



Not All Hope is Lost

'I've cleaned the snow from your pavement meanwhile you were protesting. Thank you for standing up for democracy on my behalf as well.' – a message found at a gate of a protester in December 2018. All of us remember those weeks when braving sub-zero temperatures, thousands took the street protesting against a proposed labour law. When day by day, more and more people went out to the streets all over the country and after almost 10 years, they were not afraid to raise their voice against the autocratic regime. It was the time when we all started believing that there's hope for change. As we are not alone and we are more than we thought.

In the midst of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late March, international media once again focused their attention on Hungary and on the so-called Authorisation Act which was pushed through the Parliament by Viktor Orbán's government. Once again, Hungary was in the spotlight, and a new item was added to the long list where the government's actions resulted in the country appearing in the negative light of increasing authoritarianism and lack of commitment to EU values. Many label Hungary as a dictatorship, others just look at it as a lost case. And while such an appreciation is valid when it comes to the government, its generalisation to the entire population is neither right nor fair.

ORBÁN DOES NOT SPEAK FOR ALL HUNGARIANS

In 2010, Fidesz regained the democratic authority to govern the country with a two-thirds majority. Voters put their trust into them and into the institution they hoped would represent them. But they have abused this trust and altered the rules of the game, making sure to remain in power even though their support has dropped during the last years. Abusing this trust and the potential of a two-third majority is particularly painful, as after the regime change in 1989 these laws were passed with the intention that decision-making, in any case, should be based on political consensus. Ever since, there was no other government which would have abused this power.

Therefore, by doing so, Orbán has put the first nail in the coffin of rule of law and has been building his whole system on the basis of abusing this two-thirds majority. What we see today instead of rule of law, by any means, seems more like rule by law. Thus when Fidesz is quick to point a finger at how the Parliament is still democratically functioning, we need to remember that they use this majority as a carte blanche to flout rule of law and erode the democratic fabric of the country. They are also undermining the integrity of democratic institutions and elected officials. From the Constitutional Court

having a majority of Fidesz loyalists to the Attorney General's office ignoring corruption cases related to the governing party, all essential checks and balances have been undermined.

This is amplified by the governmental control on public media that became a mouthpiece of government propaganda and the capture of an overwhelming share of the country's private media. As a result, a big share of the country's population, especially in rural areas, has only access to media which are owned by Fidesz oligarchs, therefore even if they would like to be informed from different sources, those are the easiest and sometimes the only ones available.

Last important piece of the puzzle: using its supermajority, Fidesz redesigned the electoral system in their favour, meaning that a smaller number of seats could be awarded to smaller and non-incumbent parties and giving more of the total seats to the victorious party. This makes it very difficult for the opposition to reach significant results as the system is mainly benefiting the strongest party at the time of voting. These are just a few examples of the measures that have allowed Orbán to cement his power and give the impression that while there are a few vocal opposing forces, the population supports him. Reality is more complex, as a big part of the population has turned away from politics and their silence strengthens Fidesz.



However, it is not a glaring phenomenon that people feel disenfranchised and lost their trust in politics and politicians, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. Thousands have lost their jobs, their homes and were left on the side of the road without any help and most of them are still not even being acknowledged by the government. On top of that, people do not believe anymore that Fidesz can be replaced through elections, as after their third landslide victory in 2018, an unprecedented dismay swept through the country.

INCIPIT MOMENTUM

Momentum was born out of the same disenfranchisement that so many other Hungarians are feeling. As young graduates, we felt like that no one was representing us and we did not believe that any of the opposition parties could be an alternative to Fidesz. We did not see any governability and credible representation. We did not want to put up with our fates, but to take destiny into our own hands.

Therefore, we decided to act instead. We felt like it was our responsibility to try for a political-cultural and political elite change. We also had the freedom to do so. We could have easily chosen to go or stay abroad, but we felt that if all the highly educated young people went abroad, then Hungary would sink even deeper. We realised that it is not us who should leave the country to live a better and more free life, but it is the government that should be ousted to be able to live the life we want to, but in our own country.

After the general elections in 2018, many people felt defeated and disillusioned. We felt the same and it was really hard to see that despite the dedication and determination, we could not prevent a 2/3 majority. However, what lifted our spirits back was that in the following weeks, many people wanted to join, which showed that our work meant a lot to people and maybe slowly, but we will make that change happen.

And what is our secret? We walk the talk.

We don't believe in cheap politicking, we don't think we can change the world from tv studios or through press conferences. What we believe in is community building, dialogues, constructive discussions instead of just telling people what they should think. We ask questions and we listen. We bring people together and show through street activism how much can actually depend on us, and just on us. So, this was the Momentum recipe: innovating and turning into an advantage the limitations imposed on us by our very limited resources and the hostile environment created by Orbán's system with no access to traditional campaigning channels. While the government was omnipresent in traditional media, we spent countless weeks touring the country, meeting local communities, and working with our amazing volunteers across the country. While the country was covered with governmental

billboards, we were out on social media harnessing the power of innovative communication tools such as specific Momentum animated GIFs, live Q&As or Instagram stories. And our community has not stopped growing because we offer an inclusive atmosphere which helps its members to grow, and shows them that doing politics is fun. Our method was confirmed during the European elections. Despite the opinion polls, what we did resonated with the people and we reached a result of 10%, allowing my colleague Katalin Cseh and myself to be the first two elected officials of the party. In the local elections of last autumn we saw further success both in Budapest and in the countryside.

LOOKING AHEAD

14 December 2018. I will never forget that date as I spent a night in police custody for holding a smoke flare while protesting. When I asked my father the day after whether he was worried he smiled and said 'Why would I? You are the third generation of politicians in our family who get imprisoned for fighting for democracy.' This was the moment when I finally understood, each generation has the chance, the right, and the duty to do it better. To fight for what they believe in.

As a new political generation, we ought to build a solid and coherent vision for our country, a vision that underpins our message and helps people embrace our identity, our new political culture and our very own way to engage with them. Our party is first and foremost a movement with activists working hard online and offline, building an enthusiastic community with a clear message capable of bringing hope to people.

During the next elections, it will be our task to spread this hope, break away from political apathy and harness the tremendous amount of discontent and wish for change present in society. We must build a future together with the Hungarian society, towards a self-confident and truly democratic country that doesn't leave parts of its citizens behind and which plays a constructive and central role at the heart of Europe.

Hungary is not a lost case. A whole new generation has grown up since the transition in 1989. Being a member of the European Union is neither questioned nor an economic issue for us but a part of our identity. We are European and we share its values.

