the EU is in?

Answers:

1. The right wing populist party, Fidesz has won an overwhelming two-third majority in the Hungarian parliament in 2010. It started with a revolutionary proclamation intending to create a new political epoch in the history of Hungary with anti-communist and nationalistic rhetoric. The real project is to cement the power of the party on the long run even through conflicts with the European Union and the rest of the world. Democratic norms and culture, constitutional checks and balances are not taken seriously any more. The political line of the ruling party has shown more and more authoritarian tendencies.
2. The big victory was due to many factors: the weak political and economic performance of the former socialist and socialist-liberal governments, the lack of reforms and the populist attacks of Fidesz on the attempts of the government to introduce them, a shift towards the right including to the extreme right in the public, a general dissatisfaction with the economic situation, etc. The popularity of the current government has evaporated since then; however, the democratic political parties and civil groups are weak and fragmented. There is no consent about the measures and actions of the government even if in its political communication Fidesz still simply argues that "we have our mandate from the people". Yes, Viktor Orbán's objective is to have a system where loyal public figures serve his political concept.
3. Kulturkampf between conservative nationalists and pro-Western liberals has a long tradition. This time the cultural war has included attacks

against well-known liberal minded philosophers as well as the idea to rearrange the big square in front of the Parliament building reflecting the spirit of the interwar period on Hungarian „gloire”. On the other hand, high culture seems to be less important than ever before and there is no official cultural ideology of the new regime except the references to a heroic Hungarian past. The attempts to silence Klubrádió belong to the intensions of the government to control the public space in general.

4. The democratic community and the European institutions have reacted to the challenge in a more and more definite way following the first astonishment and when realising the seriousness of the provocations of the Hungarian government. On the other hand, there have been no experiences and the European Commission has relatively limited ways of legal actions. Also, it is a dilemma of political tactics how to deal with a member state, especially with a member party as in the case of the European People’s Party. The European Parliament has had three very critical resolutions on the political development in Hungary. Also, the international pressure in the media and the voice of the international institutions are still crucial to express the concerns of the democratic global and European actors about the Hungarian situation. The intervention of the European Commission can restore some basic legal democratic measures and procedures, but many of the radical changes introduced by the government might stay with us creating a long term problem for Hungary.
5. Jobbik wants to have a referendum on the secession of Hungary from the EU. This extreme right wing party is also anti-Semitic, but the number one target group of their racist language is the Roma community. Their views include a mythical relationship with ancient assumed Hungarian glory and here Turkey might play some, but not significant role. There might be special business relation between Russian nationalists and Jobbik.
6. The European Union has fewer incentives for a member state then for a candidate country. But there has been a general development of both the political and economic integration during the last decade. Today, this is the EU as such which can react to the Hungarian events in contrary to

the case of Austria, when EU member states introduced measures bilaterally. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU has become an opportunity for reference in the debates about the quality of democracy and this legal binding text, which has been incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty, has a growing impact since the conflicts with the Hungarian authorities.

7. Fidesz has introduced a new electoral law that favours the big parties, is more majoritarian than the former system, and rewrites the borders of the individual constituencies increasing the influence of traditional right-wing areas. In spite of these changes, a potential strong opposition might have chances to win the elections in 2014 in case it gains credibility in the eyes of the apathetic swing voters. Hungarian economic prospects are relatively gloomy: the government has insisted on an “unorthodox” nationalist economic policy which failed and concluded into the warning of the European Commission that transfers from the Cohesion Fund might be suspended under the excessive deficit procedure.