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Symbols and communication of values in the accession to the EU (Hungary)ⁱ

We have analysed the symbols and communication of values of the elections – mostly the element of campaign-clips, tv-spots, posters, slogans – of the parties competing in the general elections since the first free elections in Hungary. We used the methods developed in this longitudinal research to examine the propaganda-materials of the 2004 (first) Hungarian EU-election, and the accession celebrations. We used the methods of the content analysis, when we analysed the main topics of the campaign, the central values, aims, human needs, and the most important symbols: the symbolic role of colours, sounds, music, lights, personalities (number, gender, social status, age of personalities presented, clothes and whole outlook of them), background, decorations, objects, other visual effects, language style, slogans, some dimensions of party-image: (potential social basis of the party, friends and enemies of the party, general image and changes of image of the party); and some dimensions of possible oppositions: left--right, past—present--future, nation—Europe--globalisation, the role of foreigners, religion and religious symbols. These symbolic elements may reflect to hidden aspect of the political culture and the changes of the society.

We also analysed the symbolic messages the EU-image reflected in the accession celebration. In this case the most important symbolic aspects and most important association fields of the EU-image were in the focus of the analysis.

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EU elections are not fundamentally different to Parliamentary elections for the parties: quite naturally all parties used the elections to judge their strength and steer local relationships in a direction favourable to them. At the same time the election campaign was eminently suitable to analyse the way relationship to Europe, and national and international issues are dealt with by the different parties. These issues are only one of many issues (and not the mostly emphasised ones) in the national general election campaigns. (Re-) joining Europe has been a political programme and value voiced often by almost all political parties since the first general elections, differences of emphasis were noted in two major issues:

1. The values and symbols attached to Europe, image of Europe, the programmes emphasised in connection with accession to the EU.
2. Doubts and fears voiced from the point of view of the (sovereign) interests of the country.

However, the discourse, which embraces the election campaign, must be examined so that these differences can be properly analysed: how did the issue of the EU and accession to the union appear in the Hungary of the turn of the millennium?

Image of EU in Hungary

What accession means became increasingly vague for the public, the more it was discussed. The majority accepted the necessity of accession, if for nothing else, but the fact that it is the West (and the Europe, which Hungary has now joined, has meant the 'West' for Hungary,

which spent the past decades ‘on the other side’). The associations of ‘the West’, Europe are welfare, a good standard of living, a developed civilisation, capitalist market-economy, highly-urbanized society, democratic relations, cultural traditions, the protection of humanity and other positive images, not only for Hungary but for the other countries of the ‘Eastern Block’. And although there are, naturally, negative associations with the West: dangerous crime, loose morals, exaggerated individualism, merciless competition, decline of vitality, etc., the more important the efforts of improving the quality of life in the Socialist countries, and the more implausible the efforts of humanising socialism became, the more obvious and widespread longing for the West became. And the majority accepted the necessity of accession, for the added reason, that they became used to the idea that the relations of the large powers decided in issues such as this, and while those in doubt regarded NATO membership as the lesser evil, there were even fewer reservations about joining the European Union (which does not even involve the dangers of unwanted military participation in conflicts).

On the eve of accession a daily quizzed a number of reference-people. The question was ‘what will you take along to the EU, and will you leave behind?’ Answers given to the question show well the point of reference by which public opinion (and those who form it) judge expectations attached to Europe. The characteristics of the thus denied, non-European past (and present) include primarily the political hatred, a bad atmosphere in politics, division, lack of union of purpose, national divide, poverty, defencelessness, unemployment narrowness of mind, bad mood, pessimism, depression, discrimination, xenophobia, prejudices, weakness of national self-knowledge, the ‘small-country’ view of life, provincialism, selfishness, envy, pettiness, unprincipled compromises, nepotism. In other words the socialist past, underdevelopment, provinciality and its consequences on mentality, national identity wavering between lack of identity and the extreme of discrimination, the touch of the Balkans, and the ‘curse’ of division, complained over for centuries in Hungarian political life. (In this indirect image Europe, or the Europe-ideal is cultured coexistence and cooperation, wellbeing, good feeling, confidence, democracy, the peaceful world of predictable and reasonable relations.)

Nonetheless it is certain, that members of the Hungarian society have very little knowledge, either practical or theoretical, of what it means to be a part of the European Union (and – precisely because of the above reasons – the majority show little interest in this). The campaign launched before the referendum on membership of the EU, aimed at providing information on the imminent changes, was a substantial failure and even at the time of accession symbolic gestures (and the largely media-produced gaiety surrounding the accession) were dominant, and not a mass of information relevant to life within the European Union. (The most efficient symbolic gesture was that of ending the decades of enclosure – the Iron Curtain: the enjoyment of the fact that from now on Hungarians will be able to travel within Europe without a passport (with an ID), suggests more than anything else the fact of acceptance – not so apparent in other areas. As the ID is a tool of domestic identification, this fact for many symbolised that Hungarians will be ‘at home’ in Europe.)

The idea of Borderless Europe became an important notion, issue of the EU accession celebrations. The ‘Borderless’-event gained significance along the country’s borders: in this context, the *virtualisation of the borders* was the primary stress, and the celebration of this historic change. In order to symbolically experience the disappearance of borders, midnight border-crossings were organised (primarily on the Austrian border, the site of the former Iron Curtain), allowing the participants to enjoy the fresh feeling of travelling without a passport).

'Let's run across to the EU' was a series of running and roller-skating competitions, and there was a relay race entitled 'We've been waiting for Europe'. (The 'Let's run across to the EU' was also a reference to East Germans running across the border to Austria when the Iron Curtain fell, and that Hungary was the country that opened these floodgates in the final days of Socialism.)

The point of reference is of importance in this image. The starting reference point is the (undemocratic and poor) socialism, East Europe as against Europe; in conjunction with opposition to the poverty-stricken Third World (in this distinction however, Hungary can be safely associated with Europe, although some regime-critical thinkers have been warning for years that Hungary can only share the fate of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries). A further point of reference is the opposition of Christian Europe and Islam (in this respect, based on its cultural and historical heritage, Hungary is firmly on the side of the West), and polarisation with Asia, Far East as potential competitor in the economy (and here again, Hungary belongs to Europe for cultural ties, even if Asian origins, Eastern heritage are mentioned every now and again; Eastern cultures are foreign and therefore cause no doubt for the majority in the matter of belonging to Europe, and openness towards Eastern influences is no different to such attitude elsewhere in Europe: ready-to-integrate interest in the other). Europe can be juxtaposed with the competitor and 'patron' USA's culture (and its political-economic might), but as the USA and Europe formed a single block when viewed from the other side of the Iron Curtain, this opposition has been rarely discussed in Hungary, although it does crop up in connection with some of the most unpopular foreign policy decisions of the USA. Primarily groups especially sensitive of national interests criticise American politics and mentality, and although some see a counterpoint to these in a United Europe, this Europe-America polarisation cannot work for the simple reason that those very people who hope to protect national interests from American influences, have doubts about the 'selflessness' of the richer part of Europe.

This raises the issue of the 'first- and second-class EU members'. It was depressing and disappointing for the Hungarian public, in view of the great expectations, (even if it caused no great surprise for those with a realistic view of global politics and economics, and after experiences of history) when it emerged that Europe was not granting new members all the rights enjoyed by the 'old' members. Unhappiness was primarily caused by restrictions on the movement of labour, unequal treatment of agriculture causing unfair advantage to old members, and the general unfair conditions for access to EU funds, and the sometimes 'preaching', sometimes superior attitude of the western brothers. There were doubts about the real direction in which money was flowing: hopes and promises were about funding from West to East, aiming to help catching up, experiences, however, have often suggested that more profit is siphoned from the country and region, than the amount that comes in. (A typical manifestation of scepticism surrounding the free movement of labour was an ironic essay in a leading Hungarian daily on the disappointed English and French prospective employees, who wanted to come to work in Hungary.)

(There is a very small, but significant sign of subjective non-equality: our Austrian colleagues collected posters, on which symbolic representation of Austria was one of the EU-stars or a piece of 'Europe-cake', and so on. It means that Austria feels itself as a real member, an organic part of United Europe; while in Hungary the flag with EU-stars, the EU-emblem always appears as a kind of *aim*, as a symbol of an other, desired world – also after the Hungarian accession).

Accession had become a central issue by 2004 in spite of the doubts and lack of information, as for the first time, at accession to the EU on May 1st, and at the EP elections on June 13th, 2004, the Hungarian people experienced through a series of political events a change in the organisational framework of their lives in a direct way.

Front pages of newspapers

Accession was a central issue in the printed and electronic media: we cannot present a detailed discussion of this within the current article, we shall simply mention a few typical front pages as examples: the liberal political-economic weekly (*HVG*) showed the EP election campaign as the 'Siège of Strasbourg' (duelling knights in armour: the image that may have greeted the Magyars arriving from the East to Europe in the ninth century).

(plate 1)

Another front page of this weekly: Hungary becomes EU member. The ferry rests? The picture shows a strong rope tied around a mooring covered in the gold stars of the EU – a reference to an image created by a great Hungarian poet from the turn of the twentieth century, Endre Ady, in which Hungary is presented as Ferrycountry, a country swinging to and fro between East and West, and which country finally ceases to swing, having attached itself once and for all to the West. Let it be noted that 'The ferry rests?' headline allows for a number of sceptical associations. The 'rests' expression suggests that the anchoring may not be permanent, and the line is a quote from another poet, this time Sándor Petőfi: the whole sentence conveys a less than euphoric message, '*The ferry rests, it has been moored, darkness is silent within*'. (In the present context it suggests = we couldn't know how will be the future, the future is a 'black hole'.)

(plate 2)

There is an other picture of a satirical magazin (*Hócipő*): picture of a 'tschikosch' – as a djinn coming out from a Hungarian coloured bottle into the stars of the EU.

(plate 3)

And finally (an other example of self-criticism): a front page of a political weekly (*Magyar Narancs*) presented a fat Hungarian man with an endless appetite in a concrete and symbolic sense. (The subtitle of the picture was: 'We have arrived')

(plate 4)

Accession show (EU-image reflected in the accession celebration)

The accession celebration events on offer are worth analysing from the point of view of the country's relationship to Europe and membership of the union: what Europe-vision and what Hungary-image was represented in these celebrations?

◆ One of the typical celebration events was a presentation of the music and dances of accession countries, entitled 'We go together'. Sitting places with music where placed at the main boulevard of Budapest were the people could listen to the music of the other EU countries. Music and dance appeared in this respect as the main tool of communication between different nations, and as the symbol of a *more peaceful, merrier world*, and it implied that Europe was the home of *cultural variety*.

(plate 5)

There were song and dance events called 'Borderless Europe', thus adding a new association to the Europe-image: the European Union, as the *dream of borders destroyed come true*.

◆ The next programme worthy of mention was the European *gastronomy* festival (of similar connotations). Gastronomy appeared as the 'royal path' leading to acceptance of the culture of the other, whereby drinking and eating are cornerstones of consumer culture. Programmes showing the cuisine of accession and member countries was a major event of all celebrations in Hungarian cities (although the actual food and beverages on offer, as several news reports noted, was a selection of uniform sausage, burgers and beer instead of real variety).

◆ Redecorating the *bridges*. This type of programme was perhaps the most spectacular of the celebration events on offer in the national accession show. The three most central bridges of Budapest all took different appearances:

a) Chain Bridge: birthday breakfast for children born on May 1st, observation balcony;

(plate 6 and 7)

b) Elisabeth Bridge: waterfall (=Hungary as a country of waters – medical waters, the lake Balaton, the most successful national sport: water polo);

(plate 8 and 9)

c) Liberty Bridge: covered in lawn, turned into a meadow. (People enjoyed lying on the green grass – other days it is forbidden to step on the grass in the parks of the city, but now, at the day of celebration we may use it everywhere, still on a bridge. And there is an other symbolic meaning of this performance: a technical element, a bridge is turned into a part of nature, green grass).

(plate 10, and 11)

Celebration events used the bridge metaphor profusely: Mentions of Hungary as bridge-country (bridge between East and West, perhaps between North and South), similarly to ferry-country, symbolises the role of intermediary attributed to the country. The topical association was: 'we cross to Europe over the bridge'. The bridges being taken into possession by the public symbolised this; in almost all country cities with bridges, there were bridge-related events, the bridge-metaphor played a key role. (Europe, the symbol of *crossing* and of 'arrival'.)

◆ The introduction of twinned cities. The movement of twinning cities, launched to foster improved understanding of the other, better relations, 'everyday diplomacy', lay the mental and organisational foundations in several European countries for continental cultural and economic cooperation well before the EU was set up. In conjunction with the accession celebrations, the introduction of twinned cities underlined the concept of the EU as the opportunity of *brotherhood, peaceful coexistence and the alliance of peoples*.

◆ The 'Dwellers of the Europe house' series of short films gave an introduction of EU members. In the light of these short films, but also in terms of the whole of the accession celebrations, the aforementioned lack of knowledge about the EU and the different member states was reconfirmed.

◆ 'Week of European film'. The series of films shown together gave the image of Europe as the home of *film culture, high culture*. (But it must be added that only a fraction of the programmes dealt with European high culture, the majority of events were centered around music, dance and gastronomy.)

◆ ‘Europe for youth – youth for Europe’. In this approach the EU is the home of *youth and future*. In connection with accession to the EU many people – especially older people - have said that accession promises precious little for them (advantages will only be felt in the long-term), but perhaps (or probably) it promises *a better and safer future* for young people. An MSzP (=Hungarian Socialist Party: HSP) campaign film, to be discussed later, attempts to react to this belief, by showing an old lady, who tells the viewer that *she too* will benefit from the accession, but hopes her grandchild will have more benefits.)

◆ The Time Wheel. In one of the most representative points of Budapest, on Heroes’ Square renowned designers erected an 8-metre-tall wheel, in which one year’s worth of sand started flowing exactly at midnight, the time of accession; in the image of a time wheel, to be turned upside-down after every year, accession to the European Union becomes a symbol of a new *calendar*.

(plate 12)

◆ In many places the introduction of new technical ‘wonders’ was connected to the celebration events: in this respect, Europe appeared as the symbol of *modernity, of technical and scientific development*. An international exhibition of inventions, industry and fine arts was staged, entitled ‘Genius Europe’: this afforded an opportunity for the representation of Hungarians as a talented people, and Europe appeared in this context as the *world allowing the blossoming of this talent*.

◆ Public Art events, apart from their aesthetic effect, also showed that Europe is the home of *urban culture*.

◆ ‘Messages to Europe’: this was a comprehensive ‘communication project’: special stamping of mail, carrier pigeons, radio station, EU-NET-PACK online. The primary message was the simultaneous representation of old and new types of messaging (such as carrier pigeons and online messages) – joining the European flow of information – but it also suggested that the EU is the *possibility of a synthesis between tradition and modernity*.

◆ The ‘message’, (which, although stresses absence, is an eternal symbol of connection) was in general a central theme of the celebrations. The EU message-wall was about safeguarding the values of our culture, and the ‘Send messages with a Trabant’ event was a car-painting performance, with the involvement of respected artists. The Trabant (‘Go Trabi, go’, etc.) has been the symbol of ‘bare-bottomed Socialism’ for decades, and repainting the Trabant is a representation of *free and merry creativity* on the one hand, and of *changing, erasing the past, colouring in a drab, grey world* on the other. This was not the only DDR-cemetery and event representing Eastern European-ness through the symbolism of the car: in the ‘Farewell to the past – two-action engine cavalcade’, the Trabant- and Wartburg-symbolised Socialism was the yesterday that the Hungary entering Europe was bidding goodbye to.

◆ Part of this farewell was the aforementioned ‘We are not taking along... (EU junk-party)’ poll. Collection spots were designated in the capital for objects people did not want to take along to the beautiful new world of the European Union. (The location itself, a run-down bus station, was also symbolic, it will be turned into a Design Centre in the near future.) The objects dropped off were primarily symbols of Socialist ideology, Soviet occupation and dictatorship or those of lack of development, poverty and provinciality, but some attempted to criticise today’s political division (and governments). There were Molotov-cocktails, russian machine gun, Stalin and (former Hungarian communist Premier) Rákosi busts, underground literary publications, police batons, foreign currency form (a memento of restriction on travel), doctor’s ‘*para solventia*’ (symbol of the everyday corruption in a non-market economy), wine in plastic canister, milk in a bag, bread and fat (as a typical food of poor people), haphazard design from the 50’s and 60’s: coffee pots, ancient record players

(symbols of the underdeveloped industry and low level of consum culture), destroyed dust bin, salt (used in winter time against of ice and connected with ecologic pollution), objects of kitsch-culture, -- but there was also a tableau of the current government (as well as quotes from politicians of previous governments, and political 'jokes' created by the owners of the 'junk').

(plates 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18)

◆ Many events employed the customary elements of larger celebrations. The fireworks and other pyrotechnical displays underlined the idea that accession to the EU is a *special, festive event*.

◆ There were equestrian and Hussar shows in several places, and a parade of Hussars and horsemen entitled '2000 years on horseback'. This type of programme, in keeping with the country's image projected for tourists, stresses Hungary's unique nature (within Europe) as a country of equestrian traditions, and refers to Hungary as a fighting nation (protector of Europe); and this is all in keeping with the recent resurgence in interest in the customs and traditions of the Hungarian nobility.

◆ Blessing the Europe bell stressed the idea that European culture is the *vessel of Christian tradition*.

◆ Part of the celebrations was the solemn raising of the EU flag and playing Beethoven's Ode to Joy (the EU anthem) and Szózat (a kind of second Hungarian national anthem) one after the other.

◆ The flag and anthem being the basic symbols of nationhood, the new flag and new anthem also unequivocally signalled that the country has become part of a new greater state, and of a 'meta-nation'; and that the smaller and larger unit will, in the future, demand its citizens' identity simultaneously. The 'all men will be brothers' and 'to your country be immovably faithful, oh Magyar!' are both valid at the same time. (The usual confusion could be noted in relation with the flag: on the day after accession the Hungarian flags were covered up by the EU flags, and a few days later the national colours were put up again, above the new boards. Several motorists, intent on displaying the country's new EU membership began to plaster over the Hungarian colours with the 'H' symbol surrounded by the EU stars on their licence plates, but the police attempting to enforce current regulation, and intolerant of arbitrary alterations to licence plates, tried to dissuade people from this practice by threatening these motorists with the immediate withdrawal of the licence plates and a 3-year prison sentence. Naturally, since May 1st new cars have been issued with licence plates featuring the EU-starred 'H' symbol, and the owners of old cars can have their plates replaced with the new EU plates for a charge of HUF 30,000 = 120 Euros)

If we want to summarise the EU-image reflected in the accession celebration, we can see, that European Union appears as a

-- peaceful, merry world
-- borderless land
-- world of tolerance
-- world of cultural diversity
-- land of modernity, technical and scientific development
-- new historical period
-- urban culture
-- land of brotherhood, alliance of peoples
-- home of youth and future

- land of christian traditions
- synthesis between tradition and modernity
- world of creativity
- emergence of a new world (after the communist past of Eastern Europe)

Accession celebrations coincided with the EP-elections' campaign period. Although the celebration events only reflected the (cultural) peculiarities of the different parties in their style, and accession itself was represented as the joint action of the whole nation (apart from the opposing minority), during the preparation for the elections, the differences between the attitudes of the different parties emerged again, and we shall detail these below.

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The campaign

Naturally, as in every campaign, there were shared elements, typical of all or several parties. We shall discuss these first.

1. The campaign had features independent of the political parties, which dealt with what was at stake in the elections, and stressed its general significance. This was the motive behind the creation of posters (before the referendum about EU-accession, 2003), on which people symbolising subcultures were displayed together, to show that they do have the same thoughts on Europe; and at the same time suggesting that the essence of Europe is the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the different cultures.

(plate 19)

- a well-known actrice (of classical dramas and films) and a roma pop-singer

(plate 20)

- football stars of two antagonist football team

There were similar pictures of

- two comedians with different humour
- two 'personalities' of concurrent reality shows
- two TV-reporters, representatives of different generations and styles, representatives of the elite and mass-culture
- representatives of different TV-games – a rather sophisticated and a very simple one

A part of the posters tried to reflect to the everyday uncertainty of the people in connection with the EU. For example:

(plate 21)

- May I open a coffee shop in Wien?

(plate 22)

- Whether the pig-killing is EU-conform, or not?

(plate 23)

- Is the Hungarian land property protected?

(plate 24)

- May I study to be a graphic designer in Paris?

(plate 25)

- May we eat poppy-seed cake? And so on.

The answer is 'yes' in every case.

Such propaganda-solutions include a TV-channel's interview with several known people on what European-ness means for them, shown in a news programme.

2. Although the elections this time decided on who would be delegated to a joint European institution, the campaign was primarily about *domestic policy*: for the Government the issue was to see how much support it can work up, for the Opposition the issue was to determine to what extent they could profit from dissatisfaction of the public.
3. In words, all Parliamentary parties stressed that the 24 MEPs should not be 'a group of feuding people,' that there should be consensus between the delegates over the main national issues. This, however, remained at the level of words, partly because the question of along which issues there should be a national consensus, was never properly addressed during the campaign.

What were the issues dealt with by the different parties?

In the primary issues espoused by the different parties the differences between the various parties (in terms of situation and type) were represented.

The ruling HSP was stressing on the one hand, rather trivially the continuation of the Government's work, and results achieved so far, and on the other hand, by badgering away with the 'there has to be action, not only talk' slogan, was attempting to reinforce the image – employed at the previous general elections – that the largest Opposition party, FIDESZ's (= Alliance of Young Democrats, a member of European Popular Party) effective phrases were merely oratory exercises, which are in contradiction with the party's actions, and in contrast with that, HSP is the party of active professionalism.

FIDESZ stressed the issues of working together, protection of national interests, and the general values of labour, home and security.

The issues addressed by the junior Government and Opposition parties were defined by this opposition, and both attempted to profit from it. MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum: HDF, a moderate conservative party) focused on issues, which were areas of loss of confidence for the large parties in their government-cycles (politics and corruption).

The other junior Parliamentary party, SzDSz (Alliance of Free Democrats, a liberal party) was also attempting to define itself as a 'third way'. The issues dealt with by the Liberals were dictated by the party's liberal politics and its representation: therefore Free Democrats addressed minority rights, the rights of the individual, freedom to make choices, demands of tax cuts, interests of large cities and cities in general, and stressed the consistent representation of liberal values directly.

Styles, methods, emphases

Free Democrats chose the strategy of opening the campaign early (launching their campaign as early as January). They led the field in terms of quantity of political broadcasts (as in all previous elections), and rivalled the large parties in terms of the number of giant billboards. Again, Free Democrats attempted to exploit the fact that today's image of Europe held many liberal associations, thus it was possible that a number of voters – in terms of domestic politics often not supporters of the party – felt that Free Democrats were more 'suitable' than others. Free Democrats therefore stressed its own liberal nature more than usual, presenting a marked opposition between the conservative, socialist and liberal values in newspaper adverts over several issues (healthcare, education, religion and Church, social issues, abortion, drugs, etc.), urging the voters to make a choice between the different attitudes. Separating the three positions also implied that in contrast with the quasi-two-party system that has developed in Hungary, Free Democrats were making an effort to break off HSP, stressing that the two parties are different in essence, and this difference has not been abolished by cooperation in government, not in terms of political-philosophy, values or strategy. Free Democrats – as in all previous elections – made an effort to use both rationality and emotions (intensively and markedly) to serve the goal of liberal values. They stressed the value of freedom and freedom to make choices in several areas of private life (freedom of faith, freedom to chose abortion; city life as the home of individual freedoms, tax cuts to provide greater individual freedoms and other issues emphasising freedom of choices, up to representing liberal approach to light drugs), and in the public sphere (smaller state, lower taxes). They addressed first-time voters through 'personal letters', in which they stressed the issues of the abolition of conscription and drug use (assuming that a large part of this age-group do not oppose the liberalisation of drugs), the issue of abortion, and insistence that the state should not interfere with the private lives of the people.

HSP never found its own specifics (apart from insisting on the 'results' of distributive Government), this, in addition to the negative effects of governmental measures, could have played a part in the party's weak performance. HSP attempted to dominate the campaign with what appeared to be sudden ideas: such was the Prime Minister's suggestion, which caused general surprise and a public polemic, that the different Hungarian party's should set a joint list for the EP elections...

FIDESZ stressed the values of labour, home and security (all of these carried a topical message as well as their general attractiveness: EU-accession may have made some people more afraid of unemployment, support for young people setting up first homes is natural from a party that attracts the most young voters; the issues of security in the cities and social security, there was the added meaning of national security, which has gained increased importance die to the Iraq war and the possible unpredictable consequences of US foreign policy) at its meetings.

Posters

The four Parliamentary parties managed to put up posters and billboards in the capital. One of the first to do so was HDF. One of their posters first appeared on the escalators of the Budapest underground, showing a portrait of party chairman Ibolya Dávid and the ‘Normal Hungary, Normal Budapest!’ slogan; which was continued with symbolic images referring to corruption, pollution in Budapest and the desolate housing estates of the Socialist era, and over these pictures was printed the continuation of the slogan: ‘...but not like this’. (The counterpoint to the desolate images was the pleasant and elegant lines of the Erzsébet híd and the adjacent statue of Queen Elisabeth /’Sissi’/.)

Another HDF poster showed a manicured female hand before a green background in the shape of the country (with a difficult, easily misinterpreted message of a woman’s hand taking care of the country? stroking the country?, but it could also bring to mind images of a hand pressing down on the country; although the images exuded a different feel: a feel of elegance and smoothness).

While out and about, one could quite frequently run into a particularly unflattering photo of Ms Dávid. On a fourth, somewhat better picture, Ms Dávid, dressed elegantly, smiled at the observer: with the ‘Nő az esély’ (Greater chances) slogan. (The phrase, literally ‘the chance is increasing’ is a pun in Hungarian, ‘nő’, the word for woman, is a homonym of ‘nő’, the third person singular version of the verb ‘to increase’: thus the slogan had a double meaning. 1. the country and/or party’s chances are getting better; 2. this is guaranteed by the fact that HDF – unlike any other Hungarian party – is headed by a woman. The pun – and this suggests that it was not such a good idea – was often the rivals’ target for derision; and not entirely without reason, because it is not a very good idea to stress the gender of a – otherwise very popular – politician rather than his/her abilities and personality; furthermore, this wording suggests that those directing the HDF campaign are assuming that a woman will be given better chances in the EU, which is why she is heading the party list.)

On a FIDESZ poster Pál Schmitt (a former olympic champion and sports diplomat) stands wearing the Hungarian track-suit top behind a group of children. (The image offers us the chance of examining the joint effects of several symbols: the child as symbol of the future, sport as the symbol of success, a group as the symbol of working together, the sports-wear bearing the Hungarian coat of arms, as the symbol of international representation of Hungary, and the known successes of the main figure, which are sports successes, but can always radiate through into the political arena, thereby confirming the party’s promise of political success. This poster was also immediately criticised by the rival parties: 1. does a representative of the Hungarian Olympic Committee and of the whole of the country as a sportsman have the right to appropriate the symbol of the national sports uniform; 2. all of the children on the picture are boys. (One of HSP’s favoured angles of attack is that FIDESZ’s senior leadership has no women members, the party has become too patriarchal.

On another FIDESZ poster Mr Schmitt sits in an elegant office, before him an open book (often disfigured on the posters displayed on the streets with the legend ‘communist’, referring to the FIDESZ party leader’s past as sports leader in Communist times). The image bears the slogan ‘Together we can make it!’ (Exploiting the general attractiveness of the promise of ‘success’, and stressing the ‘unity’ refers on the one hand to cooperation of the

public and politics, and on the other hand to national – or majority – consensus, the importance of community values and teamwork.)

A third poster of them – similarly to HDF's aforementioned woman's hand poster – shows five hands (manicured, but different in terms of age, gender and colour) interlocked over the national colours, bearing the 'Go Hungary, go Hungarians!' slogan, (this form echoes the well-known slogan of Berlusconi: 'Forza Italia') adding to the symbols employed by HDF those of teamwork, community spirit and the associations of sports.

The slogans

We have mentioned the slogans of the different parties in relation with their posters.

FIDESZ based its campaign primarily on the 'Together we can make it' and the 'Labour, home, security' slogans, and we have already detailed the connotations of these. At the same time there has been a change in the logo of the party, which now includes the 'European Popular Party' denomination (it showed that FIDESZ, a member of the conservative, international party alliance, stresses its nature of 'popular party', in other words that it is ready to integrate all sorts of values, and although the 'European' adjective is due to every European party, in this context it stresses the European-ness of the given party as a positive characteristic).

HDF's 'Normal Hungary, normal Budapest' slogan stressed the need for a restoration of the damaged ethical and other *norms*.

HSP's: 'HSP again' slogan does not say much, perhaps it builds primarily on people's reluctance to have changes, and hangs on to the hope of repeating the success of the 2002 general elections. The 'While others just talk' slogan, which refers to the FIDESZ, has already been discussed. The shrill aggression of the 'Let's stop the FIDESZ lie-factory!' slogan, because it sounds like a threat from a party in a position of power.

On the one hand Free Democrats say of themselves that their party is 'The Hungarian liberal party' – a change is noted here compared to the legends of previous logos, when the Hungarian was not stressed (this means, that behind the party there is the international alliance of liberal parties, represented in Hungary by them, the Free Democrats). The other slogan: 'Liberals to the EU'. This at the same time shows the party's need to send MPs to the European Parliament, that the liberals belong in the EU, and the wording also suggests that the rivalry between the different parties is now to be understood in an EU-context.

A further Free Democrats's slogan: 'Budapest: this is a village too, it's just full of people'. One of the key elements of the campaign was referring to the interests of the City, and city dwellers (as opposed to the political right, which focused on the villages). Free Democrats's slogan refers to the fact that two-thirds of Hungary's population live in cities, and Europe represents an even more urbanised culture (80 per cent of Europeans live in cities). This approach successfully turned the capital-countryside dichotomy of earlier campaigns to an opposition of cities and villages (in keeping with the fact that one of the most dynamic social processes of the last decades has been the urbanisation of Hungary's villages).

The dream, the plan (Free Democrats), the chance (HDF), the success (FIDESZ) were the key words of the campaign. This shows that (election) victory (and the success, emergence embodied by election victory) appears as a value in itself, which can mean either a good thing, or a bad thing. Its bad aspect is that there are no real programmes, true goals, the essence of political competition is the ‘competition itself’. Its good aspect is that this is often the case when the whole of society is on an upward path, and it is not the desperate struggle between two different sets of ideologies that decides the possible way out from a given situation of crisis.

Mailbox-campaign

Perhaps Free Democrats were the most active mailer. Apart from addressing first-time voters, the use of postcards of different topics was noted. One of the topics was domestic abuse directed against women – the postcard showed a young woman’s face marked by signs of battery. The related values: ‘Solidarity. Responsibility. Human rights. Tolerance. Our choice: Europe.’ Another postcard was entitled: ‘In what kind of Hungary do you want to live?’. This postcard depicted conflicting images symbolising regulated order and free disorder. The answer given to the question raised was the most ideological of what the different parties offered the voters, this answer was born as part of a strategy to badger voters with the basic values of liberal ideology: ‘In a Hungary where not the state, but the people decide how they want to live’. The next postcard: a crown of thorns against a blue background. ‘Faith is a personal matter. No-one can be forced to support a faith in conflict with their conscience.’ This postcard was meant to show the party’s commitment to religion as well as the religious tolerance of liberal ideology. The next postcard showed a sad dog (addressing the animal rights supporters): ‘Do not tolerate it. In Hungary several hundred thousand animals are killed every year out of negligence and cruelty. Think European.’ The next: ‘Cities are the motors of Hungary. We bring EU grants to the cities. In Europe the cities are the motors of development. Do not allow Budapest to be left behind in the competition between the cities.’ ‘The EU should spend the same time addressing the problems of city dwellers as it does on the length of cucumbers and fat-content of milk.’ (In contrast with the earlier focus on agricultural issues, here a concentration on urban problems can be noted – but the texts imply the criticism of an over regulating – cucumber-length-measuring – EU bureaucracy.) And finally: ‘We, the liberals, believe in humanity, not the state.’ (This bon mot relies heavily on Hungarians’ disappointment in institutions, greater individualism and the anti-state interests of private enterprise.)

One of the HSP leaflets said ‘For a successful European Hungary’. (‘Success’ again!) The leaflet shows the HSP emblem and the EU-stars. ‘Hungary has returned to Europe, returned to the values she has held her own for a thousand years. The faith and future of our country are united with those of Europe.’ ‘Since the beginnings HSP has taken a stance by a united Europe, without borders.’ HSP’s Europe plan: motorways, roads, canals, modern state, better quality healthcare, education, lower taxes, rising employment rate, European welfare. All these were coupled with photos: the Prime Minister and the Foreign Affairs Minister sign Hungary’s accession contract. Visegrad-four reunited. The Prime Minister kisses an old lady (reference to the often-criticised photo of former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán getting his hand kissed by an old lady). Picture of road building. Image of a laughing young family. HSP is attempting to underline its own achievements on the one hand (emphasising the construction of roads and the relatively good approval of its foreign policy, supported by schematic representations of harmony).

The campaign broadcasts. Tv spots. ⁱⁱ

Relatively few party political broadcasts were made in this campaign. The differences of invested intellectual and financial assets were considerable in this area as well. Free Democrats conducted a relatively intensive campaign through television, and HDF campaigned through television slightly stronger than the rest. HSP was the one that inclined most towards the negative campaign. (Even compared to earlier elections) agriculture and the countryside were much less often addressed; there was a noticeable focus on the cities. The issue of ownership of the land was not raised (not even by radical right-wing parties), and what the union of European states meant was hardly dealt with at all in the broadcasts. (Party of Free Democrats was the only one to note that the motor of development in the EU is the city.)

FIDESZ's TV spots emphasise the importance of the team – coupled with the associations of private life, sport and politics. (Stressing community values in opposition to those propagating individualism: the 'companion' word is central, creating a connection between the need for a companion in the private sphere, and the value of political partnership.) The spot begins with an image of idyllic family life, which is practically a spitting image of the opening sequence of Socialist Prime Minister Peter Medgyessy's party political broadcast at the time of the previous general elections (which of course simply adopted the cliché from somewhere else). The idyllic moment is transformed into a birthday-party, with many children (which harks back to a campaign broadcast used earlier by FIDESZ leader Viktor Orbán). The spot features sport (football), as the symbol of victory, fitness and team spirit. Finally, the film cuts to the familiar image of Mr Schmitt sitting in his well-furnished office – always suggesting the image of a responsible political/state leader.

One of the main issues addressed by HDF – focused on by one of its broadcasts – is anti-corruption. After a series of images describing the dark path that money takes, the hand-motif reappears, with a much more unequivocal message than on the poster: here the gesture is that of purposefully erasing the corrupt past and present. In the other section of the film, Ms Dávid addresses a large crowd – the film stresses support for the party, the leader's quality as a speaker, her ability to win people over (a relatively frequent topic in campaign broadcasts). The elegant clothes, stressing the gender of the party's leader (with references to a burgher, even noble background) are also characteristic of the film. The other campaign broadcast of the party – Budapest on the threshold of EU accession – evokes the image of a city disfigured by smoke and rubbish, dog excrement, holes in the tarmac, desolate housing estates and filled with beggars (these are the most frequently-voiced negative feelings about Budapest); these images are contrasted with the image of a street filled with green plants (and the film switched to colour from monochrome), and the film thus stresses the desire for a 'more liveable Budapest'. An evocative atmosphere and a rousing emotional message are typical of this film. At the end of the broadcast the list-leader talks to some people (which shows that the party feels it is important to underline the teamwork of the party leadership).

HSP used the bland slogan, an element of its negative campaign: 'because others just talk'. (And the radical imperative, 'Let's stop the FIDESZ lie-factory!' also puts in an appearance.) The party based its films on pronouncements of affiliation (by voter-types embodying the 'man of the street'); this method was employed primarily by FIDESZ at the 2002 elections.

For Free Democrats, as discussed above, the emphasised key issues in the campaign film were freedom of the individual, tax cuts, cities, roads, education, standard of living and consistency. They were the party that produced the most, and most colourful materials. The recurring question in their films: 'What do we need for life?' builds on the privacy-orientation of people sick of politics, which harmonises nicely with the party's very nature of focusing on the values of individualism. The types features, with their individual peculiarities, the representation of unique life-styles suggested an emphatically individualistic nature, and yet the statements of the characters come across as pronouncements of deep personal conviction. In respect of both the issues addressed and the style employed, Free Democrats managed to find the least clichéd solutions. There is humour, surprising developments in several of their campaign films. (For example the connection of the 'My girl wants to have a baby' sentence with the party programme. Or one of party chairman Gábor Kuncze's usual witty, or if you like aphoristic turns of phrase: 'another reason I'll vote for this party, is that I am its chairman.'). Direct dialogue between the party and the private life of the individual suggests that private life is sacred, but for whatever a political platform is required, the party is ready to be a partner: in this respect the personal and political help and strengthen each other. (The 'you are voting for yourself' slogan is in keeping with this idea.) The number of sexual references is notable: a young man who wants to go 'dating,' the slightly older young adult whose 'girl wants to have a baby', the girl who weighs the possibility of 'falling pregnant against my will' (in a train of thought arguing for freedom to chose abortion). The characters are mostly white-collar people and significantly mostly young (the whole of the party's current campaign was aimed to addressing young people, especially those most disappointed in FIDESZ). The markedly urban vernacular (typical of the party from the beginnings) circumscribes the target group, and there are frequent references to the city in the campaign. Another original feature was the efficient use of visual symbols in the campaign here discussed – the bird soaring to the sky, which refers to the party's emblem or 'totem' in a new form; and the suggestive footage of Martin Luther King, the '56 revolution and the solitary figure facing the tanks on Tiananmen square, which also carry the basic values of liberalism.

It is worth examining sound- and light-effects in the films: FIDESZ used modern, dynamic pop-music of a national feel. HDF underlined the opposition of negative and positive images with the use of music, the negatives are accompanied by sinister music, while positives are accompanied by a relaxed, rhythmical dance music and the merriness of Viennese waltzes. HSP's choice of music was very similar: the dynamic classical dance music is here coupled with the Ode to Joy (the EU anthem). Free Democrats use a dynamic, but slightly upsetting syncopated Jazzy, English (English-language) music.

FIDESZ's film starts with images of a bright morning; later it switches to the festive atmosphere of the candle-light and sparklers of a birthday, finally the green light of the office in the evening creates an atmosphere of solemnity. HDF uses contrasts: the negative images are shown in sinister dark and greys, replaced in one case by the spot-lit podium at a night-time meeting, in the other the bright light of an afternoon scene.

Finally, if we return to the question raised initially, the ways in which the differences in the relation of the parties to the European Union are presented, we can answer that all in all there were relatively few noticeable differences. The values expressed are either the same, generally demanded values (such as security, welfare, freedom, etc.), or European values, undoubted by any party, such as tolerance, democracy and a respect for cultural heritage. On the other hand it is quite obvious that the different parties stressed certain values more than the others, and when they defined the essence of 'European-ness', they emphasised these

values and attached these to 'Europe'. (Such was liberalism for Free Democrats, cultural heritage and cultured behaviour for HDF, /state-subsidised/ modernisation for HSP). There was, however, a notable difference between the parties in that the different small parties either did not address the issue of 'European-ness' (Workers' Party, MIÉP = Party of Hungarian Truth and Life) and thereby indirectly express their reservations about the alleged positive effects of accession, or like FIDESZ, stressed (or also stressed) that accession must not be implemented with self-subjection, the attitude of trying to catch up, but by relying on domestic resources where possible, and with the knowledge that Hungary can not only gain from accession, but also largely enrich the European community.

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The results of the election: FIDESZ: 47 %, (a substantial surge compared to the previous elections) HSP: 34 %, (an even more substantial drop); Free Democrats: 7.7 %, (a relatively large gain) HDF 5.2% (gain).

FIDESZ's success was certainly due to an extent to criticisms of the government, and the more dynamic representation of national interests, and Free Democrats's relatively large gain was due to the party's successful self-representation of a third way, and the assumption of many voters that liberal values are more compatible than others with European values, and perhaps the fact that they managed to establish the association of consistency in the minds of the voters. HDF succeeded in passing the 5 per cent mark thanks to its balanced, peaceful image and reasonable style.

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As far as public opinion's relation with the elections and EU accession is concerned, we can establish that on the one hand there remains a substantial lack of information; the majority of the people have little knowledge of what it means, and how their lives will be influenced by an international union of states. As a result, EU elections failed to elicit much interest (that the low turnout, much lower than that of the Parliamentary elections, did not sink below the EU-average, was largely due to the fact that many voters felt it was important to participate, if only to express their preference in domestic politics). There are optimistic and negative expectations of the EU; (accession celebrations highlighted the surviving, slightly messianic expectations, but the sober majority coupled these positive expectations with a scepticism fuelled by centuries of experiences). The most productive attitude was the slowly spreading (albeit not yet majority-) opinion, which attempts to base expectations of the country's successful development primarily on the efficient and conscious use of the country's resources.

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Plates:

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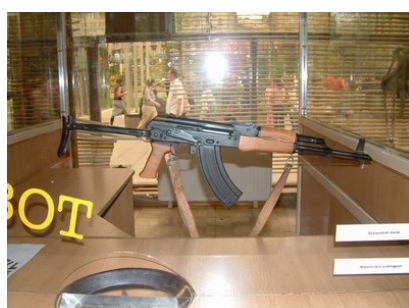
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Más a közönségünk, de egy a célunk:
hazánk európai uniós tagsága.

Gáspár Győző, Törőcsik Mari

www.eukk.hu EU-vonal: 181* 

Mi ott leszünk. Legyen ott Ön is! EU-népszavazás április 12-én.

*Vezetékes és mobilhálózatról a befutó sáv számjánál hívható.

20.

Lehet ugyanaz az érdeke egy
újpestinek és egy fradistának?
Igen. A szavazófülkében.

Kovács Zoltán, Gera Zoltán

www.eukk.hu EU-vonal: 181* 

Mi ott leszünk. Legyen ott Ön is! EU-népszavazás április 12-én.

*Vezetékes és mobilhálózatról a befutó sáv számjánál hívható.

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