

Weekly Newsletter

News

A lawsuit to be taught

Zsolt Császy, the former legal and sales manager of the Hungarian State Holding Company, told the *Népszabadság* that there was no confession under duress and no direct interference to coerce him into saying anything that could compromise the members of the previous administration. Whether being remanded in custody is reason enough to alter one's recollection is a different matter, said Császy, who believes that many were at their wits' end among those questioned in the Sukuró-case. This is a lawsuit during which people are paraded on television in shackles, explained Császy. Therefore, it is by no means vicious if, considering the significant psychological pressure, one reconsiders his position. It is no coincidence that the defendants, referring to the aforementioned pressure, are withdrawing their evidences. As regards the outcome of these evidences, Császy recalls being asked several times whether, in the Sukuró-case, he could feel any political pressure exerted upon him by Ferenc Gyurcsány. And even if he said that he couldn't, it would have been in vain because the public prosecutor kept returning to the same question, as if inspired by a certain someone. But that's the beauty of a political trial.

Orbán shouldn't represent the employees

Some 50,000 people took part in the joint demonstration of the European Trade Union Confederation and the Hungarian trade associations in Budapest on Saturday. The demonstrators protested against the austerity measures introduced by the EU member states.

Fidesz attacks court leaders

Alluding to the slowness of the judiciary, but in fact considering the leading judges as being post-Communists, Fidesz will practically decimate the headcount of the jurisdiction. There is only a ghost of a chance that the protest of the judges will prevent the governing majority from introducing the regulations.

The mayor of Esztergom requested new elections

The independent mayor of Esztergom requested the dissolution of the local council in an open letter written to the Prime Minister in order to eliminate the political stalemate that has paralyzed Esztergom for half a year. Viktor Orbán – freeman of Esztergom – alone can step up: only the government can propose the dissolution of the local council and the announcement of new local elections to the Parliament. Éva Tétényi chose a peculiar method to raise awareness: she walked app. 50 kilometers from home to the Parliament to deliver her letter.

Mr Tamás Deutsch's latest scandal

According to the sources of Egyenlítő, a political blog, the European Parliament's relevant authorities are conducting an audit of Fidesz nominated Tamás Deutsch's expense claims. According to the website the politician – infamous for his obscene comments and scandalous dealings with women – became target of this current audit because he regularly claims and collects the EUR 220 subsidy owed and paid to politicians living in the countryside – which in his case would be owed to him for the distance travelled between Ferihegy (Budapest Airport) and Hódmezővásárhely – although he usually travels to the airport from Budapest. Mr Deutsch's day-to-day living in Budapest is further supported by the fact that the „enfant terrible” of Fidesz was the

president of the party's Budapest organization (2002-2004), member of the Budapest City Council (fraction leader of Fidesz-KDNP between 2002-2003) and member of the local council in Budapest's 7th district (2006-2008). This last position he managed to lose rather embarrassingly, he did not to turn up at any of the local council meetings for one full year, yet he collected his monthly salary for the job. By the way, the EUR 220 sum (roughly HUF 60,000) collected at every single Brussels trip would be enough for roughly eight journeys between Budapest and Hódmezővásárhely, calculated by using the consumption rate of an Audi A6 on this distance and with HUF 400 as the price of one liter of petrol.

Hungary inflation accelerates

Hungary's consumer prices went up by 4.5% year on year in March, up from 4.1% in February and above the market's call for a 4.2% CPI. Inflation was up 1.1% m/m, primarily over a 2% rise in food prices and a 3.4% increase in the price of motor fuels. *portfolio.hu*

Comments

Orbán's broken magic

Viktor Orbán can face the fact for the first time, that his long lasting post-election magic is broken. It is no longer enough to say that the country has to be pulled back from the edge of an economic crisis, and then the building process can be started. The people who took to the streets for a trade union protest against the government's actions last Saturday may feel that while the country has indeed stepped back from the edge of the cliff, they still stand closer to it than ever before.

Ákos Tóth, nol.hu, April 9. 2011.

Orbán's World Falling Apart

Worrying signs are coming from the Parliament's Nándorfehérvári Hall. This is the 180 square meter room in which the father of the ballot box revolution, "the Genius of Mátra*" (*a mountain range in northern Hungary; the country's highest peak, Kékestető [1,014 m; 3,330 ft] belongs to this mountain range; *Kékes* literally means *Bluish* in English) now sits alone. The Hungarian premier used to negotiate in this room with U.S., Russian and French presidents, the German chancellor, the British prime minister as well as other EU leaders several years ago. These days nobody visits except Orbán's cronies. And Viktor Orbán is just staring out of the window, getting increasingly sorrowful and weather-beaten. Orbán and his team have virtually destroyed this country. The chastised Hungarian public administration – cleansed by unlawful dismissals – is in ruins, the Constitutional Court and the PSZÁF (the Hungarian Financial Supervisory Authority) have lost their significance. To the greater glory of press freedom, producers of false news are being appointed to oversight the media. The government is completely destroying the judicature. A former executive of MNV Zrt. (the Hungarian State Holding Company) accuses the prosecution of political show trial (as of now, there has been no response to his allegation). Lately policemen and firemen have also been humiliated.

Zsolt Gréczy, Népszava, April 11. 2011

Here, Tamás Deutsch, here's your front page!

Tamás Deutsch, a wise politician and private person at the same time told the complacent spectators what the moral and the ethical fine is, thus offering the best terrain for novice psychology students. He told the audience where things are coming from, what the gauge was, how we have to manifest ourselves, how we have to take over responsibility, how we – infinitely simple minded people – should live.

András Murányi, Népszabadság, April 11. 2011

Government: suppressing, quibbling, manipulating

Accepting criticism and, what is more, correcting oneself is an organic part of politics. Sadly, however, not for Fidesz, as it seems. During the last few days they have overstepped another boundary.

As Véleményvezér (“*The Opinion Leader*”) considers, the government appears quite disturbed lately: as if it were incapable of treating criticism regarding its policies with accepted, normal methods. The phenomenon is, of course, not fundamentally new – the novelty lies in the government’s responses, which have again gone past a certain frontier.

The latest three affairs are all about unorthodox reactions of the government to criticism voiced by certain political actors.

SUPPRESSION OF INFORMATION

First in line and, perhaps the least significant case, was the official communication following the Orbán-Wulff meeting. Péter Szijjártó (*spokesman of the Prime Minister*) issued the usual kind of meaningless communiqué, according to which „Hungary is looking to Germany with great respect, and striving for long-term co-operation with her in all areas.” Contrary to that we have learned from German sources that the meeting was less than idyllic. In the diplomatic words of Federal President Wulff, “as it happens between friends, we also spoke about some disturbing issues related to the media law, the question of taxation and the debate on the constitution.” Suppressing German criticism is everything but a manifestation of respect towards Germany. Perhaps it is needless to detail and further why, from a diplomatic point of view, it is a troubling gesture to suppress and distort the standpoint of a counterpart after a meeting.

QUIBBLING

The second case is related to this weekend’s trade union demonstrations. Péter Szijjártó was literally saying that trade unions were demonstrating *for* the government’s policies, since the Hungarian government was as much against the policy of austerity measures as them. Again, it is needless to detail why the government’s reaction is absurd. It should suffice to look at what was said at the demonstration for anyone to decide whether those sentences expressed support for the Hungarian Government.

Again, of course, this step has its own logic: the government is constantly seeking to legitimize its decisions with a reference to the will of “the people”. Obviously, it finds itself in a difficult position when a group of “the people” turns against it – as it represents a direct challenge to this sort of legitimacy.

MANIPULATION

The third case, undoubtedly the most severe one, is related to the “creative reinterpretation” of Daniel Cohn-Bandit’s press conference. To make matters worse, the architect of the coup was rewarded with a promotion “to editor-in-chief” – not that anyone should have the slightest of doubts as regards motivations. We are no Cohn-Bandit fans either, we find it fully justified that he is considered by some as the “*Mr. Torgyán*” of the European Parliament. But one’s opinion about similar manipulations cannot depend on who its victims are, and what we otherwise think about them.

WHY?

Obviously, no political force likes it to be criticized, but criticism is an unavoidable part of politics in a democracy. Naturally, criticism does not necessarily have to be swallowed. It is possible and

necessary to defend oneself, just as it is a well-established method of modern politics to fend-off criticism by attacking the integrity of the person voicing it. But the above cases go well beyond that. They point to the fact that the government does not want to accept opposition in any case at all, not even the fact that it exists. For this it is capable of reinterpreting events in the most absurd way, or even consciously lying. Despite the fact that accepting criticism and even correcting oneself is an organic part of politics – except for Fidesz, as it seems. Similar affairs represent an astonishing political risk, and point towards a dangerous future coercions for the government. It is simply impossible for anyone win every single battle, it cannot be that it is always the same one side that has to be right. Those who are not willing to ever lose, those, who constantly resist accepting any mistake, will only face problems when they will have already grown way beyond them, and have become unmanageable.

By then, it will be too late.

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