

## News

### **Paid spectators at Orbán's ceremonial speech?**

The prime minister emphasized in his ceremonial speech: we are true to the 'That we the yoke of slavery, No more shall wear' oath after 163 years, and we still keep ourselves to it. Making an oath together for each other means that whatever happens in the world we will stand up for each other. The nation's collective oath means that all Hungarians will stand up for each other and all Hungarians together will stand up for Hungary – said Viktor Orbán. We did not tolerate to dictate to us neither from Vienna in 1848, nor from Moscow in 1956 and 1990, and we won't tolerate it even now if someone dictates to us from Brussels or anywhere else – stated Orbán. The prime minister emphasised: we won't abide by any lectures and we expect everybody to respect Hungary and the Hungarians.

Meanwhile it turned out that some organized spectators were invited for the ceremony held in front of the National Museum on Thursday. This was stated by young people to the news portal Origo, and they identified themselves as paid spectators. According to one of the participants, an unnamed company paid five hundred individuals to participate at the event. One of them claimed that they were not particularly interested in Orbán's speech or in politics in general, however, they received 1500-2000 HUF for participating. The speaker did not reveal the name of the company that hired them for the job. Somebody claimed that they were only supposed to stand and watch, while others added that they had to applaud as well. Three girls wearing the national cockade said they would receive the money after the ceremony.

### **Green ombudsman criticized the ruling parties' draft constitution**

Eliminating citizens' right to a healthy environment and the institution of ombudsman for future generations - as suggested in the ruling parties' draft constitution - is unacceptable, Hungary's green ombudsman, Sandor Fulop told MTI in a statement. Fulop argued that no fundamental right can be ensured unless those rights are backed by appropriate institutions. The draft makes it clear that the necessary conditions will not be met to "represent the interests of future generations, advocate sustainable development or to ensure that the ombudsman has increased control over environmental issues," said Fulop's statement. The draft is a "regrettable step back from the current level of the environment, sustainability and protection for future generations," Fulop added. Under the draft, a single ombudsman would replace the current four, with deputies in charge of different areas. *MTI*

### **EP approves resolution criticising Hungary's Media Law**

The resolution condemning the Hungarian media law was passed with 316 against 264 votes with the abstention of 33 EP members. Before the vote, the European People's Party group, which includes the Hungarian governing party Fidesz, withdrew its own resolution criticising the attacks against Hungary's media law. The most important objections include the law being biased and not independent. The approved resolution urges a new review of the Hungarian

media law and suggests that the European Commission should draft an EU directive protecting the freedom of the press and media pluralism. The resolution calls on the Hungarian government to amend its law again, taking into account recommendations of the European Parliament, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. It added that clauses inconsistent with "the wording or spirit" of European laws and agreements should be scrapped. It calls on the Hungarian authorities to "restore the independence of media governance" in Hungary and to put an end to the state's "interference in freedom of opinion".

### **Demonstrations in four countries for the freedom of the press in Hungary**

There were demonstrations in four countries on March 15th for the freedom of the press in Hungary. The organizers want to make sure that the government withdraws the media law. Protests were held in Germany in front of the building of the Hungarian Embassy in Berlin, also in Frankfurt, in New York in the United States, and also in Romania in front of the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest.

### **The European Commission opens infringement procedure against Hungary over 'telecoms tax'**

The EC has launched an infringement procedure against Hungary, the centre-right government of which imposed taxes on several profitable business sectors to boost budget revenues and meet its budget deficit targets. Hungary introduced special charges for telecoms operators in October 2010. The Commission this time has concerns that this tax is incompatible with EU telecoms rules, which require specific charges on telecoms operators to be directly related to covering the costs of regulating the telecoms sector. Hungary has two months to reply to the request, which takes the form of a so-called 'letter of formal notice, the first stage of EU infringement procedures. The Commission has just decided to refer France and Spain to the EU Court of Justice concerning similar 'telecoms taxes'. László Kovács, former European Commissioner and present vice-chairman of MSZP added it wouldn't be surprising if new proceedings were started against Hungary after the rotating presidency. He thinks that the regulation of the excise tax clearly offends European norms, and levying reduced VAT-rates also contradicts EU law. According to Kovács it is possible that procedures would start because of certain extraordinary taxes levied on other sectors too, because they were imposed unexpectedly, retroactively, without consultation and not on the profit but on the revenues. László Kovács added he thought that the proceeding on the extraordinary 'telecoms tax' would be launched after the Hungarian rotating presidency, but the fact that it happened earlier refers to the rapidly decreasing favor of European institutions shown towards the Hungarian government.

### **Parliament exonerates 2006 rioters**

The national assembly voted 297 to 60 last Monday to nullify the convictions of participants in anti-government demonstrations and riots of 2006 who were found guilty solely on the basis of police reports and testimony. The proposal came from István Balsai of the governing conservative party Fidesz, whose caucus was supported by lawmakers from the opposition nationalist party Jobbik in a roll-call vote. The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which had requested the open vote, opposed the bill, as did the small green opposition party LMP.

## Comments

### **Life was better under Gyurcsány**

It may well be that the increase of salaries in the past eight years was too much. However, it was the doctor, the social worker and the teacher who saw their salaries increased and their standard of living improved. At least it wasn't the millionaire, the prime minister or any member of parliament who pocketed the money.

Under Gyurcsány, we used to have some definitions and everyday practices, which seem to be on the verge of extinction today. We used to have interest reconciliation; wage offers were usually accepted even at times of severe financial crises. Our social achievements, our constitution, the defense of minorities, anti-segregation laws in the educational system and the office of the ombudsman were all respected and honored. And now all this hard work, our democratic credentials are threatened by the current prime minister. Back in those days it was self-evident that the guardians of our democracy, such as law enforcement, should be respected and not vilified if they were putting their own lives at risk for our sake. That is even more valid if we know that the group of people against whom the police were trying to defend us were none other than a bunch of thugs. Were there any mistakes? Yes, regrettably, there were. But we also used to have the right institutions to investigate them, which now no longer exist.

No question that the republic was respected and that the quality of life was higher. Orbán destroyed our citizenry, our legal security, and he despises those who dare to take an opinion other than his own. Gyurcsány was received in London, Washington, Paris, Moscow, Beijing and Berlin, he could also host many of the great leaders of the world. Unlike Orbán who has become a pariah by now. In his last moments as prime minister Gyurcsány could still use his authority to help the country by negotiating 1 billion euro for development, whereas the current PM is constantly being humiliated while being the current president of the EU.

*Zsolt Gréczy, stop.hu, March 14. 2011.*

### **Long way down**

In the next few weeks 263 Fidesz-KDNP and 46 Jobbik MPs will discuss a document, to be followed by heavy media interest, which may define the country's destiny for a long time to come: namely the new constitution. In this legislation process the governing coalition parties' politicians will be debating the constitution only amongst each other, opposing opinions will only be made by one party, which is heavily relying on the historical constitution and the myth of the Holy Crown, while it is farther away from the two other opposition coalitions in its beliefs than from Fidesz. At the end of this process a new constitution will be enacted, one which is written and voted on only by governing coalition politicians – and since the opposition parties have removed themselves from the process, the governing coalition will not even have the chance to at least put in some amendments coming from other sources even if only for making the picture look a little nicer.

This is the point where one may wonder whether the unreasonable way of discussing the new constitution in the parliament is due to the governing coalition's two-third majority power politics or just the offended opposition's hope for revenge. If we take the legislative process seriously, then it would be the obligation of MSZP and LMP politicians – sent to the parliament with 1.5 million votes – to challenge and air their concerns in the parliament. Even if it is the case I have to say that Fidesz made the first mistake as even they said, in opposition, that the biggest responsibility lay with the government since real allowances and

gestures could only be made by them. The government made a wrong decision from a content and tactical point of view: with wiser and more considerate politics it could have created a situation for the constitutional process, in which the opposition parties simply could not have abandoned it.

*Gábor Török, torokgaborelemez.hu, March 14, 2011.*

### **The Future Has Begun - Once Again**

Even back then, in the wake of the 2002 general elections, 5-6 percent of polled voters decided not to disclose their disapproval of the government: in fact that was the cause behind the contradiction of Fidesz's expected victory (forecast by most research institutes) and the party's actual loss of the elections. Although Orbán's first government only teetered on the verge of parliamentary democracy and democratic principles; its greed, unscrupulousness, exaggerated ideological fervor and the regular marches by its cockaded supporters intimidated many citizens: they expressed another party preference to the surveyor at home than they did when standing alone in a curtained polling booth. Today, the vast majority of Hungarian society is scared.

Inflation took off, and the NBH (National Bank of Hungary) had to raise interest rates. Despite bombastic promises, unemployment has been growing since last autumn; the number of unemployed increased by almost 100,000 in January 2011 due to the cancellation of public works programs initiated by the previous administration. While investment rates are on the increase in all countries that show recovery from the crisis, Hungary posted an unexpected 8 percent decline in the fourth quarter of 2010. The budget deficit is already staggering: public deficit exceeded 81 percent of the annual target by February.

Now Orbán's regime is crushing between two millstones. On the one hand, there are the Western economic forces such as investors, financiers and money-lenders, in other words: reality; and, on the other hand, there is irrationality. The lies are now being exposed, the effect of previously effective communication techniques is now quite the opposite of what they intended, and the avalanche is slowly beginning to build up...

By now, the reputation of Orbán and his regime has suffered catastrophic losses amongst all major Western political actors. As long as Orbán acts as the rotating president of the Council of the European Union, fulfilling the formal duties assigned to him in the first half of the year, he will not encounter public humiliation. However, after the presidency, he will become a real pariah as envisioned by the Washington Post already in summer 2010 (the cancellation of the EU summit in Gödöllő was just an early indication of what should be expected in the future). Sooner or later, this will become evident in Hungary as well – even for the lowest social classes. Today it is also clear that sailing with the 'eastern wind' was pure illusion. Orbán was ignominiously rejected in Moscow, while the Chinese simply set their traditional formal politeness aside last October. Since then, it has become clear that they have absolutely no intention to finance our public debt, thus 'the Chinese card' is nothing more than an unsafe bet.

What consequence can be expected? I think even greater arrogance of power than before. 'Minimum-wage commandos', persecution of 'political criminals liable for indebting the nation', night police raids at discotheques ordered directly by the PM, imprisoning children etc. It is obvious that fear – and because of fear – hatred of the powers that be will grow. Orbán and his accomplices already committed so much cruelty, they made so many unscrupulous moves, violated so many principles, and crossed so many barriers that their conduct will certainly have consequences. There will be a backlash. I would say now the sooner the better. This unrestrained power, this stupid regime just cannot go on for long. Its

financial and psychological resources will fall into a downward spiral after a while – then things will start to happen very quickly indeed. There will be a political implosion. What that actually means is not sure yet. The future is always unpredictable, but I am sure that it is not as distant as we previously dared to believe.

*József Debreczeni, Népszabadság, March 13, 2011*