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### **The Hungarian Party System in 2010: More Polarized, less Plural**

Looking at the 2010 election from a comparative perspective it is tempting to invoke Giovanni Sartori's (1976) use of the term 'polarized pluralism' to describe the Italian party system in the 1970s and suggest that the Hungarian party politics is best described as polarized, but not-so-plural. The central puzzle is that the combination of a party system dominated by two large parties and an electoral system with a strong majoritarian component has resulted in centrifugal, rather than centripetal, competition. Sartori linked polarized pluralism in Italy to the country's proportional electoral system. Most comparative politics scholars associate majoritarian electoral systems with Downsian convergence on the median voters (Downs 1957). However, Hungary's 2010 election seemed to confirm the trend over the last decade: toward polarization in a two-party (or at least two-bloc) system (see Enyedi and Benoit in this volume). Three other (and related) aspects of the Hungarian 2010 election stood out as unusual compared to developments elsewhere in Central Europe. First, Fidesz-KDNP secured more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament, and thus the power to re-write the constitution. Second, the most stable party system in post-communist Central Europe underwent dramatic change. Two long-established small parties fell below the electoral threshold and seemingly disintegrated, leaving only two of the six parties that won seats in the 1990 election still standing. Third, Jobbik emerged as the third largest party, closely behind MSZP in terms of both votes and seats. These developments raised questions not only about Hungarian party politics, but also about whether and to what extent this fits into a broader European pattern. Was this a peculiar result of an unlikely set of circumstances; the consequence of the medium-term development of the Hungarian party system; or can it be seen as part of a broader trend in European politics?

In order to begin to answer these questions, this chapter investigates the origins and nature of Hungary's 2010 'earthquake election'. Fidesz's path to power in the spring of 2010 involved the usual combination of astute political strategy, weak or discredited opponents and an element of political or economic crisis that so often characterise major electoral change. The centre-left coalition had been in power for eight years, under three different prime ministers (albeit run more or as a less technocratic interim government for the last year). It had presided over an economy in crisis. The last two elections had been too close to call before the polling booths closed. These are factors that have been seen elsewhere in Europe, both separately and in this combination. However, the Hungarian story also featured its own more or less unique elements. The most important was the polarisation of party politics. Although the party system was remarkably stable in the 1990 and 2000s, the process of party system stabilisation brought about two increasingly hostile blocs. The three-bloc competition that characterised the 1990 election was all but replaced by the MSZP – Fidesz two-bloc rivalry by the time the 1998 election results

were in. By 2010 this contest had been reduced to a two-party contest between Fidesz and MSZP, and voters perceived the two parties as growing ever further apart (see Enyedi and Benoit in this volume).

The approach taken to analysis of party system development and change in the present chapter is one that focuses first and foremost on political parties as strategic actors. This perspective sees political parties (or more specifically, the party leadership) as more or less rational agents that try to combine a series of goals that might not always be compatible: attracting votes, gaining executive office, influencing policy and surviving as an organisation. The proposition put forward in what follows is that the 2010 election can be seen as the latest development in the process of party system stabilization in Hungary in the sense that consolidated the MSZP – Fidesz rivalry at the core of the party system. The stabilisation of the party system involved a reduction in the number of parties, particularly as the ‘right’ consolidated in the shape of Fidesz-KDNP. But it also involved a pattern of gradual polarisation. Fidesz’s rise involved a clear shift toward the cultural right in the 1990s, consolidating the mainstream right and marginalising the extreme right. After its defeat in 2002 Fidesz’s electoral strategy involved strong opposition to the government rather than a return to the political centre. Anti-communism and rhetoric about oligarchy and incomplete regime change returned to the political agenda, in sharp contrast to the declining role such questions played in other post-communist EU states. This process was far from inevitable, and can be understood as the result of a series of contingent decisions about party strategy that could easily have turned out otherwise.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief review of the 2010 election, and the core characteristics of the Hungarian party system in 2010. The second section present a brief analysis of the political parties strategies and strategic choices in the two decades leading up to 2010, particularly as a contest between the non-socialist parties as to who would dominate and define ‘the right’. The third concluding section returns to the opening questions, and assesses the Hungarian party system anno 2010 in a comparative perspective.

### **A comparative take on the 2010 ‘earthquake election’**

In the literature on comparative European party systems, the term ‘earthquake election’ was first used widely to characterise the Danish 1973 election, and to a lesser extent the Norwegian election of the same year. These elections saw the emergence of new populist anti-tax parties that fundamentally changed the dynamics of party competition; as well as the rise of post-materialist socialist left parties. The label fits the Hungarian 2010 election well, since it saw two new parties win seats, neither of which fit into the established pattern of party competition. Both were protest parties. Jobbik had long been an insignificant fringe party on the far right, but emerged as a strong nationalist challenger on Fidesz’s right flank in when it polled 14.8% in the 2009 elections for the European Parliament and won 3 MEPs. LMP was established as a green alternative to a discredited political establishment, building on commitment to social justice and participatory politics. Its first national poll was the 2009 EP elections, when it took 2.6% and secured

no MEPs. Both were ‘anti-parties’ in the sense that they eschewed the term ‘party’, criticised all the established parties for corruption, and presented themselves as clean alternatives. With Fidesz-KDNP soundly defeating the MSZP, the SZDSZ and MDF falling below the threshold for representation, and the two new parties winning representation, 2010 was Hungary’s ‘earthquake election’.

Table 1 – percentage of votes (list votes) and percentage of all the 386 seats

Party	1990		1994		1998		2002		2006		2010	
	Vote s	seat s	vote s	seat s	vote s	seat s	vote s	Seat s	vote s	seat s	vote s	seat s
MSZP	10.9	8.5	33.0	54.1	32.9	34.7	42.1	46.1	43.0	49.2	19.3	15.3
SZDSZ	21.4	23.8	19.7	17.9	7.6	6.2	5.6	5.2	6.5	5.2	-	-
Fidesz	8.9	5.4	7.0	5.2	29.5	38.3	41.1	42.5	42.0	42.2	52.7	68.1
KDNP	6.5	5.4	7.0	5.7	2.3*	0.0*	3.9*	0.0*	*	*	*	*
MDF	24.7	42.7	11.7	9.8	2.8	4.4	**	6.2	5.0	2.8	2.7	0.0
FKgP	11.8	11.1	8.8	6.7	13.2	12.4	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-
MIEP	-	-	1.6	0.0	5.5	3.6	4.4	0.0	2.2	0.0	-	-
Jobbik	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	***	0.0	16.7	12.8
LMP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.5	4.1
Others	15.8	2.8	11.2	0.6	6.3	0.3	2.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.3

\* The KDNP split in 1997, had some MPs elected for Fidesz in 1998 and 2002, before re-uniting and effectively joining Fidesz in 2006 and 2010.

\*\* MDF ran on a joint list with Fidesz in 2002; and thus won 24 seats.

\*\*\* Jobbik ran with MIEP in the ‘Third Way’ alliance in 2006.

The most remarkable aspect of the 2010 election was also the most widely predicted: Fidesz’s overwhelming victory. In 2002, after four years in government with the MDF and FKGP, Fidesz had come close to becoming the first governing party in Hungary to win re-election. Its defeat in 2006 came as a surprise, and went against the pattern of anti-incumbency voting in post-communist EU member states. By 2010 the polls were clear: Fidesz-KDNP was set not only to win, but win an absolute number of the votes and capture two-thirds of the seats. The Socialists’ defeat was the other side of the same coin. Both parties had changed their profiles since the mid-1990s, and achieved a dominant position on their side of the political spectrum. Perhaps the main characteristic that stands out is the extent to which MSZP adopted a more pro-market stance than its main “centre-right” competitor on a number of issues. Fidesz’s electoral campaigns, particularly in 2006 and 2010, came across as increasingly populist rather than free-market conservative. However, this is hardly unique in post-communist Europe: Slovakia and Poland have provided ample examples of parties that are nominally on the right but which programmes are far from free market. A comparison with Italian or Norwegian politics reveals a similar pattern: in 2006 and 2010 Fidesz was far closer to Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia/Popolo della Libertà or the Progress Party in Norway than to traditional Italian Christian Democrats (let alone the Christian Democratic Union in Germany) or Norway’s Conservatives in terms of both policy and electoral strategy.

In terms of economic policy it is tempting to conclude that the majoritarian elements of the electoral system, which rewarded the winners of the 1990, 1994, 1998 and 2010 elections with seats far out of proportion to their share of the votes (see table 1), may offer some clues to the pattern of competition between the two main parties. Given the economic reforms introduced by the 1994-1998 MSZP – SZDSZ government, their defeat in 1998 came as no surprise. By 2002 both Fidesz and the MSZP had learned the lesson well. With a less controversial economic policy Fidesz almost managed re-election in 2002. When the MSZP – SZDSZ coalition returned to power consistent and prudent economic policy took a lower priority than re-election. Consequently the coalition managed to secure re-election in 2006. Ferenc Gyurcsány's effort to reverse this policy famously backfired when his message to a meeting of Socialist MPs to the effect that the state of the economy was far worse than anybody had admitted (and that therefore in effect he had lied in the campaign) was leaked in the run-up to the October local elections. If the Hungarian experience in the 1990s and 2000s hold one lesson, it is a lesson in the difficulties of managing tight economic policy in the context of winner-takes-all electoral systems. Given the economic 'vale of tears' that transition from communism inevitably involved, it was no surprise that anti-incumbency voting was strong across post-communist Europe in 1990s. However, in Hungary the majoritarian part of the electoral system has re-enforced this trend more than a PR-system would have done. It may even have contributed to extending this phenomenon well into the 2000s.

The second 'earthquake' aspect of the 2010 election was the disappearance of the SZDSZ and MDF. Although this was hardly a surprise, since both parties had come perilously close to the threshold for parliamentary representation in 2006 and were polling poorly in the opinion polls in for more than a year leading up to the election, both were long-established features of the Hungarian party system. Their fates are hardly unique to Hungary: the SZDSZ story has been shared by a number of West European small coalition partners; and MDF demise reflected the dynamics of competition between liberal free-market conservatives and the populist right in Central Europe (and perhaps across the whole EU). The story of the SZDSZ is a near perfect illustration of 'government-fatigue', or the danger that participation in government as a minority partner holds for small parties. Kaare Strøm (1990) famously based his theory of minority government on the argument that small parties may be better off lending external support to a minority government in return for policy, rather than join a majority coalition and share the blame for policies they do not control. By 2009 SZDSZ had participated in three such coalitions with the MSZP, none of which had done much to restore the party's fortunes. The story of the MDF in the 2000s is one that several free-market liberal parties in formerly communist states have shared. As Fidesz moved toward the cultural right, MDF effectively leapfrogged Fidesz into the centre in the mid-2000. Ibolya Dávid took the party in the free-market liberal direction, particularly after the 2002 electoral defeat, but lost some support in the process. In 2006 she was rewarded with MDF's crossing the 5% threshold. However, in 2010, the context of a broad popular backlash not only against the MSZP but also against the Bajnai government's economic reform and crisis measures, this was hardly a winning strategy.

For outside observers, particularly the European press, the biggest shock of the Hungarian 2010 election was nevertheless that a far-right party with links to a uniformed movement took 16.7% of the vote and became Hungary's third largest party. Any explanation of Jobbik's success in the 2010 election would have to involve the usual factors associated with the rapid rise of parties on the extreme right: disaffected voters and discredited mainstream parties, anti-establishment protest, economic recession or unemployment, cultural protectionism in the face of globalisation, immigration or ethnic minorities, and a populist organisation that capitalises on this (Taggart 1995; Norris 2005). In Hungary's case the anti-establishment backlash was exacerbated by corruption (which affected all the established parties); the global economic crisis (which deepened the recession), the exceptionally high levels of unemployment in the north-east, and Jobbik's rhetoric that linked crime to the governing parties, international capital and the Roma minority. However, the extreme political polarisation between government and opposition after the 2006 election and the leaking of Gyurcsány's 'lies-speech' exacerbated this. Jobbik's rise to power came in the context not only of discredited government, but in which the mainstream opposition party went far beyond the ordinary parliamentary channels of opposition, e.g. questioning of the legitimacy of the election result, organising street protests and boycotting the prime ministers parliamentary speeches.

The second new party to enter parliament in 2010, LMP, was far more ordinary by comparative European standards. Built around a network of environment NGOs that spanned much of the left – right spectrum both in cultural and socio-economic terms, it may be compared to many of Europe's green parties. Like Jobbik LMP made the most of the antiestablishment backlash, picked up on an anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist trend, and won support from a disproportionate share of young (especially first-time) voters; but it did this from the diametrically opposite ideology. Its effort to stay clear of both the both Fidesz and MSZP was reminiscent of the initial strategy of many West European green parties, as was its commitment to grass-roots participatory politics and its focus on the environment, tolerance and inclusion, and its rejection of the political establishment, clientelism and corruption. As the year 2010 came to a close, the question of how LMP would position itself in Hungarian parliamentary politics remained open, as did the future of the party itself.

### **Party strategy, party competition and party system polarisation**

The central proposition put forward in this chapter is that the political developments that led to the 2010 election can be seen as part and parcel of the process of party system stabilization in Hungary, and that this process has been shaped more by the political parties strategic choices than by the underlying social structures of cleavages. This is by no means an effort to rehearse the *tabula rasa* arguments of Offe et al to the effect that post-communist society was an "atomized and decapitated mass of ex-clients of state socialism" (1998:25). As other contributors to this volume have observed, social cleavages and ideology play a major part in shaping party politics. The point is rather that party strategy has played a remarkable role in shaping Central European party systems in

the two decades since 1989 (Bakke and Sitter 2005). Looking across Europe in the twentieth Century, there are few or no similar cases in which the players of the political game been so free to elaborate the new institutional framework and explore and experiment with different strategies for competition; even if this takes place within the limits set by electoral rules, voter alignment and the parties' organisational resources. In Hungary, as in the rest of post-communist Europe, a number of very different strategies were pursued by a wide range of parties. Only a few proved successful in the long run. The key to this is party strategy.

Party strategy may be defined as the link between goals and their achievement. This involves a broad formula for how a party is going to compete: what its ends should be and how to pursue these ends. In the classical party politics literature a party's key aims were the pursuit of votes and office (Downs 1957, Riker 1962). This has since been supplemented by focus the pursuit of policy, which in turn shapes both coalition games and the pursuit of votes (de Swaan 1973; Budge & Laver 1986; Dunleavy 1991). Internal party management and organisational survival may be considered a fourth goal, which lies at the core of the party's identity (Panebianco 1988). The central problem is that maximising one goal may entail merely satisficing another, or even fully-blown trade-offs, and herein lies the dilemmas of party strategy (Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999). Historically, most West European parties have come close to one of three strategies. The first is linked to the catch-all and cartel models of party organisation and involves an effort define the left – right dimension; the second and third represent alternative strategies for competition based on representing interests or 'protest-parties' that operate at the flanks of the party system (figure 2).

Figure 2. Three Party Strategies

	Catch-all: Defining left vs. right	Interests: Cross-cutting left vs. right	Protest: Competing at the flanks
– 1880	Elite party		
1880 –	Mass party		
1919 –		Interest party	Anti-system party
1945 –	Catch-all party		
1970 –	Cartel party	Single issue party	Protest and new populist parties

The three strategies represent different responses to the strategic dilemmas of prioritising and balancing different goals, and are closely related to (and derived from) the literature on party organisation. First, the mainstream parties that compete against each other and in effect define 'left' and 'right'. Hence Kirchheimer (1966) and Katz & Mair's (1995) dynamic models that have most parties evolving from elite or mass parties into catch-all or cartel parties as they adapt and develop in the pursuit of votes and office. Second,

however, a number of parties have eschewed this strategy, choosing instead to focus on representing interests or a given constituency, and/or specific policies, often related to the very origins and identity (*raison d'être*) of the party, and therefore competing across the left-right dimension. To the extent that left-right issues are less salient, these parties may tend toward the 'centre' of the party system (Rokkan and Urwin 1983). Third, and alternatively, some inter-war parties rejected liberal democracy and thus operated at the communist and fascist extremes, although their post-war successors have either modernised or been crowded out by socialist left and new populist parties at the respective flanks (Taggart 1995). To be sure, many parties represent a mix of strategies and some parties transform themselves from one type to another. In post-communist Hungary, as elsewhere in Central Europe, most of these strategies were attempted by one political party or another. The potential main contenders struggled to define the left – right dimension of political competition and establish a dominant role on either side of the centre. In Poland market liberal and populist parties have struggled over how to define 'the right' without a clear winner; whereas the market liberals came out on top in the Czech case and the populist right in the Hungarian case. In all three countries a number of parties have attempted the interest-based or single-issue strategy: most have fared no better than the FKGP or KDNP in Hungary. Perhaps most remarkably, until Jobbik's breakthrough in the 2009 European parliament elections the far right was remarkable unsuccessful in central Europe.

Party system development in Hungary during the first decade after 1989 was primarily a question of deciding not only the meaning of 'left' and 'right', but also which parties would define the left and right in practice. As in Poland, the matter proved relatively straight-forward on the left side of the political spectrum. No party emerged to challenge the MSZP, which swiftly positioned itself near the centre, and won the 1994 elections. Its offer of a coalition to the SZDSZ in 1994 has been interpreted as a tactical deal partly to ensure legitimacy for government policy and partly because the MSZP right wing correctly assessed that an alliance with the SZDSZ would enable it to disarm its own left wing. The smaller party's willingness to join this coalition reflected a parting of the ways between SZDSZ and Fidesz that began in 1993 (which in turn reflected the leadership struggles in Fidesz in 1993, when Orbán's faction emerged victorious). The liberal parties' disappointing performance in the 1994 election opened the door to the centre-left coalition, and despite a somewhat turbulent four-year coalition government both MSZP and SZDSZ agreed to fight the 1998 election on a platform of continued coalition. This was their centre-left alliance consolidated, and the first elements of Hungary's 'polarised non-pluralism' in place: the establishment of a centre-left bloc that was more pro-EU, more free-market oriented and more well-disposed to foreign capital than its competitors on the centre-right. However, this was contingent on the MSZP's decision to offer partnership in coalition after winning an absolute majority of seats on its own in 1994; the Fidesz and SZDSZ's decisions on leadership and policy profile in the previous year; and the strength of the right wing within the MSZP.

The struggle to define and dominate the right followed a far less predictable pattern. The 1990 election was a triumph for the Christian national right over its more market-oriented and cosmopolitan liberal rivals. However, two sets of strategic choices were to shape the

development of the centre-right in Hungary in directions that would have seemed imponderable in 1990. The first was the divisions within the three victors of the 1990 election, as each party divided over how to react to the electoral defeat in 1994. The second was the rise of Fidesz, as it moved into the space left open by the three Christian national parties in the mid-1990s and absorbed elements from all three parties. The MDF, KDNP and FKGP all split gradually, and over several stages, and all lost MPs to Fidesz. The KDNP formally split in 1997, and seven of its MPs were re-elected in 1998 when one of its two factions arranged to run on the Fidesz ticket (after the rump-KDNP failed to win seats in either 1998 or 2002, the party re-united under the Fidesz umbrella). Fidesz also picked up factions that left the FKgP and MDF: 11 ex-FKgP MPs were re-elected for Fidesz in 2002, and 11 ex-MDF MPs in 2006. Although the story of the Hungarian centre-right in the 1990s and 2000s is the story of Fidesz's triumph under Orbán's leadership, this story also includes divisions that haunted the three Christian national parties. Whereas the Polish centre-right remained divided over strategy, and Vaclav Klaus opted for a market-oriented strategy and invoked Margaret Thatcher as his role model, Fidesz's choice of electoral strategy had more in common with that of the Italian right under Silvio Berlusconi. The comparison with the Czech and Polish (and indeed Italian) cases suggest that this was a matter of strategic choice, rather than the structure of post-communist competition.

The reduction of political space in Hungary also involved the marginalisation of the extreme right until about 2006, as Fidesz occupied a broad space on the political right. The Hungarian extreme right was born as a political force in its own right in 1993, when tensions within the MDF culminated in the expulsion István Csurka and the birth of MIÉP. Although MIÉP won representation in 1998, it failed in 2002 (albeit because of an increase in overall turnout rather than a drop its votes; Enyedi 2006). Although a weak organisation and a small and ageing membership were also important factors in the party's decline, Fidesz move to the right probably also contributed to squeezing out the party. By contrast the next party to emerge on the right flank, Jobbik, soon developed into a far better organised party. From late 2006 the combination of Fidesz's re-orientation toward the centre-right, the government's unpopularity, and the increased public debate about 'Gypsy crime' opened a window of opportunity for Jobbik. The party's anti-Roma rhetoric provided an additional edge to the traditional nationalist focus on the plight of Hungarian minorities abroad. By the end of 2009 Jobbik had taken third place in the EP elections, and organised the Alliance of National Movements with the Italian Fiamma Tricolore, the Swedish National Democrats and the Belgian National Front, which provides a good guide to who its counterparts in Western Europe are.

Between 1994 and 2006 the Hungarian party system thus saw a realignment from three blocs to two; and from six parties to four. As in other post-communist states, party system development included a considerable measure of trial and error. Several strategies and ideologies were adopted and tested. On the left the MSZP's strategy of centrist policy and economic reform in the 1990s, along with its coalition with SZDSZ, effectively closed the space to new social democratic challengers. But it left the field open for a populist challenge on the right, based partly based on a critique of the government's economic policy. On the right a wider set of strategies were tested: pre-communist parties



with niche target audiences were revived (KDNP and FKGP); a new populist catch-all type parties was briefly successful (MDF in 1990); and a classic far right party even managed to secure election (MIÉP in 1998); before Fidesz' new populist catch-all strategy eventually paid off in 1998. The MDF and SZDSZ found themselves in supporting roles: as junior coalition partners they faced the dilemma of going it alone and running the danger of losing votes to the larger and more viable parties, or remaining in the bloc and being associated with the policies of larger partners. Both chose economic policies that were more free-market than their respective partners and both saw heated debates on party strategy, which in turn contributed to their demise in 2009 and 2010. From 1998 onwards Fidesz and MSZP each saw the other as its main competitor. However, unlike the cartel parties discussed by Katz and Mair these two parties found little common ground and hardly agreed on the government sharing the spoils of electoral victory with its defeated opponent. Both learned the lesson from MSZP defeat that year: economic reform and austerity measures do not make re-election likely. They fought each other not so much on economic policy as on valence questions related to values, competence and corruption. Hungary's decade of polarised two-party competition had begun.

### **The Hungarian Party System in 2010: Polarized and bipolar, but stable?**

In 2010 the central characteristic of Hungarian party competition was the increasingly polarised competition between MSZP and Fidesz. The bitterly fought 2002 election had seen the largest opposition party (MSZP) criticise the main government party (Fidesz) for incompetence, corruption, abused of power and as damaging to democratic consolidation; four years later the pattern was reversed, with each party cast in the other's role. The 2010 campaign was almost as polarized. Although some comparisons with West European cases are obvious (Orbán's party was hardly the first to emulate Berlusconi's football chant-inspired slogan *Forza Italia!*), Hungarian party politics clearly represented an outlier in the set of European party systems in 2010 in terms of the level of polarisation between the two biggest parties. Fidesz showed no sign of moving to a more centrist strategy in the aftermath of the election; nor did MSZP. The obvious question is whether MSZP will be in a position to benefit if and when Fidesz experiences the backlash that most governing parties sooner or later face. Given the considerable unpopularity of MSZP, could another party emerge as the strongest opposition to Fidesz? West European history suggests that the big catch-all parties usually find a way to return to the centre; but the fate of the Polish left provides a salutary warning. As it stands, however, there seem to be no major alternatives to the MSZP on the centre-left.

The second question mark concerns the prospects for Jobbik and LMP. An important part of this question is whether Jobbik has mobilised to its full potential, in the near-ideal conditions of polarised and de-legitimised politics, or whether it can attract future disgruntled Fidesz voters. However, the focus on party strategy in the discussion above also points to the importance of how the mainstream parties on the centre-right and -left respond to the challenge from the far right. A recent study of how West European parties

dealt with such challenges concluded that a combination of policy adjustment and consensus-building across the let-right divide may be the optimal strategy (Bale et al 2010). Combined with the discussion above, this suggests that not only was the rise of Jobbik at least partly dependent on the broader polarised context of party competition in Hungary in the 2000s (and therefore not necessarily a signal of things to come elsewhere in Europe); but also that the Jobbik's future prospects depend to no small extent on the strategic choices made by Fidesz and MSZP. A broader comparative analysis offers much less to say about the LMP. By the end of 2010 the party was broader and more divided than its main competitors, with some way to go before it could present a clear and consistent governing alternative to Fidesz. However, it had embarked on a process of institutionalisation that might form the basis for a broader challenge to the two big parties. Like Jobbik it may be seen as an example of a broader European phenomenon, but if there is a lesson to be drawn from the West European experience it probably concerns the imperative for green parties of positioning themselves in relation to one of the mainstream parties, as possible coalition partners.

In short, returning to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter as to whether the 2010 election was a peculiar result of an unlikely set of circumstances, the consequence of the medium-term development of the Hungarian party system, or a part of a broader trend in European politics, the answer set out here emphasises the first two points. The 2010 election reflected a combination of extraordinary circumstances (the 'perfect storm') and the gradual polarisation of party political competition. The extraordinary majority Fidesz-KDNP captured in the 2010 elections probably reflected the specific circumstances of this election: polarised two-bloc competition, economic crisis and extremely high levels of anti-incumbency voting; combined with the two long-standing smaller parties being divided over strategy. To be sure, whether the government will be in a position to use its power to re-write the rules of the game in its own favour is of course another question (and by the close of 2010 the signs were clear that it would try its best to do so). Jobbik's success likewise seems at least partly the result of contingent factors, not least the polarisation of party competition in the 2010; and LMP clearly capitalised on the collapse of SZDSZ in 2009 and the general level of disillusionment with both MSZP and Fidesz among young, urban voters. At the very least, there is little evidence so far to suggest that Jobbik's success is a clear signal of things to come in Europe. Jobbik may have capitalised on a backlash against free-market economic policy, European integration and globalisation; but its rise seems also to have required the particular polarised context that Hungarian politics provided in 2008-10. By the end of 2010 the MSZP – Fidesz axis of competition seemed the only stable component of the Hungarian party system: polarised, but not very plural.

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