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The Evolution of the Systemic Position of the Prime Minister of Hungary – Legal Regulations and Constitutional Practice

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Słowa kluczowe: transformacja systemowa, demokratyzacja, parlamentaryzm, władza wykonawcza, premier, władza wykonawcza, Węgry

Abstract

The article discusses the issues of evolution of the political position of heads of government in Hungary. The time frame is between 1990 and 2020. A wide historical spectrum is included as well, showing the transformations of the supreme bodies of state power. After 1989, Hungary opted to establish a parliamentary cabinet system, with some strengthening of the government's powers. The institution of the Prime Minister has become a real instrument of political power for the leaders of political factions in the countries discussed. The analysis takes into account both constitutional regulations and political practice over the past nearly 30 years. A particular strengthening of the political position of the Prime Minister can be seen after 2010.

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Streszczenie**Ewolucja pozycji ustrojowej premiera Węgier –
regulacje prawne i praktyka konstytucyjna**

W artykule poruszono problematykę ewolucji pozycji politycznej szefów rządów na Węgrzech. Ramy czasowe obejmują lata 1990–2020. Uwzględniono również szerokie spektrum historyczne, ukazujące przemiany najwyższych organów władzy państwowej. Po 1989 r. Węgry zdecydowały się na ustanowienie parlamentarnego systemu gabinetów, z pewnym wzmocnieniem uprawnień rządu. Instytucja Prezesa Rady Ministrów stała się realnym instrumentem władzy politycznej przywódców frakcji politycznych w omawianych krajach. Analiza uwzględnia zarówno regulacje konstytucyjne, jak i praktykę polityczną ostatnich prawie 30 lat. Szczególne wzmocnienie pozycji politycznej Prezesa Rady Ministrów widać po 2010 r.

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I. Introduction

The analysis looks at the evolution of the systemic position of the Prime Minister of Hungary both in the context of existing legal and constitutional regulations and the developed constitutional practice. It covers the period after the beginning of the 1989 political and systemic transformations and the first contested election to the National Assembly in March and April of 1990. At the same time, the traditions of the institution of the government and its head in successive systemic orders from the mid-19th century (the Spring of Nations and the formation of Austria-Hungary institutions) have been included. It is noteworthy that the institution of the Prime Minister and the government has functioned in different systemic models – constitutional monarchy, parliamentary monarchy, the authoritarian system developed during the regency of M. Horthy (1919–1944), the parliamentary cabinet system (1945–1949), the system of a single state power dominated by the communist monopoly (1949–1989), and the peaceful transition toward the parliamentary model after 1989. A significant milestone in Hungary's modern political history is 2010 when the ruling party, FIDESZ, won a constitutional majority in the

National Assembly. The hypothesis of the article is as follows – the institution of Hungary’s Prime Minister has been affected to a larger extent by the tradition of shaping this institution than by direct constitutional regulations. This trend was particularly evident in the interwar period (the so-called regency) and the period of political transitions after 1990. The personality of a Prime Minister has significantly affected the political position of the head of government (the case of I. Bethlen, M. Rákosi, I. Nagy, J. Kádár, J. Antall or V. Orbán). Here, it is worth quoting the opinion of a Hungarian political scientist referring to the political changes introduced after 2010 by the FIDESZ government: “The number of fundamental changes introduced in the public sphere alone makes it difficult to describe them even superficially and to characterize the government’s policy. But it can be summed up as a desire to confer more power (economic and legislative) on the executive in relation to other state agencies and institutions”².

II. A historical overview

During the Spring of Nations, Lajos Kossuth, as the head of a delegation of the parliament’s lower chamber, presented in Vienna a programme of political-systemic and social-economic reforms. He demanded the establishment of an autonomous Hungarian government that would be accountable to the parliament (elected by taxpayers with voting rights). On 18 March 1848, the Austrian emperor decided to accept the presented demands and consequently appointed Count Lajos Batthyány as Prime Minister. He set up a government composed of liberal Hungarian politicians. At the same time, the parliament convened in Pozsony (now Bratislava) amended the constitution, establishing a constitutional monarchy. The parliament had a two-chamber structure – with an upper chamber composed of aristocracy and appointed dignitaries, while deputies elected for a three-year term sat in the lower chamber³. After

² M. Szabó, *Państwo i demokracja: świat jako wola*, [in:] *Przekraczając uprzedzenia i entuzjazm. Druga kadencja Viktora Orbána*, eds. J. O’Sullivan, K. Póczy, Kraków-Budapeszt 2016, p. 132.

³ M.E. Ducreux, *Czechy i Węgry w monarchii habsburskiej w XVIII-XIX wieku*, [in:] *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, ed. J. Kłoczowski, Lublin 2000, p. 401; W. Felczak, *Historia*

the Spring of Nations was defeated by the imperial forces in 1849, the Monarch revoked the 1848 regulations concerning Hungarian institutions (the parliament and the government).

A settlement was reached in February 1867 under which Hungary became a constitutional part of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was given a separate parliament and government, joint (Hungarian-Austrian) ministries of foreign affairs, military affairs and treasury were established. The so-called delegation was created, whose task was to agree on common matters involving the relationship between Budapest and Vienna⁴.

The Hungarian constitutional act consisted of the April and December 1867 acts and many other legal regulations relating to more than 1,000 years of history of independent statehood. The Hungarian government carried out its decisions through the administrative apparatus and local autonomous authorities. These included counties and cities authorized to enact local laws. By 1918, there were 67 counties and 25 cities with legal autonomy in Hungary⁵. The government of the Kingdom of Hungary – in accordance with the adopted model of parliamentary monarchy – was politically accountable to the parliament. In the area of the so-called common matters, in turn, “imperial-royal” ministers who did not belong to the Austrian or Hungarian government were in charge. The common ministers were accountable to the so-called delegations elected by the parliaments – the Austrian and the Hungarian – and to the Emperor⁶.

After the Hungarian Soviet Republic was overthrown in the summer of 1919, Hungary’s system was *de iure* a form of constitutional monarchy. The functions of the head of state were performed by the regent while the royal throne remained vacant. The Act no I from 1920 established a tripartition of power – the legislative one was exercised by the parliament, the executive one by the regent, and the judicial one by the tribunals. The regent had the right to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and – at the request of the head of government – appoint individual ministers. The appointment of

Węgier, Wrocław 1983.

⁴ J. Reychman, *Dzieje Węgier*, Łódź–Warsaw 1963, p. 61.

⁵ T. Kopyś, *Historia Węgier 1526–1989*, Kraków 2018, p. 303.

⁶ I. Romsics, *Historia Węgier*, Poznań 2018, p. 312 and J. Kochanowski, *Węgry: od ugody do ugody 1867–1990*. Series: *Historia państw świata w XX wieku*, Warsaw 1997.

a Prime Minister did not require searching for a majority parliamentary coalition around their candidacy. Relevant regulations stipulated that a Prime Minister appointed by the regent automatically became the leader of the ruling faction – the Unity Party, regardless of his previous political affiliation. Moreover, a Prime Minister could not be dismissed by the deputies without prior consent of the regent⁷.

According to the constitutional act passed on 31 January 1946, Hungary was proclaimed a republic. The President of the Republic exercised executive power through ministers accountable to the National Assembly. The head of state had the right to appoint and dismiss a Prime Minister after hearing from the Assembly's political committee. In this regard, he acted according to the principle of parliamentary majority. The President appointed and dismissed ministers – at the request of the head of government. The appointed government was obliged to present its action programme in the parliament within 8 days. Before the government was approved, the head of state could not dissolve the National Assembly. Every presidential decree and regulation required a countersignature of the head of government and the responsible departmental minister. (art. 13 of the Constitution)⁸.

The president's competences included appointing government officials above the fifth service group as well as all the judges – at the request of the head of government and the relevant departmental minister. (Art. 14 of the Constitution)⁹.

The constitution of 20 August 1949 proclaimed the Hungarian People's Republic as a state of people's democracy¹⁰. The Council of Ministers was defined as the supreme body of state administration. Its structure and tasks were specified in the fourth chapter – the Supreme body of state administration. The Council of Ministers was composed of the Prime Minister, Deputy

⁷ H. Donath, *Przemiany ustrojowo-prawne 1939–1949*, Wrocław 1978, p. 14 et seq. J.R. Nowak, *Węgry 1939–1969*, Warsaw 1971, p. 18.

⁸ *Konstytucja Republiki Węgierskiej*, [in:] *Nowe konstytucje państw europejskich*, ed. L. Gelberg, Warsaw 1949, p. 214.

⁹ Ibidem. B. Pytlik, *Prezydent Republiki Węgierskiej*, [in:] *Prezydent w państwie współczesnym. Modernizacja instytucji*, ed. J. Osiński, Warszawa 2009, p. 698.

¹⁰ B. Kovring, *Communism in Hungary. From Kun to Kádár*, Stanford University 1979, p. 234 et seq.; J. Kochanowski, *Węgry: ...*, *Communism in Eastern-Europe*, ed. T. Rakowska-Harmstone, London 1979.

Prime Ministers, ministers without portfolio and ministers in charge of individual departments. The authority of requesting an appointment and dismissal of individual members of the Council of Ministers was taken over by the Presidential Council. The members of the government, who were not deputies, could also take part in parliament sittings and have their say in discussions (par. 23 of the Constitution)¹¹. It is worth noting the new name of the governmental body, the Council of Ministers, which had not previously existed in Hungarian legislation.

The government was accountable to the National Assembly and reported to it on its activity. The Hungarian legislator also established the responsibility of the Prime Minister individually and of individual ministers for the orders they issued and their public activity. The government could act directly or through a specific ministry in the areas falling within the competence of the Council of Ministers. It could also take state administration branches under its direct supervision and create special bodies to this end¹².

In April 1972, the National Assembly passed a comprehensive amendment to the 1949 constitution. Hungary was proclaimed a “socialist state”, rather than a “state of people’s democracy” as before¹³. New legal regulations relating both to the institution of the government and the entire state administration were introduced then. The supreme body of state administration reverted to its traditional name – the “Council of Ministers”, which had been replaced in November 1956 by the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government. The legislator broadened the tasks of the Council of Ministers by adding the following to the existing catalogue – protecting and securing the state system, the social order and the rights of citizens; managing the activity of field councils and exercising supervision over the lawfulness of their actions; determining the development directions in science and culture and providing the necessary human resources and material condi-

¹¹ *Konstytucja Republiki Węgierskiej*, [in:] *Nowe konstytucje...*, p. 44

¹² T. Szymczak, *Ustrój europejskich państw socjalistycznych*, Warsaw 1983, p. 256 and L. Szamel, *Le système étatique de la République Populaire Hongroise*, Budapest 1966.

¹³ The amendment should be seen in the context of similar amendments in other Central and Eastern European countries in the 1960s and 1970s. See I. Kovács, *New elements in the evolution of socialist constitution*, Budapest 1968.

tions for it; creating the system of social provision and health care, and securing material resources for these objectives¹⁴.

The democratic transition launched in Hungary in the late 1980s resulted in the hammering out of a comprehensive amendment to the existing constitutional act from August 1949 by negotiators from the government's side and representatives of the political opposition gathered at the "Triangular Table". The fundamental constitutional principle was based on a joint declaration of building a democratic state and the rule of law. The constitution was amended in October 1989 and on 23 October 1989 – the 33rd anniversary of the outbreak of the People's Revolution – the Republic of Hungary was proclaimed (marking the country's return to its name from 1946–1949)¹⁵.

As Hungarian constitutional scholar Adam Antal emphasized when analyzing the model of government developed in Hungary at the time, "the system of government can be classified as a parliamentary republic. The situation and position of the new authorities, i.e. the President of the Republic, the government and the parliament, as well as relations between them, are largely determined by the traditions of parliamentarianism. The President of the Republic has not been equipped with the right of arbitration"¹⁶. The key task of the head of state is to carry out the mission of cooperation and balance from the point of view of the parliament and the government. The parliamentary cabinet model was based on three elements of its structure: 1/a unicameral parliament elected by universal suffrage; 2/a separation of the tasks of the President of the Republic and the head of government, and 3/a non-separation of the executive power which was assigned to the government¹⁷. Witold Brodziński¹⁸ emphasizes that the Hungarian political elites recognised the division and balance of powers as the essential guarantee of the democratic system. This allowed for the development of a bipolar system of government

¹⁴ *Konstytucja Węgierskiej Republiki Ludowej*, ed. A. Gwizdz, Wrocław 1975; *Rządy w państwach Europy*, eds. E. Zieliński, J. Zieliński, Warsaw 2007, p. 283.

¹⁵ *Rebirth of democracy. 12 constitutions of Central and Eastern Europe*, Strasbourg 1996; *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*, ed. J. Elster, Chicago 1996.

¹⁶ A. Antal, *Le rôle de la Constitution en Hongrie*, [in:] *Ten Years of the Democratic Constitutionalism in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. K. Działocha, R. Mojak, K. Wójtowicz, Lublin 2001, p. 116.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ W. Brodziński, *System konstytucyjny Węgier*, Warsaw 2003, p. 55.

where the key levers of state power included the parliament and the government. Inside the government, ministry heads received significant competences.

Under the 1989 regulations, the government consisted of the Prime Minister and the ministers. It returned to the traditional name of the executive body, the name the Council of Ministers was scrapped. The post of Deputy Prime Minister was notably skipped. At the same time, the Hungarian legislator declares that the Prime Minister is replaced in their duties by a minister designated by the head of government. New rules for electing the Prime Minister and the government were introduced. The President of the Republic obtained the right to present a Prime Minister candidate to the National Assembly. Then the parliament needs to take a stand on the submitted candidacy. The Prime Minister is elected by a majority of votes of the statutory number of deputies. As the Prime Minister is elected, the National Assembly expresses its views on the issue of approving the government's programme. Ministers, in turn, are appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic. But he acts in this area at the request of the Prime Minister. The government is created when its ministers are appointed. At the same time, after the government has been formed, the members of the government are obliged to take an oath before the parliament (par. 33 of the Constitution)¹⁹. In the view of Hungarian constitutional scholar Nóra Chronovski, the constitutional position of the President of the Republic represents the features of the head of state in a parliamentary democracy. The constitutional definition of the President emphasizes "representing the unity of the nation and safeguarding the democratic functioning of the organization of the state"²⁰. One can only agree with Bogusław Pytlik²¹ that the order of chapters established in the autumn of 1989 (chapter III – the head of state, chapter VII – the government) does not reflect the real constitutional position of these authorities of state power. The President of Hungary ranks among the weakest heads of state in Central Europe in the political and constitutional realities after 1989.

In the 1997 amendment, the chapter on the government's structure and rules of operation was rephrased. Par. 33 was amended by adding points a and

¹⁹ *Konstytucja Republiki Węgierskiej*, ed. H. Donath, Warszawa 1992.

²⁰ N. Chronovski, *The Head of State in the Hungarian Constitutional System*, [in:] *Ten Years of the Democratic ...*, p. 350.

²¹ B. Pytlik, *op.cit.*, p. 706.

b. They relate to cessation of the powers of the government and its individual ministers. The legislator declares that the powers of the government cease: 1/after a new parliament has been installed; 2/after the head of government has died; 3/in the event the Prime Minister has lost voting rights; 4/in the event *incopabilitas* is established by the Prime Minister; 5/after a constructive no-confidence motion has been passed and a new head of government has been elected. (par. 33/A)²².

In the case of a minister, on the other hand, it was determined that their powers expired in the event of: 1/a cessation of the government's powers; 2/ resignation; 3/dismissal; 4/death; 5/a loss of voting rights, and 6/when *incopabilitas* is established by a government member. (par. 33/A)²³ As noted by Bożena Dziemidok-Olszewska²⁴, the system of parliamentary government developed in the Republic of Hungary in the early 1990s had its origins in the Austro-Hungarian times. It resulted indirectly from the tradition of the political and legal culture of the Hungarian society and its attachment to a special position of the parliament among the supreme bodies of state power.

III. The constitutional regulations

First of all, it is worth analyzing the constitutional regulations relating to the institution of the government and its relations with the legislative power on the one hand and the President of the Republic on the other.

The Basic Law of Hungary of 11 April 2011 devotes to the government one section in the chapter *The State* – containing articles 15 to 22²⁵. The Hungarian legislator precisely defines the tasks of the government and its place in the structure of other bodies of power. The government is referred to as the main executive authority whose scope of responsibility and competences encompass all the areas of activity, except for those constitutionally transferred to other authorities. It is an example of a negative definition. It was declared

²² *Konstytucja Republiki Węgierskiej*, ed. W. Brodziński, Warszawa 2002.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ B. Dziemidok-Olszewska, *System polityczny Węgier*, [in:] *Systemy polityczne państw Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, eds. W. Sokół, M. Żmigrodzki, Lublin 2005, p. 584.

²⁵ *Ustawa zasadnicza Węgier*, ed. W. Brodziński, Warsaw 2012.

at the same time that the government is politically accountable to the parliament. The government is the supreme body of public administration which, by law, can create state administration bodies. The government is authorized to issue regulations – acting within its competences, on issues ungoverned by laws, or based on statutory authorization. The Hungarian legislator declares that a government regulation must not contradict other legal acts (art. 15 of the Constitution)²⁶.

The position of the Prime Minister is underlined in the constitutional regulations relating to government formation. The make-up of the government is determined through categories of its members – the Prime Minister and the ministers. But the Prime Minister, by way of a regulation, can designate one or more Deputy Prime Ministers from among the ministers, it is therefore their discretionary power. The procedure of appointing the Prime Minister also points to his role in the government and is similar to solutions applied in the chancellor model of government. The Prime Minister is elected by the deputies at the request of the President. It is necessary to obtain an absolute majority of votes for an election to be effective²⁷. The head of government takes office upon election. The election of the Prime Minister takes place in two circumstances – at the inaugural meeting of the National Assembly and within 15 days after the Prime Minister's mandate has expired. Such expiration can occur in the following circumstances: resignation, death, establishing the existence of a conflict between the office of Prime Minister and the functions they perform, a failure to meet the necessary conditions to be elected Prime Minister, a no-confidence motion. In the event a candidate submitted by the head of state fails to be elected Prime Minister, the President is required to present another candidate within 15 days. Ministers, on the other hand, are appointed by the President at the request of the head of government (art. 16 of the Constitution). In addition, it should be noted that the Hungarian legislator stipulates that the Prime Minister determines the main directions of the government's policy. Within the main directions of

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Viktor Orbán was twice elected Prime Minister under the new Hungarian constitution – at the first meeting of the National Assembly after the 2014 and 2018 elections. A request to approve the Prime Minister candidate was submitted by the President of the Republic – János Áder. He was elected by the National Assembly on the first ballot.

the government's policy, the ministers independently run the public administration departments under their control and subordinated bodies and also carry out the tasks assigned by the government and the Prime Minister (art. 18 of the Constitution)²⁸.

The Hungarian legislator precisely defines the circumstances when the Prime Minister's mandate expires. These include: the installation of a newly elected parliament; an expression of no confidence in the Prime Minister; the parliament's failure to express confidence at the request of the Prime Minister; resignation; death; when a conflict is established between the function exercised and other public functions performed; when the conditions necessary to elect them Prime Minister no longer exist. The constitution states it is up to the parliament to decide that the conditions necessary for the Prime Minister's election no longer exist and that there is a conflict between the Prime Minister's function and other public functions they perform. A two thirds majority of the voting deputies is required to issue the decision in question (art. 20 of the Constitution)²⁹.

As already mentioned before, the Hungarian regulations draw on the experiences of the chancellor model. They are apparent when the no confidence procedure is discussed. The measure envisaged by the Hungarian legislators includes a constructivist element with a requirement to simultaneously submit the name of a candidate for the next head of government. A relevant request can be made by a group of at least one fifth of deputies to the National Assembly. An absolute majority of the statutory number of deputies is required to take an effective decision³⁰. The Prime Minister has two more instruments in relation to the parliament. First; they can call a confidence motion. The National Assembly does not express its support for such a request if no more than half of the statutory number of deputies support it in a vote. Second; the head of government can link the issue of confidence in their cabinet with the fate of a specific government submission. In such a situation, the parliament, by refusing to express its support

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ A constructive no-confidence motion has been voted on once in the Hungarian political practice – on 14 April 2009, when Gordon Bajnai was elected to replace Ferenc Gyurcsány (still under the previous constitutional act).

for a governmental proposal submitted for vote, also takes a stand on the issue of no confidence in the cabinet (art. 21 of the Constitution). Wojciech Orłowski points out that the system of government shows several similarities to the chancellor model found in Germany, with the president equipped with limited competences, indirect election by the parliament, as well as the procedure of electing the Prime Minister by the parliament at the request of the head of state³¹.

IV. The constitutional practice

It is worth analyzing the issue of who has occupied the Prime Minister's seat in Hungary after 1990. The time frame begins with the first free and democratic parliamentary election in Hungary since 1945³²; it naturally ends in 2020 (the moment the article was written).

Seven heads of government have been in office in Hungary in the analyzed period. Politicians have been Prime Ministers twice: Ferenc Gyurcsány and Viktor Orbán four times. It is noteworthy that one (i.e. the first) term of V. Orbán is interrupted by an eight-year period in parliamentary opposition (the years 2002–2010)³³. However, Hungary has not seen a single case of an interim government, nor have there been any early elections to the National Assembly, which is a sign of certain stabilization of the political system as well as consolidation of the party system. But it does not mean that all the governments have survived entire four-year parliamentary terms.

³¹ W. Orłowski, *Republika Węgierska*, [in:] *Ustroje państw współczesnych. T 2*, ed. E. Gdulewicz, Lublin 2002, p. 291; *Emergence of East Central European Parliaments: The First Steps*, ed. A. Agh, Budapest 1994.

³² M. Grzybowski, *Pierwsze wolne wybory parlamentarne: Polska, Czechy, Słowacja: w poszukiwaniu adekwatnego systemu*, "Ad Meritum" 1995, No. 1; R. Chruściak, *Wolne i demokratyczne wybory powszechne w 1990 roku w Europie Wschodniej (Bułgaria, Czechosłowacja, Węgry, Rumunia)*, [in:] *Transformacja ustrojowa państw Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, ed. E. Zieliński, Warsaw 1996; A. Agh, *The Politics of Central Europe*, London 1998; *Post-Communist Transition. Emerging Pluralism in Hungary*, edd. A. Bozóki, A. Kőrösnéyi, G. Schöpflin, London–New York 1992.

³³ J. Debreczeni, *Viktor Orbán*, Warsaw 2015, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Orbán%C3%A1n (08.05.2020).

Table 1. PMs of Central and Eastern European countries after 1990

No.	Country	Name and surname	Faction	The mandate's duration
1	Hungary	József Antall	MDF	VII 90-XII 93
2.	Hungary	Péter Boross	MDF	XII 93-VII 94
3.	Hungary	Gyula Horn	MSzP	VII 94-VII 98
4.	Hungary	Viktor Orbán	FIDESZ	VII 98-V 02
5.	Hungary	Péter Medgyessy	MSzP	V 02-IX 04
6.	Hungary	Ferenc Gyurcsány**	MSzP	IX 04-IV 09
7.	Hungary	Gordon Bajnaj	Bezp.	IV 09-V 10
8.	Hungary	Viktor Orbán***	FIDESZ	V 10-

Source: the author's compilation, MDF- Hungarian Democratic Forum, MSzP- Hungarian Socialist Party, FIDESZ-The Federation of Young Democrats.

The government has been most often headed by the leader of the victorious political party (the casus of MDF, MSzP, FIDESZ). There have been four such Prime Ministers out of a total of seven, including one who was first the head of government and only during that period became the leader of the ruling party – Ferenc Gyurcsány. One of the Prime Ministers replaced a deceased head of government late in the parliament's term – in December 1993. That was the case of Peter Boross, interior minister in the first democratic government of Jozsef Antall. After two years of participation in the government, the politician joined MDF and even became its vice-chairman³⁴. One of the Prime Ministers took office following a vote on a constructive no confidence motion – G. Bajnaj at a meeting of the National Assembly on 14 April 2009³⁵.

Alternation of power occurred in Hungary already in the first contested election to the National Assembly (1990), in the first period the main sociopolitical division differentiating the political scene involved historical issues, along the lines anticommunist opposition–postcommunist parties³⁶. In

³⁴ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A9ter_Boross (08.05.2020).

³⁵ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Bajnai (11.05.2020).

³⁶ A. Antoszewski, *Partie i systemy partyjne na przełomie wieków*, Toruń 2009; K. Sobolewska-Myślik, *Partie i systemy partyjne Europy Środkowej po 1989 roku*, Kraków

Central and Eastern European countries, the historical division first lost its importance in Slovakia (in March 1994), with Hungary following suit (July 1994). A governing coalition was then formed between the postcommunist MSzP and the social-liberal SzDSz originating from the Budapest democratic opposition (it formed the parliamentary basis of the cabinet of G. Horn). That coalition was again formed in 2002 (the cabinet of Péter Medgyessy and the first government of Ferenc Gyurcsány) and once more in 2006. In the latter case, however, the coalition did not survive a full term, after the ministers recommended by SzDSz stepped down in 2008 due to their disapproval of the social and economic policy pursued³⁷.

Table 2. The length of a Hungarian PM's time in office after 1990

No.	Country	Name and surname	The mandate's duration	Faction
1.	Hungary	Viktor Orbán	165 months	FIDESZ
2.	Hungary	Ferenc Gyurcsány	55 months	MSzP
3.	Hungary	Gyula Horn	48 months	MSzP
4.	Hungary	József Antall	43 months	MDF
5.	Hungary	Péter Medgyessy	28 months	close to MSzP
6.	Hungary	Gordon Bajnaj	13 months	close to MSzP
7.	Hungary	Péter Boross	7 months	MDF

Source: author's compilation.

It follows from the data presented in table 2 that Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán has served as Prime Minister for the longest time, more than 165 months in total, or over 13 years and 9 months by April 2020 (taking into

1999; J. Wojnicki, *Kształtowanie się systemów wielopartyjnych w Europie Środkowowschodniej*, Pułtusk 2004; *Współczesne partie i systemy partyjne: zagadnienia teorii i praktyki politycznej*, eds. W. Sokół, M. Żmigrodzki, Lublin 2005.

³⁷ A. Czyż, S. Kubas, *Doświadczenia węgierskiej transformacji ustrojowej – od Jánosa Kádára do Viktora Orbana*, Katowice-Sosnowiec 2011; J. Fitzmaurice, *Politics and government in the Visegrad countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia*, Basingstoke 2002; *The consolidation of democracy in East-Central Europe*, ed. K. Dawisha, B. Parrott, Cambridge, New York 1999.

account his four terms including the current one, yet to be completed at the time of writing this article). There have been different reasons why the head of government's mission was terminated – the PM's faction lost the next parliamentary election four times (P. Boross, G. Horn, V. Orbán, G. Bajnaj), in one case the Prime Minister died in office (in April 1993 – J. Antall), internal conflicts in the MSZP leadership were the reason twice – 2004 – Péter Medgyessy, and five years later – Ferenc Gyurcsány.

The sociodemographic structure of Hungarian heads of government is as follows. Notably, only men have been heads of government, a woman has only served as Deputy Prime Minister³⁸. The youngest Prime Minister at the time of his election was V. Orbán, 35 in July 1998, 47 when he took the office of Prime Minister again. The oldest Prime Minister at the time of his election was P. Boross – he was 65 then. Hungary has also had two heads of government in their 40s – Ferenc Gyurcsány (45) and Gordon Bajnaj (41). Those in their 60s included Gyula Horn (62), P. Medgyessy (60). In turn, the first democratic Prime Minister after 1990, J. Antall, was 58 years old at the time of his election³⁹.

When it comes to education, it should be noted that all Hungarian PMs completed university studies. Four of them graduated in economics (G. Horn, F. Gyurcsány, G. Bajnaj and P. Medgyessy). In addition, two of them could boast of holding a PhD degree – J. Antall in history and G. Horn in economics. J. Antall (philology and history), V. Orban (law and philosophy of politics) and F. Gyurcsány (pedagogy and economics) studied at two faculties. In the context of their political (as well as government) career, it should be noted that two PMs were members of the communist governments before 1990 – G. Horn headed the department of diplomacy in the last MSZMP cabinet led by M. Nemeth (1989–1990), while P. Medgyessy headed the finance ministry (1987) and was Deputy PM for economic affairs in the governments of K. Gross and M. Nemeth. He was also in charge of the finance ministry again in the cabinet of G. Horn (1996–1998). Those who had experience in government administration before taking office as PMs also include P. Boross (interior minis-

³⁸ This refers to Deputy Prime Ministers dr Mónika Lamperth (in office V 2002–2004) and Kinga Góncz (VI 2066–IV 2009). Both served in centre-left cabinets formed by MSZP and SZDSZ – P. Medgyessy and F. Gyurcsány.

³⁹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat%C3%A9gorie:Premier_ministre_de_Hongrie (11.05.2020).

ter in the government of J. Antall), F. Gyurcsány (minister of youth and sport in the government of P. Medgyessy) and G. Bajnaj – head of the department of regional development and local government as well as minister of economy and national development in the cabinet of F. Gyurcsány (2007–2009)⁴⁰.

Andrzej Antoszewski⁴¹ points out that the potential and real power of Prime Ministers in the discussed region is growing. This stems from several premises – the process is connected with the consolidation of democratic systems, but it has come with an increase in some undemocratic tendencies (the case of Hungary); the position of Prime Minister constitutes a key link in the political system; heading a government is increasingly connected with party leadership which is evidenced by examples not only from the discussed region of the Old Continent. This practice has emerged in full swing in Hungary, beginning with the government of J. Antall. Heads of government who weren't party leaders at the same time were exceptions. They were appointed during deadlocks in political elites of the ruling factions (usually leftist -MSZP). A particular strengthening of the political position of the head of government can be seen on the example of Viktor Orbán, beginning with his first term after 1998⁴². An increased tendency to consolidate power around the instruments subordinated to the Prime Minister has been seen since 2010. In this context, it is worth quoting an opinion of a columnist familiar with Hungary: Orbán appears to be benefitting from Hungarians being accustomed to strong leaders who rule for many years. If we take into consideration the past century alone, only three leaders have ruled the country over 70 years: the regent Miklós Horthy, the communist first secretary János Kádár, and Orbán. Although only the last of them was elected in democratic elections⁴³.

⁴⁰ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat%C3%A9gorie:Premier_ministre_de_Hongrie (11.05.2020).

⁴¹ A. Antoszewski, *Potencjalna i realna władza premiera w państwach Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, [in:] *W kręgu nauki o państwie, prawie i polityce. Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Markowi Żmigrodzkiemu*, eds. B. Dziemidok-Olszewskiej, W. Sokoła i T. Bichty, Lublin 2012, p. 38.

⁴² It is worth noting, however, that Viktor Orbán gave up party leadership in May 2000, wishing to focus all his attention on running the government. After the lost election in 2002, he returned to the leadership post in FIDESZ, which he has held up to the present day, combining it from V 2010 with the duties of a ministry head.

⁴³ A. Sadecki, *Orbán w koronie*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 2020, No. 16, p. 46.

V. Summary

In summary, it should be noted that we can see an evolution of the institution of the Prime Minister in Hungary since 1989. According to the adopted model of government (largely modelled on parliamentarianism, with some exceptions in regulations and constitutional practice since 2012), the position of the head of government is a key post for the leaders of political factions. Ambitious politicians with leadership qualities have sought to head the government, becoming the most influential politicians in the country (the case of Jozsef Antall, Gyula Horn, Viktor Orban). Those who held office for the longest time have spent more than 100 months in the Prime Minister's chair (the case of V. Orban). The real power of the head of government is at its weakest when the Prime Minister is not in the chair of the ruling party's leader, which is a direct result of the adopted constitutional and systemic solutions (the case of P. Medgyessy and G. Bajnai).

A particular strengthening of the Prime Minister's power has been seen since 2012. It has resulted from several reasons – the victorious political camp, *de facto* FIDESZ, holding a constitutional majority in the parliament, carrying out a constitutional change which additionally strengthened the position of the government and its head against the parliament, also by reducing the influence of the parliamentary opposition on the legislative and supervisory process toward the cabinet and state administration. As a Hungarian political scientist depicted the dilemma: A two thirds majority means higher expectations of voters and a greater burden of responsibility on the ruling parties. That's because all the actions will be assessed more strictly when the rulers do not face any serious opposition that could be a counterweight in legislative work. From this point of view, what matters is not the constitutional threshold, but the fact that the rulers can ignore dissenting voices, which may create an impression of a deficit of democracy⁴⁴. The columnist's conclusion offers an afterthought: While they have held a constitutional majority for a large part of this decade, the country hasn't seen profound systemic or social changes. The new constitution enacted in 2011 did not fundamentally change the sys-

⁴⁴ F. Hörcher, *Większość konstytucyjna bez opozycji: ciężar czy szansa? Po wyborach 2014 roku*, [in:] *Przekraczając uprzedzenia i entuzjazm. Druga kadencja Viktora Orbána*, eds. J. O'Sullivan, K. Póczy, Kraków-Budapeszt 2016, p. 316.

tem, but it made institutional corrections in favour of FIDESZ instead. It was similar with the amended electoral law, which was remodelled to benefit the candidates of this party⁴⁵. What merits particular attention is a weakening of the supervisory functions performed by the parliament. It is a core element of the parliamentary cabinet system.

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⁴⁵ A. Sadecki, op.cit., p. 46.

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