

HUNGARY

ANDRÁS BÍRÓ-NAGY

1. History

In Hungary, the history of the left after the regime-change is essentially the history of a single party. Between 1990 and 2010, only the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP*) declared itself the follower of social democratic values in the Hungarian Parliament. The MSZP not only became the dominant party in the Hungarian left, but it was also the electorally most successful party in the first 20 years of modern Hungarian democracy. Since 1990, the socialists have won elections three times and governed the country for 12 years. These results would have seemed highly unlikely when the party was first founded.

A difficult start: the successor party of the old regime

The Hungarian Socialist Party was established on October 7, 1989 as the successor party of the former Hungarian Socialist and Workers Party (MSZMP). The main reason why the reformers of MSZMP decided to carry this moral burden and not break all ties with the old regime was the party's infrastructural background and its social embeddedness (Lakner 2011: 25). Yet in spite of legal continuity, a radical change took place in terms of political content. The MSZP accepted the framework of a pluralist democracy, 'humanised capitalism' became its new economic and social policy goal, and the party declared itself a part of the Western European social democratic party family. The socialists aimed to advocate the interests of the employees, to reduce social inequalities, and increase social mobility (Bozóki 2004, Ripp 2004).

Small party, big party, medium-sized party

MSZP's history since the first democratic elections can be divided into three stages. Between 1990 and 1994 the Socialists had to adjust to having a small party status, in which leaving the political quarantine set by all the other parties was the most important challenge. The second stage – the 1994-2008 period – was characterised by an MSZP that encompassed the entire left and which became the most successful political party in Hungary. Throughout these years, the Socialists relied on a liberal ally, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) in forming coalition governments three times. The break with the liberals in spring 2008 can be considered the beginning of the third stage, in which the MSZP not only lacked any close allies in the party system, but – as the heavy defeats of the 2009 European Parliamentary and 2010 general elections indicated – also lost its big party status. With the party's vote share

hovering around roughly half of its pre-2007 size, reconstruction time for the Hungarian Socialists started from the state of a medium-sized party.

The power of the expert image

At the first elections in 1990, MSZP obtained less than 10 percent of the parliamentary seats and found itself in complete isolation for two years. In order to get out of the political ghetto, it was vital that the conservative-liberal cleavage proved to be more important than the anticommunist stance for the then biggest opposition party SZDSZ (Tóka 2005). The reapproachment between socialists and liberals was helped largely by the fact that there was common ground in numerous issues when it came to criticizing the conservative government and set the direction for the most crucial tasks in the future. MSZP politicians tended not to speak about the communist past – that would have been an uncomfortable task – and generally avoided ideological statements. The socialists rather decided to position themselves as the party of policy experts. 'Let competence govern the country' was their campaign slogan in 1994, when MSZP won a landslide victory. This was not the first and last time when the expert image was on top spot among the party's messages. The 1988-1990 Németh government was also positioned as a cabinet of technocrats, while economic competence was a key factor in the election of Péter Medgyessy in 2002 as well the preferred self-presentation of the 'expert government' of Gordon Bajnai in 2009-2010.

External and internal struggle with liberals

The second and longest stage in MSZP history not only brought constant struggle with the stable coalition partner SZDSZ, but the social democratic-liberal cleavage also generated tensions within the Socialist Party. In terms of policy content, the challenge was not easy for the Socialists in government. Voter expectations regarding social security had to be met, while the markets, international institutions and SZDSZ pushed the party towards liberal economic policy in order to stabilize Hungary's economic situation. As László Andor (2010) demonstrated, the economic policy of MSZP was mostly under the influence of liberal-leaning economists for the last 20 years. Contentwise, this was the roots of many infights and many socialist politicians supported their government's economic measures and various reforms only half-heartedly. PM Gyula Horn (1994-1998) fired his finance minister Lajos Bokros in 1996 immediately after the end of Bokros' financial stabilization programme, with the aim to ease tough austerity. In 2002, Péter Medgyessy initiated a Keynesian shift in MSZP's economic policies, which proved electorally popular but fiscally unsustainable and prompted the introduction of an austerity program after the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition was reelected in the 2006 election. Between 2006-2008, PM Ferenc Gyurcsány's liberal health and higher education reforms were, however, largely rejected even by his own party. PM Gordon Bajnai's crisis management programme, implemented after the global financial crisis eliminated any hope of a recovery from the popularity drops of 2006-2008, was considered necessary by MSZP, but was not popular within the party and there is no doubt that the socialists would have chosen a more socially responsive path if they had had any other option.

The standard account of why the MSZP became popular and the dominant party on the left in the 1990s is that those who thought that the regime transition caused more insecurity, growing unemployment and poverty, considered the socialists the political force that could bring back security and stability in their lives. It is telling that 71 percent of MSZP voters hoped the return of the 'positive characteristics' of the old regime in 1994 (Bokor 1995: 543). While the MSZP was in government, especially in 1994-1998 and after 2006, it the party followed an agenda that promoted privatization, foreign direct investment, and economic opening in general. As a consequence, the relationship between left-wing economics and MSZP weakened in the eyes of the voters. The opportunity opened up for other political parties to attack MSZP from the a statist and less pro-business economic platform, and culturally conservative and arch-rival Fidesz lived with this chance.

Interestingly, Hungary's quasi two-party system of 2000-2008, with its 'frozen' party supply (Enyedi 2007) did not reflect standard European party profiles – at least not in economic policy. In opposition, right-wing Fidesz became defender of left-wing economic goals, while MSZP was arguing for a smaller state, more competition and privatisation. Survey data of the Hungarian Election Studies in 2009 showed that MSZP's left-wing identity was questioned by many. According to this research, 62 percent of the voters thought that MSZP was the party of the elite and only 25 percent agreed that the socialists represented the workers and the poor. These attitudes explain why Fidesz managed to win a 'social referendum' against the government in March 2008, making it impossible that the socialist-liberal coalition could introduce new user fees in higher education and health. The political defeat of liberal reforms led to the breakup with SZDSZ and brought in a new era for the socialists.

Starting again by winning back the comfort zone

After 2008, MSZP was not considered a big party any more and its comprehensive defeat in the upcoming 2010 election was taken for granted. The disappearance of SZDSZ from the Hungarian party system also made it easier that the socialist break definitely with the era marked by a pro-liberal orientation. Medium-sized MSZP aims to win back its comfortzone by a leftist turn. The right-wing government's policies explicitly favour the high income segments of the society and leave the left-wing economic position relatively open for opposition parties. The main goal of the party's current president, Attila Mesterházy (2010-) is to attract those to the socialists who are unsatisfied with rising poverty, reject the newly introduced flat tax system, and the decreasing opportunities for social mobility. Solidarity, social justice and labour rights are the key themes for the new MSZP leadership. In October 2011, the social democratic-liberal struggle was also finished within the party leadership with the departure of former PM Gyurcsány from MSZP and the emergence of his own party, the Democratic Coalition.

2. Organization

The Hungarian Socialist Party was established as the alliance of various power centres and it has preserved its poliarhical character ever since. It has never occurred in the history of MSZP that all power would have concentrated in the hands of one leader – not even when the socialist party leader and the prime minister was the same person (Gyula Horn in 1994-1998 and Ferenc Gyurcsány in 2007-2009). Because of the balanced intra-party power relationships, from an organisational perspective MSZP can be best described as a 'party of permanent bargain' (Lakner 2011).

2.1. Closer to the members: a radical reform of the party statutes

It is of the main goals of current MSZP president, Attila Mesterházy, to bring the leadership closer to the members by a radical reform of the party statutes (MSZP 2011a). In order to provide more membership legitimacy to the party leaders, from November 2011 it is compulsory to collect the recommendation – practically signatures – of 10 percent of the membership nationally and within a county, to become a MSZP presidential candidate and a county leader, respectively. Candidates in single member constituencies must gain the support of at least ten percent of the registered supporters within the electoral district to qualify, while the prime ministerial candidate (election ticket leader) of the party is expected to achieve the same rate nationally. This system favours those politicians who are well embedded in the party structure and significantly reduces the chances of outsiders. Taking into account that the last three prime ministers of MSZP came from outside of the formal party hierarchy – either from private business or a political advisory role –, this change is of great importance.

A further significant change in the MSZP statutes influences the rules of choosing delegates for the party congress. According to the new party law, the number of delegates from a county will not be decided on the basis of party membership but of the number of residents in a county. Local party budgets are also set in line with the number of residents. The party's mesosphere, the county leaders, may lose much of their influence not because of organisational changes but Hungary's new electoral system. According to the new election law passed by the right, mandates can only be won in single member constituencies and on national party lists, and the party lists for counties, the so far safe haven for county leaders, will disappear.

The MSZP started the 2010-2014 parliamentary cycle with 59 seats out of 386 in the Hungarian Parliament. After the departure of former Speaker of the House, Katalin Szili in 2010, and the foundation of Ferenc Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition party, the parliamentary group of MSZP consists of 48 MPs in 2012. Though narrowly, but the MSZP parliamentary group is still the biggest among the opposition parties. The leader of the parliamentary group and the president of the party is the same person, the 38-year old Attila Mesterházy. The MSZP parliamentary group's operative leader is the faction director József Tóbiás, whose work is helped by three deputy leaders of the parliamentary group.

2.2. Where crucial decisions are made: National Presidium and the Party Congress

The National Presidium is the leading organ of the MSZP (Figure 1). The president of the party, the deputy president, the two vice-presidents, the leader of the parliamentary group are automatically nominated, while the rest of the 11-15 members are elected by the party congress. The congress not only appoints the leaders of the party, but – as the major decision-making forum – also decides about the party list for parliamentary elections, the presidential and prime ministerial candidates, approves the party manifesto and amendments of the party statute. Strategic and public policy oversight is exercised by the Party Assembly. Delegates to the party congress are sent by local party units. The autonomy of the local level is considerable in the internal life of MSZP. This is where decisions are made about the candidates for single member constituencies at both general and local elections, and mayoral candidates and party lists for local elections. The power of the local level and the party membership in general should not be underestimated: congressional delegates turned against the national party leadership and made Ferenc Gyurcsány prime minister instead of Péter Kiss, the Presidium's favourite, in 2004.

Figure 1. The multi-level party organization



Source: MSZP, www.mszp.hu

2.3. Ageing membership but substantial organisation

At the end of 2011 MSZP had 30,000 members, that is 9,000 less than the socialist membership ten years earlier but sufficient to find and nominate candidates in any partisan election nationwide (Table 1). MSZP lost only a few hundred members due to the fact that former PM Gyurcsány quit the party, and is still the second strongest party organisation behind the governing conservative party, Fidesz. The proportion of men in the membership is quite high, 63% in 2011, though appreciably lower than a decade ago (69%).

Table 1. The evolution of MSZP's party membership, 2000-2011

Years	Number of members	Membership (% of electorate)
2000	39000	0,5%
2011	30000	0,38%

Source: MSZP 2011, p. 12-13.

The average age of the MSZP membership, 55,9 years, is the oldest of all parliamentary parties in Hungary, and two years higher than the average socialist member's age was ten years earlier (MSZP 2011b) and seven years older than in 1990: i.e., at least the pace of the members' aging dropped. In general, MSZP members are quite highly educated: 40 percent of the party members hold higher education degrees and further 25 percent finished high school (Table 2).

Table 2. The sociology of MSZP's party membership, 2000-2011

Years	Sociological profile
2000	Max. 8 classes of primary school (23%) Vocational school/Technical school (11%) Secondary school (31%) University/college degree (35%)
2011	Max. 8 classes of primary school (21%) Vocational school/Technical school (14%) Secondary school (25%) University/college degree (40%)

Source: MSZP 2011, p. 14.

3. Electoral results

The Hungarian Socialist Party was the biggest vote-getter in all national elections since between 1990 and 2010 save the two dramatic electoral defeats that started and ended this period (see Table 3). With the exception of 1990 – when the socialists achieved merely 10,89% and a fourth place overall -, MSZP finished either first or second at the general elections. The socialists came out of the post-communist ghetto

in 1994 by winning almost 33% of the votes and 54% of the seats. This was the only occasion when the MSZP could have commanded a majority in government alone, but decided to invite the liberals in a coalition to gain more legitimacy both among Hungarian voters and international institutions. In terms of party list votes, MSZP achieved a similar result to 1994 in 1998, but despite this fact lost the latter election. The reason behind this can be found in the radical transformation of the conservative side. While MSZP, as the party of the united left faced an easy race with the fragmented right in 1994, the alliance of right-wing parties was able to win against the socialists in the second round of the 1998 elections.

The 2002 election saw an intensely fought campaign and the highest turnout (70,5% and 73% in the first and second rounds, respectively) in post-communist Hungarian politics. MSZP got the highest number of votes in its history (2,36 million votes) and narrowly won the 2002 elections ahead of the right-wing incumbents. In 2006, the race was similarly tight between the two big blocs, and, once again, MSZP managed to win one percent more of the votes than the conservative rival. The 2006 election marked the peak of the concentration of the Hungarian party system: 85% of the voters chose either MSZP or Fidesz. The two parties were so evenly balanced in both 2002 and 2006 that the liberals obtained a pivotal role in government formation both times despite the fact that even their parliamentary presence – the passing of the 5 percent legal threshold – was in danger both in 2002 and 2006. The MSZP's re-election in 2006 was a surprise because of two reasons. First, the socialists were behind Fidesz since the summer of 2003 in all polls and overtook their rivals only in the last two months of the campaign. Second, no party had managed to get re-elected in the post-communist region beforehand.

Table 3. Election results of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), 2000-2012

Years	Legislative elections (1st round) (%)	Seats (number and % in the Parliament)	European elections (%)	Seats (number and % of all Hungary seats)
2002	42,05	178 (46,11)		
2004			34,3	9 (37,5)
2006	43,21	190 (49,22)		
2009			17,37	4 (16,67)
2010	19,3	59 (15,28)		

Source: National Election Office, Hungary, www.valasztas.hu

After the peak: downward spiral till the 2010 elections

Only a few months after the historic 2006 elections victory, MSZP's support suffered the most significant decline of the last ten years due to the austerity measures adopted by the Gyurcsány government. PM Gyurcsány's leaked 'Őszöd speech', in which he

admitted that he lied about the state of the country to win the elections, cemented the loss of popularity and took away the hope of a political recovery. A slow, gradual erosion of support characterized the 2006-2010 parliamentary term after the dramatic developments of 2006. This process led first to the resignation of Gyurcsány in 2009 and a massive electoral defeat in 2010. The unpopular and politically defeated reforms in health and education, the 2008 'social referendum' initiated by the right-wing opposition, the global economic crisis, a heavy defeat at the 2009 European Parliamentary elections and several corruption scandals in the second half of the term were the key points of MSZP's downward spiral (Beck, Bíró Nagy and Róna 2011). At the 2010 elections – when Fidesz won more than two-thirds of the mandates – MSZP lost 58% of its 2006 voters and the 19,3% of the votes was merely enough to win the race for the position of the leading opposition party ahead of newcomer radical right party, Jobbik (16,7%). Since then, MSZP's support has increased, although not substantially: MSZP remained in the sphere of medium-sized parties since 2010. The socialists could count with 25-30% of the active voters in 2012, still behind the governing right-wing Fidesz party in the polls.

Table 4. Government participation of MSZP, 2000-2012

Years	Government/Opposition
1998-2002	Opposition
2002-2006	Government (coalition)
2006-2010	Government (coalition)
2010-2014	Opposition

Source: National Election Office, Hungary, www.valasztas.hu

Sociology of the MSZP electorate

Geographically, there has been two key factors of electoral success for the socialists: a strong result in the most disadvantaged counties in North-Eastern Hungary, and a landslide victory in the relatively affluent capital city, Budapest. The key role of the latter can be underlined by the fact that MSZP won 28 out of 32 Budapest districts in the very tight electoral races of both 2002 and 2006. In 2010, the socialists lost the most in the North-Eastern counties – in Borsod and Szabolcs counties MSZP got more than 30 percentage points less than in 2006 – and it seems very likely that there is no way back to power for the socialists without winning back the 'crisis regions' of the North-East.

At the local level, the socialists managed to win the majority of the main mayoral positions (Budapest, districts of Budapest, major cities) only once, in 2002. At the height of its popularity, MSZP won 29 of the 46 most important local offices in the country. Right after the change of regime, in 1990 the socialists had no mayors in these key municipalities at all, while in 1994, 1998 and 2006 they won in just 11, 17 and 19 of them, respectively. MSZP's decline after 2006 is also reflected in its 2010

local elections results, when socialist mayoral candidates only four of these mayoral position (in three Budapest districts and a single provincial city, Szeged).

MSZP's electorate is much less educated than its party membership (Table 5). 34 percent of their voters have finished primary school or less. Therefore it is no surprise that the socialists are the strongest among the less privileged segments of the society. Only 16 per cent of the MSZP voters have obtained a degree in higher education. Ageing of their voters is a huge challenge for the Socialists: more than two-thirds of the MSZP supporters are above 45, and 43 per cent are above 60 (MSZP 2011b).

Table 5. The sociology of MSZP's electorate, 2011

Years	Sociological profile
2011	Max. 8 classes of primary school (34%)
	Vocational school/Technical school (24%)
	Secondary school (26%)
	University/college degree (16%)

Source: MSZP 2011, p. 11.

4. Relationship with other parties and social movements

4.1. The liberal allies are no more

The Hungarian Socialist Party had no rival on the left between 1990 and 2010. The single potential ally of MSZP was a liberal party, SZDSZ that took part in all Socialist-led governments from 1994 to 2008. As it was noted in previous parts, there were numerous policy differences between the two sides (privatisation, more choice in public services, taxation, welfare spending), but cultural liberalism and the fierce rejection of the main political rival – within the framework of 'antiorbanism', referring to Fidesz-leader Viktor Orbán – brought the two parties into an alliance. The relationship between socialists and liberals was never perfect, but the negative feelings towards the liberals led to a rupture only during the second Gyurcsány government, after 2006. This was the period when the socialist PM – who found Tony Blair's third way approach quite sympathetic – put several liberal reform goals into the centre of his agenda. The socialists and even Gyurcsány turned against the liberal reform agenda after the 'social referendum' that the MSZP lost, and the prime minister fired his liberal health minister. As a reaction, the liberals left the coalition and the socialists governed the second half of the parliamentary term with a minority government. The liberals failed to reach the five percent threshold in the 2009 EP elections, were unable to run independently in the 2010 general elections and became completely marginalised afterwards.

4.2. New potential allies: Greens, civic movements and the Gyurcsány-party

The Hungarian party system went through radical changes in 2010 (Enyedi and Benoit 2011). Besides the disappearance of two old parties (SZDSZ and the moderate conservative MDF), two new parties entered the Hungarian Parliament. Both new political forces, the radical right Jobbik and the green-left LMP, based their strategy on attacking the socialist governments. However, the socialists have repeatedly signalled in the last two years that they look at the greens – a small opposition party, with five to ten percent public support – as potential future allies. The fact that MSZP unilaterally withdrew four of its candidates from the runoff in the 2010 general elections to support LMP politicians was a clear proof for that.

Since Hungary's new electoral law clearly favours big party blocs and disadvantages fragmented political sides, it seems to be certain that the green-left LMP must look into the opportunities of an electoral alliance with MSZP if they are keen on changing government. The socialists show openness towards the civic movements that have emerged from the anti-government mass demonstrations since 2010. Though it is not clear if the new extra-parliamentary left, composed of the trade unionist Solidarity movement, the One Million for the Freedom of Press! movement and former PM Bajnai's Haza és Haladás are to take part in the next elections as political parties (their joint movement 'Együtt 2014', established in October 2012, is a sign of that), MSZP would most probably be open to co-operate with them. While former PM Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition is no longer a faction within MSZP, both Mesterházy and Gyurcsány emphasised that they consider a future electoral alliance possible. On the whole, despite the many potential allies, MSZP is currently alone in the party system. Nevertheless, the willingness to co-operate is there, MSZP is determined to integrate the opposition parties and movements into one anti-government bloc and act as its leading force.

5. Relation to power and institutions

Because of the burden of being the successor party of the single political force of the old regime, the Hungarian Socialist Party has always considered vital to prove its commitment to democracy. It has always been a top priority to avoid that political rivals could accuse MSZP that it would try to restore the old system. Besides democracy, a pro-Western foreign policy has been the other pillar of its politics. As a consequence, MSZP became an enthusiastic promoter of European integration and a defender of the democratic order.

A good example for self-moderation and democratic commitment was 1994, when the socialists looked for a coalition partner in a situation in which they could have formed a government alone. Paradoxically, it was not the successor party of the old regime, but the liberal-turned-conservative Fidesz that has been accused repeatedly of disrespecting the democratic institutional system of Hungary. In the last two decades, MSZP has opposed the centralisation and authoritarian moves of Fidesz, a party that was originally established in 1988 to bring down an authoritarian regime. At the party leader level, MSZP flirted with the personalisation trends seen in Fidesz when Gyurcsány served as the party's prime minister from 2004 to 2009. However, the

socialists in general rarely look for a strong leader, the party is rather characterized by collective leadership and permanent bargaining.

6. Programmatic positioning

The Hungarian Socialist Party started the 2010 election campaign with a new candidate, Attila Mesterházy, and a new programme. Though the electoral defeat was sure long before the campaign, the party manifesto is of great significance for this study, as it already showed the direction the party would take in opposition: a leftist turn.

6.1. Socio-economic issues

The main messages of the party manifesto aimed to keep and mobilize the hardcore voters with left-wing economic campaign promises. The document contained a lot of self-criticism and declared a radical change compared to the Gyurcsány-era. 'It was the complete failure of neoliberalism what happened' (MSZP 2010: 3) – this was stated in the introductory part of the manifesto, clearly referring both to the economic crisis and the socialist-liberal governments. By a clear commitment to a strong state, full employment and helping the poorer segments of the society, MSZP positioned itself where its voters were in terms of economic policy (Bíró Nagy 2011). A single manifesto is clearly not enough to rebuild the loosened or even broken ties between the party and its 2006 voters all at once, but it indicated the intention of the socialists at least.

A comparison of the attitudes of MSZP MPs and voters demonstrates that the socialist voting base is fundamentally paternalist, which is in some cases against the position of the party elite (Bíró Nagy 2011). Socialist MPs tend to disagree with the statements that the 'government should create jobs for all' and 'there should be no tuition fees in higher education at all'. However, the party manifesto rather reflected the expectations of the voters and not the conviction of the party elite. Despite this fact, it can be expected that MSZP's official commitment to a strong state will be a stable policy position, as the party has already experienced the negative effects in public support of leaving the economic left.

6.2. Cultural liberalism

Both MSZP MPs and voters are culturally liberal in the sense that they are very secular, and support the complete separation of state and church. A further policy field – in which a liberal approach could even pay off – is gender equality (for example the party's commitment to abolish the gender pay gap). The attitudes of politicians suggest that on gender issues the left-right divide is consistent with the liberal-conservative content represented by the main political parties, and that not only MSZP supporters but the majority of Hungarians also stand close to the position of socialist politicians.

6.3. Ecological issues

In 2010, environmental issues were a must-have for all parties. MSZP politicians and voters share the same opinion on this topic. They are aware of the importance of green issues, but are not the most committed supporters. This attitude is reflected in the party manifesto: the environmental statements are rather generalities, specific promises are only made regarding energy efficiency and renewable energy. Since the election of Mesterházy as leader of the party, sustainability and environmental awareness got much more attention as these issues are considered common ground for a potential co-operation with the green-left LMP.

6.4. Europe

Since the MSZP has been strong supporter of Hungary's European integration for the last 20 years, it is not surprising that the socialists stood up for the integration process in the 2010 party manifesto as well. 'We stand for both further enlargement and a deeper integration' (MSZP 2010: 40) – this is not only the official line nailed down in the manifesto but also the opinion of the party elite. The MSZP parliamentary group is the Hungarian Parliament's most EU-friendly fraction. Socialist voters also support European integration, but not to the degree as their MPs do. The reason of the moderate support lies in the fact that Eurosceptic voters are found in the MSZP camp as well: 20 per cent of socialist voters would quit the European Union (Policy Solutions – Medián 2010).

6.5 A controversial issue: the roma minority

As it was mentioned above, the most severe coherence problem between the manifesto and MSZP voters was not on economic issues in 2010. The clearest contradiction is found in the judgement of the Roma issue. Anti-Roma sentiments are quite common among MSZP voters – in this respect there is no significant difference between left and right in Hungary. In spite of this, the socialist MPs and the party manifesto reject all forms of discrimination and social exclusion. However, there are some signs that the socialists tried to react to the rising ethnic tension in their North-Eastern Hungary strongholds and that MSZP ceased supporting the liberal approach on minority issues. The party manifesto criticises political correctness and expects efforts from the Roma minority as well: 'the society of the minority should respect the norms followed by the majority of the society' (MSZP 2010: 24).

7. Intra-party life

Ideological platforms are important actors in MSZP's intra-party life. These factions hold those – at least 300 – party members together who share the same opinion in most issues. A party member is allowed to join only one platform, and non-party

member supporters cannot enter these intra-party groups. Six platforms operate within the Hungarian Socialist Party. Party leader Attila Mesterházy's Third Wave Platform is considered the most influential. Platforms represent the ideological diversity of the party. While the main goal of the Leftist Grouping Platform – a group closely connected to the trade unions – is democratic socialism, the People's Platform is for the reduction of regional differences and the improvement of quality of life in rural Hungary, and the Reason and Responsibility Platform stands for liberal economic policy and post-materialist values. Despite the ideological differences, open races for the leading positions are rare within the Socialist party. There have been only two cases out of the six last party congresses, when there were even more than one competitor for the position of the President (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of the MSZP party congresses, 2000-2012

Years	Candidate (%)	Candidate (%)	Leader
2012	Attila Mesterházy (69)	Tibor Szanyi (31)	Attila Mesterházy
2010	Attila Mesterházy (87)	-	Attila Mesterházy
2009	Ildikó Lendvai (91)	-	Ildikó Lendvai
2007	Ferenc Gyurcsány (89)	-	Ferenc Gyurcsány
2004	István Hiller (72)	Imre Szekeres (28)	István Hiller
2003	László Kovács (93)	-	László Kovács

Source: MSZP, www.mszp.hu

Before October 2011, a strategic dilemma divided Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition Platform from the other platforms. Mesterházy and the six platforms imagined MSZP as a social democratic mass party that is open to co-operation with other opposition parties. Gyurcsány's goal was to turn the Socialist Party into an umbrella party in which liberal and moderate conservative politicians would have been also welcome. The power struggle between Mesterházy and Gyurcsány ended with the victory of Mesterházy in October 2011 and it is not in question any more that MSZP bases its strategy on the credible representation of social democratic values.

However, intra-party cleavages are still there, and the most important of them is generational. At the November 2011 party congress Mesterházy asked those socialist politicians who held important government positions between 2002 and 2010 to step back and provide opportunities for a new generation. The differentiation between old and new faces might cause further internal tensions in the Socialist Party, especially in light of the new Hungarian electoral law that reduces the number of MPs from 386 to 199. As a consequence, old and new politicians will probably fight for less potential positions – and even more so if MSZP would nominate joint candidates with other opposition movements.

8. Conclusion

The biggest opportunity for an MSZP comeback lies in the overall popularity of social democratic values in Hungary. The socialists' credibility in representing solidarity, social justice and social mobility has suffered in the last few years. However, if the party is able to be more in line with the expectations of its potential voters, there is a chance for strengthening. Since a fragmentation process has started on the left since 2010, it has been a strategic dilemma for MSZP whether they focus on obtaining the leading role in a left-wing, anti-government coalition, or try to beat Fidesz without any allies. After all, this dilemma is likely to be decided by the polls: if the socialists are not able to catch up with Fidesz in the polls, co-operation is surely needed in order to win elections in the future. What seems to be sure however, is that MSZP remains the major force on the left for a long time, without it, the formation of a non-conservative government in Hungary is impossible.

Important strengths that might help the Hungarian Socialist Party during its reconstruction time are its still notable membership and its strong infrastructural background. Therefore, not only its relatively high public support, but also its strong organisation might ensure MSZP's leading role in a future left-wing alliance. The existence of MSZP-friendly media channels, a good financial background compared to other opposition movements, well-established international relations, party foundations and think-tanks also provide a solid basis to the reconstruction of the party.

In government, not only MSZP's left-wing identity but also its competence was questioned. For this reason, it is crucial to put special emphasis on policy work and come up with a credible social democratic alternative. This might help the socialists to reduce the number of those who would 'never vote for MSZP' – the rejection of the socialists' is still the highest of all parliamentary parties in 2012. In times of economic crisis, the improving perception of the last socialist-led, 'crisis management government' and the worsening public assessment of the conservative government's performance might be also helpful in rebuilding trust in the party's competence.

MSZP politicians often speak about the existence of a wide variety of opinions within the party in a positive context. However, a different interpretation is also possible: the Hungarian Socialist Party is the party of constant infights, in which leading politicians do not struggle with each other behind the scenes, but in the media. To finish off party infights and step up in a united way, so that the party could focus on the critics of the government and presenting its own proposals, is indispensable.

A further weakness of the socialists is that they have failed to appeal to young voters in recent years. Not only MSZP's membership but its voting base as well, is not sustainable in demographic terms. 43% of MSZP voters is above 60 and no more than 15% fall within the 18-29 age group (MSZP 2011b). This situation is unlikely to improve with the same old politicians who represented the party in the last twenty years or even during the 2002-2010 period. Many of them are still MPs in the 2010-14 term. The further renewal of the Hungarian Socialist Party's elite is a prerequisite to becoming attractive to most voters again.

References

- L. Andor (2010) *Eltévedt éllovas. Siker és kudarc a rendszerváltó gazdaságpolitikában* (Budapest: Napvilág).
- A. Bíró Nagy (2011), 'Az új pártrendszer térképe. Programok, pártelitek és szavazótáborok a 2010-es választások után' in: *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve 2010-ről* (Budapest: DKMKA).
- L. Beck – A. Bíró Nagy – D. Róna (2011) 'Szabadesésben. Az MSZP 2006-2010 közötti népszerűségvesztésének politikai napirendi magyarázatai', in: Zs. Enyedi – R. Tardos – A. Szabó (eds): *Új Képlet. A 2010-es választások Magyarországon* (DKMKA: Budapest), p. 193-216.
- Á. Bokor (1995) 'Az MSZP szavazótábor három rétege', in S. Kurtán – P. Sándor – L. Vass, *Magyarország politikai évkönyve*, (Budapest: DKMKA), p. 532-550.
- A. Bozóki (2004) 'Akácós út. Az MSZP demokráciafelfogása és politikája' in I. Feitl. – Gy. Földes – L. Hubai, *Útkeresések. A magyar szociáldemokrácia tegnap és ma*. (Budapest: Napvilág), p. 98-141.
- Zs. Enyedi (2007) 'Stability in the Shadow of Chaos. The Hungarian Party System in 2006', in V. Housek and R. Chytilék, *Parliamentary Elections and Party Landscape in the Visegrad Group Countries*, (Brno: Masaryk University), p. 116-134.
- Zs. Enyedi and K. Benoit (2011) 'Kritikus választás 2010. A magyar pártrendszer átrendeződése a bal-jobb dimenzióban', in Zs. Enyedi – R. Tardos – A. Szabó (eds) *Új Képlet. A 2010-es választások Magyarországon*. (DKMKA: Budapest), p. 17-42.
- Z. Lakner (2011) *Utak és útvesztők. Az MSZP 20 éve*. (Budapest: Napvilág).
- MSZP (2010) *Nemzeti modernizáció, összetartó közösség. Ajánlat a demokratikus oldal programjára*. (Budapest: MSZP).
- MSZP (2011a) *A Magyar Szocialista Párt Alapszabálya*. (Budapest, MSZP).
- MSZP (2011b) *Egy összetartó Magyarorszáért*, (Budapest, MSZP).
- POLICY SOLUTIONS – MEDIÁN (2010), *Európai Unió: Bíráljuk, de maradnánk. Ismeretek és vélemények az Európai Unióról a soros magyar EU-elnökség előtt*, http://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/elemzesek/Policy%20Solutions_Medi%C3%A1n_EU-el%C3%B6ks%C3%A9g_final.pdf, page consulted the 22/12/2011, date accessed 17 September 2012.
- Z. Ripp (2004) 'A Magyar Szocialista Párt megszületése', I. Feitl. – Gy. Földes – L. Hubai, *Útkeresések. A magyar szociáldemokrácia tegnap és ma*. (Budapest: Napvilág), p. 30-67.
- G. Tóka (2005) 'A törésvonalak, a pártok és az intézményrendszer', in R. Angelusz and R. Tardos (eds.) *Törések, hálók, hidak* (Budapest: DKMKA), p. 243-322.