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The Paradoxes of Parliament-Citizen Connections in Hungary. A Window on the Political System. [1]

Introduction

The chapter will introduce twenty years of parliament- citizen connections in Hungary, from 1990 to 2010. Our approach and main argument is that parliament-citizen connections are conditioned by the political system per se, that is parliament-citizen connections are a window on the political system. P*arliament-citizen connections depend on how fundamental representative institutions - parties, electoral system and the parliament itself – channel the connections. At the same time some* direct democracy measures also have to be considered. For example, referendum initiatives or popular proposals that intend to affect parliament's work or legislative decisions do also form parliament-citizen connections. Altogether, the analysis of the connection covers diverse fields – within and outside the representative institutions. The Hungarian case offers an additional systemic question to consider. What is the potential impact of the former, pre-1990 communist regime on this connection and could any tendencies in parallel with the democratization and consolidation process be observed?

In line with this approach the chapter will target parliament – citizen connections from different perspectives. In doing so the main questions is: how are parliament-citizen connections serving democratic representation and can any particular trends be observed? After a brief overview about the changing place of parliament in the post 1990 regime, first the MPs' and citizens connections will be analyzed, then citizens' connection to the parliament will be placed in the centre, finally the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies (ICT) will be examined. While the time period ranges through two decades the time focus also depends on the theme: in terms of MPs' and citizens connections information is available throughout the two decade period of democracy after 1990. Citizen connections to parliament – largely in the form of direct democracy – have developed to be a major issue in the second decade only thus more recent developments will

be introduced. Similarly, the impact ICT as a new potential instrument in parliament-citizen connections can only be examined in the second decade.

The changing place of parliament – and citizen views

Parliament in Hungary has been highly valued and has been a symbol of democratic government mainly for historical reasons. That is the sovereignty of the country was embodied by parliament: independence movements against the Austrian Habsburgs historically evolved around the acceptance of an independent parliament. Even during the authoritarian regime in-between the two WW decades and then during the communist regime parliament was regarded as an institution where public interests could appear, and even connections between representatives and constituency people were highly valued.

When in other communist countries communist party dominance made the political landscape flat, in Hungary from 1970 onwards citizens in local constitutencies could nominate their parliamentary candidate (Law III/1970), under the constraints of one-party rule of course. In the 1980s the overall majority of parliamentary interpellations covered local affairs (Kerekes 1987:132), MPs sought to respond to local and citizens' demands in this way although at that time direct parliamentarian and citizen connections have been evaluated by academic literature as signs of weak chains of representation, where pork barrel politics, direct constituency service substitute formalized democratic rules (Kerekes, 1987). Close to the end of the communist period when the first representative surveys were allowed to appear, in the Spring of 1988, 84 per cent of respondents agreed that those MPs whose parliamentary work is not satisfactory should be recalled (Kurtán *et al.* 1990:499). The mere fact that the democratic transition was streamlined by the last communist parliament, that is the new democratic framework and its legal foundations were enacted by it demonstrates the elevated role of parliament (Ilonszki,1993).

The above snapshot illustration of the past might also explain some of the decisions, and institutional choices that have formed parliament –citizen connections since after systemic change. The major question in this respect for those who have created the new framework , that is the negotiating partners of the transition period in 1989-1990, was how to adjust the double expectations: to provide opportunities to maintain direct connections between parliamentarians and citizens in the democratic framework and also ensure the primacy of this highly valued representative institution. Two institutional choices should be mentioned here as responses to this challenge. One is the formation of a mixed member electoral system,

which in the SMD tier in principle offers more opportunities for the citizens to establish direct connections with the MPs while it could also enforce MPs to follow a more pro-active, constituency and citizen focused agenda. The other institutional solution was to create a relatively strong parliament and give primacy to parliament as opposed to direct democracy procedures. This is remarkable because in those years the voice of the people and more direct forms of citizen participation were highly valued.

How have these initial conditions and expectations changed since then? The diminishing importance of parliament can be observed in the first decade and its decline in the second (Ilonszki, 2007). The evolution of strongly centralized parties, party bipolarization and block politics (Enyedi and Bertoá, 2011) gave way to strong governments (Ilonszki and Jáger, 2010). During the twenty decades trust in the new democratic framework and its institutions has not strengthened, rather the constant and low level of trust towards parties in Hungary – as well as in ECE in general (Rose and Munro. 2003; Mishler and Rose, 2001) - has been demonstrated.. Trust in politicians is also notoriously low in Hungary, below or around the 10 % level.[i], one of the lowest in Europe.

How does parliament fit this trend? Is parliament simply one among many institutions from whom the electors feel distant and that they distrust? The answer is more complex. Table 1 shows the changing attitudes of citizens to the institution and to provide a broader context it also includes the average figures in all the European Union countries for trust in parliament in selected years. Table 1 covers surveys from the pre-election years (2001, 2005, 2009) and then after elections data (2002, 2006, 2010). In addition, 2008 is included when without elections a new government was formed and trust hit the bottom-line.

Interestingly, in Hungary trust in parliament is *not* notoriously low, as is the case with other political institutions, but after temporary decline it gets back to high levels.. High levels of trust can be observed in election years, in the post-election surveys while excessively low level of trust data appear in between elections. The fluctuation of the Hungarian data stays in contrast with the average EU figures, where the trend of permanent and continuous decline is obvious.

Table 1 Public trust in parliament in Hungary and the EU, selected years, in %

	2001	**2002**	2005	**2006**	2008	2009	**2010**

EU	40	42	35	38	34	30	31
HU	43	**52**	29	**47**	15	15	**47**

Bold: election years

Source: Eurobarometer surveys (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

This confirms our assumption that confidence in parliament does indeed absorb and reflect several dimensions of the political community. Norris (1999: p.9-10.) on the basis of global trends has decomposed trust into five dimensions: support in the community, in the regime principles, in regime performance, in regime institutions and political actors. Trust in parliament seems to encompass two dimensions at least: support in regime principles and regime performance. .At the time of elections when more attempt is made to attract the citizens they turn towards parliament with more optimism and this embodies general confidence in the political system. In other years dissatisfaction with regime performance and with how things are (from parties to politicians) are reflected in the low level of trust in parliament data. As Boda has demonstrated elsewhere (Boda, 2009) value judgement predominate in formulating political trust in the Hungarian political system but regime performance does also matter. Parliament seems to absorb both dimensions. Indeed, this implies, that the understanding of parliament-citizen connections is not an easy task at all.

After these general remarks the chapter will turn towards more concrete issues, the connections between MPs and voters being the first.

MPs and voters

As it has been mentioned above one of the motivations behind the introduction of the mixed member electoral system was to respond to the former tradition when direct citizen connections with parliamentarians were highly valued. The SMD tier might offer this opportunity, particularly under the conditions when parties are not yet fully institutionalized, what was the case at the beginning of systemic change. The second tier is built on regional party lists. This means that the voters have two votes: one for the SMD candidate and the other for the party list. A third type of mandate (national list mandate) is built on remnant votes of the two other tiers.

MPs and voters connections in SMDs are built on a constituency (territorial) basis, but it goes without saying that those MPs who consider the constituency as the focus of representation are more open to personal contact with the citizens, and are more prone to channel their views and interests into the political system. Table 2 illustrates the representative connection of MPs in selected years. The 1992, 1995 and 1999 results are based on postal surveys, the 2007 and 2010 data come from face to face interviews. [ii]

Table 2. The representative connection of MPs, in selected years

Who do you think you represent?	1992		1995		1999		2007		2010	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Constituency	34	34.7	47	39.8	28	37.8	32	42.1	98	42.5
Party/party voters	24	24.5	19	16.1	18	24.3	11	14.5	29	12.4
A specific group in the society	10	10.2	7	5.9	4	5.4	9	11.8	12	5.3
All the citizens of the country	30	30.6	45	38.2	24	32.5	24	31.6	92	39.8
Total	98		118		74		76		231	

Source: see footnote ii

Table 2 shows the change in the MPs's perceptions of their role in the past twenty years. Unfortunately there is no information about the attitudes toward representation in the nearly ten years between 1999 and 2007, therefore the trend should be handled carefully. Still, the results are quite conclusive in terms of the importance given to constituency representation. It seems that the place of the constituency has stabilized in MPs' perceptions of their role. While in 1992 34.7 % of the respondents said that the focus of representation is the constituency, this percentage is 42.5 in 2010. Since there has been no change in the proportion of SMD and list MPs in the Hungarian parliament in the past twenty years – that is the electoral system remained unchanged - and all the samples are representative regarding party affiliation and the type of mandate, the MPs have become undoubtedly more focused on constituency representation. Constituency is an important political resource for MPs – and for their parties, and not only from the perspective of elections. Since Hungarian parties are relatively poor the parties – and their representatives- try to gain additional resources via establishing the constituency connection. Institutionally, in addition to the electoral system the accumulation of mandates makes this possible. More particularly, an increasing number of MPs is also serving as a mayor or member of the regional council (Várnagy, 2008, p.52). These additional

functions require and offer even more citizen connections than the parliamentary mandate itself.

One aspect of the constituency connection is the effort that MPs make to reach the voters and to make themselves available to voters' requests. Our assumption at this point is that the more visible MPs are in terms of offering their services to their constituents the more open the Parliament appears. Table 3 shows the manners with which MPs kept in touch with their constituents in the 1990s.

Table 3 Types of contact with the constituency

	1992 N=98	1995 N=118	1999 N=74
Types of contact	% of all MPs	% of all MPs	% of all MPs
Local office	44.9	56.9	59.3
Permanent staff	40.4	59.5	48.1
Visits in the district	61.3	67.4	79.1
Meetings	71.1	64.5	77.4
Receiving letters	44.4	44.9	42.1
Loose connections	5.9	2	0

source: see footnote ii

Table 3 shows that fewer and fewer MPs claim to have loose connections to the district and overall there has been a considerable change in the intensity of MP-district connections. In almost every aspect the 1999 figures surmount the 1992 values. We should particularly note that virtually nobody reports loose connections by 1999 and the proportion of those who report visits and meetings in the district, as well as maintaining local office is higher than the proportion of SMD MPs. The mixed member electoral system produces cc. 45 percent SMD

MPs. This implies that even the MPs elected on party lists try to reach out towards the constituency and the citizens.

The above general figures about the first decade developments can be supplemented with more detailed information from the 2009 survey as introduced in Table 4. These results are based on face to face interviews with 99 MPs. The questions aim to reveal the means MPs try to make themselves visible. Hungarian MPs in general appear to be quite active in their constituencies. The only thing they seem to refrain from is attending personal and family events like weddings or funerals. A more detailed analysis of these data has confirmed that – similarly to the first decade results - list MPs approximate the aggregate results, there are no significant connections between the activity variables and the type of mandate (Papp, 2011). Altogether, it is safe to say, that Hungarian MPs are quite open to citizens requests, and this is mostly independent from the mandate they hold, they show a great deal of change from the transition until 2010: they have become more open towards the citizens on several various fields. This has to be acknowledged even if the partisan motivation obvious: to broaden parties' campaign and electoral resources.

Table 4. MPs' attitudes towards diverse constituency related activities, 2009.

	Actually does it (% of all MPs)	Might do it (% of all MPs)	Would never do it (% of all MPs)
Attending weddings, anniversaries and funerals	33.3	30.2	36.5
Meeting with constituents in their private home	74.5	16.3	9.2
Giving lectures and speaking at debate nights	96.9	3.1	0
Sending out personal newsletter and direct mailing	59.1	25.8	15.1
Holding office hours	93.7	4.2	2.1
Advertising constituency	97.9	2.1	0

service			
Publicizing the successes	66	20.2	13.8
Meeting local businesses and action groups	83.3	14.6	2.1
Featuring in the local media	94.9	4.1	1

source: PARTIREP Project, Free University of Brussels and Centre for Elite Studies, Corvinus University of Budapest.

It is particularly interesting that virtually the entire group of respondents participate in public lectures and debate nights, advertise constituency service, and appears in the local media. It is also worth noting that an above 90 percent proportion also holds office hours. In these dimensions even those who do not actually pursue the given connection report that they might do it in the future. In comparison to the results of the first decade (see Table 3) the increase of connections is impressive. MPs report extensive connections with local business and action groups and they even meet in large proportions (3/4th) with their voters in their private homes.

Members' visibility is a key factor of the openness of the Parliament. No matter what MPs do, how many services they offer if this information does not reach the voters. The openness of Parliament does not necessarily vivify MP-voter relationships, and does not necessarily affect citizens' satisfaction with Parliament. These concerns are highly appropriate in Hungary. A population survey in 2009 has found that more than 4/5th of the respondents have never initiated a contact with their MPs. Table 5 also reveals the unsurprising internal demographic composition of (non)contact. Women and the younger age cohorts are less active than the average in keeping contacts with their MPs.

Table 5 Have you ever contacted your MP (%)

	Gender		Age-group			
	Male	Female	-29	30-44	45-59	60-
No	81.0	88.4	88.3	85.5	83.2	83.8

Yes	19.0	11.6	11.7	14.5	16.8	16.2

Source: 2009, Hungarian Election Study (funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism), 2980 representative sample http://www.valasztaskutatas.hu/eredmenyek-en/adatbazisok

This finding confirms somewhat earlier results in international comparative studies. Among countries with similar mixed member electoral systems (Germany, Lithuania and New Zealand), Hungary has produced the lowest level of MP-citizen contacts (Norris, 2004:241) and also the lowest levels of name recognition. These results might conclude from the low level of trust in politicians (as mentioned above). As we have seen (Table 1) trust in parliament fluctuates and seems to reflect on broader (satisfaction with the regime) and more direct (performance) issues. Overall, however, irrespective of what voters think of parliament, they are not keen on contacting their MPs. In contrast to that, MPs obviously try to establish sound connections with the constituency and with the citizens.

While the effects of constituency service on voters' evaluation of the Parliament might not be as large as expected paradoxically members think that neglecting casework would result in losing votes, and losing touch with the constituents. According to the 2009 data 87.7 percent of MPs think that this would be the price of neglecting casework. As to the voters, again in 2009, in the population survey, 51 percent of the respondents said that the MPs should represent the constituency. According to 34.3 percent of the voters, the most important thing an MPs should do is to represent the collective needs of the citizens of their constituencies, 28.6 percent emphasized the importance of casework, and 20.1 percent think that openness toward the citizens and personal contact are the most important factors of an MPs job.

These facts describe a paradoxical situation. Members have become more open to interaction with voters – meeting the demand -, but these capacities and intentions remain unexploited. Therefore, the relationship between trust and openness is concentric, which means that opening up the Parliament itself will not cure the low level of connections. However, this does not have to be a vicious cycle. Despite general dissatisfaction with politics (Enyedi 2011), Hungarian voters place themselves in the middle regarding satisfaction with their representatives' performance in office The traditionally low level of political trust does not prohibit the positive process of moving the MPs and the citizens closer to each other. At the same time this contradiction, that is MPs opening up and voters low response to that gets us back to the starting argument and the title of the chapter: parliament-citizen connections are a window on the political system. If and when accountability patterns are blurred, the responsibility and

responsiveness of the political elite can be questioned (Lengyel et al. 2011) the voters will not trust MPs' individual moves.

Citizens and parliament

After focusing on parliament-citizen connections within the institutional, electoral context, this section examines how direct connections with citizens evolve. By the beginning of the 21st century it has been a widely acknowledged general rule that parliaments should ensure publicity. For a variety of different reasons this was not always the case. Although, interestingly TV broadcast of plenary sessions was introduced in Hungary still in the communist period, in 1988. At that time parliament was the agora where some reform-oriented MPs, including many reform-communists publicized new ideas and for the citizens this was really a new window: what is politics all about, what does political debate mean? Formerly, this could not be experienced at all. Due to media demand and public pressure the political class hoped to gain an additional source of legitimacy by opening parliament.

Plenary sessions are open to the general public in Hungary citizens can follow the sessions live on TV and the internet. They might even view the plenary from the public galleries, for this, however, special invitation is needed. Written records of the plenary and committee meetings are available on the internet and in the Library of the Parliament. So is every bill, interpellation and written question. From the very first moment of systemic change the Hungarian Parliament has provided rich information about the activity of the House. The press has unlimited access to the building of the Parliament, and is entitled to follow the sessions..

Apart from the openness of the sessions and the work in the Parliament, the availability of the building itself is considered a quite important aspect of overall openness. Guided tours enable the visitors to see where the most important decisions of the country are made. Each year, the Parliament has several hundred thousand visitors, the majority being Hungarians. Most of the visitors come with a school class and the building serves educational purposes as well.[iii] The number of visitors has increased considerably since 2001 when the old historical crown was placed in the main hall of the parliament. Formerly, the crown had been kept in the National Museum as a historical reliquary, and indeed it was a source of heated controversy why it should be moved to a "living" and working political institution. The Conservative government

at that time made this as a symbolic gesture: to emphasize historical continuity and identity. The crown attracts additional visitors and in this way parliament becomes more visible as well.

In more political terms however the major question is how citizens could and would interact with parliament. The jumping levels of trust in the institution have already been introduced (Table 1). The question here is: do citizens intend and then attempt to influence the parliamentary decision-making process. The answer principally depends on the constitutional rules. Referendums, popular initiatives and petitions can be the possible instruments to do so but in Hungary only the first two are constitutionally available. Referendums can be either initiated by the legislative or executive powers in order to strengthen the legitimacy of important decisions and in other instances involve voters in moral decisions that go beyond policies (such as the issue of abortion), or can also be initiated by citizens that mostly address policy questions belonging to the arena of governance (Körösényi, 2009:38-39). Obviously, from the parliament-citizen perspective the citizen-initiated referendums are a matter of interest.

According to the Hungarian constitution there are certain issues that cannot be tackled through referendums such as state budgets, government programme, dissolution of parliament, obligations arising from international treaties and issues of national defense. It is the task of the National Election Office or the Constitutional Court to decide whether a referendum can be organized on a certain issue. Validity depends on the participation rate while the success of a referendum depends on the amount of "yes" votes cast: at least one quarter of the total number of citizens eligible to vote should give identical answer to the question concerned. Even more importantly, there are two types of referendums in Hungary: those with 100 thousand signatures are called facultative and in case of success the referendum decision is only indicative while those with 200 thousand signatures are called obligatory and in case of success the decision is obligatory: parliament and government should act accordingly.

Referendums initiated by citizens often aim at overriding decisions taken by the parliament (and usually introduced by the government) thus they are often highly politicized events. Due to the strict requirements of initiation and validity, referendums cannot be regarded as a real bottom-up process in most democracies, and many observers note that political interest groups (in many cases parties) seem to dominate the field (Le Duc, 2003).

The party-politicization of referendums can be well demonstrated in the Hungarian case as well. When an otherwise also unpopular government attempted to introduce some reform guided austerity measures in 2007 the large opposition party initiated a national referendum about some elements of the reforms. The seven referendum questions were widely criticized for touching on issues that are banned from referendums (like the state budget). While the National Election Office declared the questions not suitable for referendum, the Constitutional Court approved three of them and thus the referendum was organized 24 January, 2008. With a turnout rate over 50% and 80% of voters against, medical visit fees and tuition fees had to be abolished. These decisions on budget related issues have triggered heated debate within society on the role and importance of referendums and popular initiatives and had significant political consequences: the collapse of the government a couple of months later. Before this – in harmony with the argument above that in the democratic transition representative institutions were given preference – only two internally conditioned referendum took place : one still in 1990 as a side-event of the democratic transition, and another in 2004. [iv]

The other measure of direct democracy, popular initiative with an even more direct parliamentary connection does similarly reveal that instruments of direct democracy are not necessarily and certainly not exclusively rooted in public demands. With popular initiatives the citizens are not only asked if they agree or disagree with Parliament (as is the case with referendums) but can put forward their own ideas. Generally speaking citizens can get involved in the legislative process via popular initiative in two ways: one is when the popular initiative is a law-proposal in itself, second when the popular initiative has an agenda-setting function by putting an issue up for parliamentary debate, which is called indirect initiative. The Hungarian constitution offers this second option only. If the National Election Office accepts the initiative 50 thousand signatures are required (to be collected within two months after the proposal) and the Parliament should put the issue on its agenda – without an obligation however to make a concrete decision. Comparative evidence proves that this type of initiative is not widely used and generally is not successful (Cuesta, 2010) still it has a symbolic value on the grounds that active citizens with the support of a wider public can attempt and might overwrite what "official" politicians think appropriate.

In 2008, amongst the depth of political crisis, just after the referendum introduced above a civic group put forward a public initiative to dissolve the parliament. The National Election Office rejected it on the grounds that the main representative institution, parliament has a supremacy over direct participation. The constitutional regulation concerning referendums and a former case from 1992 seemed to support their opinion. In 1992, a civic group initiated

a referendum to dissolve the parliament and at that time the Constitutional Court rejected the proposal on constitutional grounds. In 2008 however the Constitutional Court made a different statement: accepted the popular initiative, which even ran in parallel with a similar proposal inside the parliament formulated by an opposition party. Eventually both the opposition party's intra-parliamentary initiative and the popular initiative aiming at the dissolution were voted down in parliament.

In the first decade very public initiatives were launched – and more importantly until 1997 it was not constitutionally compulsory that parliament put them on the agenda. Since then – if the necessary 50 thousand signatures have been collected and the National Election Office approves - the initiative should be placed on the parliament agenda. In 2002 there were 18 initiatives, in 2003 there were 25, 2004 there were 9, 2005 there were 28, and in 2006 there were 47. This increasing trend peaked in 2007 when 412 popular initiatives and referendum initiatives were introduced to the National Election Office (Szigetvári, 2008). The sudden growth could clearly be linked to the turbulent political life that dominated the political arena since the second half of 2006 when the Socialist Prime Minister's speech (including a statement admitting telling lies during the campaign) became public. The largest opposition party, the Conservative Fidesz started a nation-wide protest campaign including street demonstrations in order to force the Prime Minister to resign. The use of direct democracy was an important part of this campaign: Still, only a handful of initiatives reached the parliament floor, the National Election Office worked as a safe filter in this respect. Altogether, between 2000 June and 2011 June parliament dealt with 12 popular initiatives and accepted two of them: one on animal rights and the other on the labour code concerning civil servants. The failed initiatives also raised important issues from ethnic minority issues to pension rights.

The above examples and the flow of controversial events make the questions indeed appropriate: how can citizens make an impact on parliament in a direct way, how are representative institutions and direct democracy interrelated. According to the 2009, Hungarian Election Study population survey (see Table 5) and the 2010 survey of MPs (see footnote ii) both MPs and voters seem to be in favour of direct democracy. Voters believe that referendums make the politicians take the citizens' opinion into consideration. They also think that referendums might increase interest in politics. The data reveal that, surprisingly, MPs on average are more enthusiastic over direct democracy than voters. This means that MPs are open to the alternatives of representative democracy even if this makes them lose their

monopoly in decision making. The relationship between the opinion about referendums and party affiliation is significant both in the case of citizens and the representatives. The answers are clearly politically conditioned however. Between 2007 and 2009 a Socialist government faced direct democracy initiatives – largely triggered by Conservative parties. Thus it is no surprise that the socialist voters are the least in favour of direct democracy, as generally they seem to agree with greater frequency that legislation is the parliament's business rather than the citizens'. They are more anxious about the drawbacks of referendums claiming that they might leads to less well-founded acts. Socialist MPs are the least pro-referendum among the MPs of all parties.

New methods – ICT

Interest towards new communication technologies has developed in the second decade of our period. The Hungarian Parliament has a website, online broadcast, and even a virtual tour on the net - but it does not apply web.2.0 technologies. Ideally, the application of new communication technologies by parliament could be put in two contexts: how does it support the efficiency and performance of the institution (Dai and Norton, 2007) and whether it broadens democracy by promoting the involvement of new groups in the democratic process (Zittel, 2009). From the perspective of parliament-citizen connections both the efficiency-performance perspective and the democracy perspective of the ICT connection are highly relevant but unfortunately, survey evidence is more limited in this respect than in relation to the former areas. On the one hand we have got information about it from the 2010 Hungarian Election Study among MPs (see footnote ii) and on the other hand a concrete election campaign study will be used to introduce the nature and the extent of the connection.

The 2010 Hungarian Election Study was the first one when ICT-related questions were asked from the MPs at all. MPs claim to keep in touch with the voters via the internet. About one third of them reported having webpages and open Facebook profiles. Personal contact does not seem to be the only option to step in touch with a politician any more. MPs offer a huge load of information, personal, official or both. MPs' public e-mail addresses enable the voters to reach the MPs with relatively little effort. Our more concrete data on the internet usage of MPs come from a research addressing internet communication technologies during the campaign before the 2010 parliamentary elections, from November 2009 to April 2010 [v]

During this period the webpages of MPs were coded according to several dimensions to capture the change in the number, style and content of the pages. Therefore we did not work

with a constant number of homepages, but the changes in their numbers were also followed. New websites appeared on the internet, and old ones ceased to exist. It became clear that the coming campaign accelerated the growth in the number of MPs' websites. While in November 2009 37 percent of the MPs had a working website, in April 2010 this proportion was 52 percent. More interestingly, before the campaign the Conservative parties had a significant advantage before the Socialists, and MPs with SMD mandate before the List MPs. The strong relationship between the type of the mandate and the existence of the homepage indicates that having a website in itself can be an indicator of the ambition of personalization (See Figure 1). Figure 1 shows the highest, and increasing number of websites for SMD MPs, MPs with the regional party list mandate follow the same trend but on a lower level, and the pattern of national list MPs is flat, they do not show much activity.

Two different types of websites could have been identified: some of the pages were created on a uniform basis. They are called 'uniform websites'. This means that the party centre delivers a skin, as well as a stream of party news, and MPs can personalize it according to their own preferences. The other type, the so called 'customized websites' differ from the uniform ones in terms of visual characteristics and contents. These websites show the intentions of the representatives to make their own image and to differentiate themselves from the party. More than half of MPs tried to appear with unique, customised webpages. Clearly, there is an intention to build direct personal relationship with the voters through the internet. Interactivity would strengthen this intention further. However, the pattern is quite blurred. More than half of the Conservative offered the chance to post comments while less than 5 percent of the Socialist pages did so.

Figure 1 Number of MPs' websites by mandate type
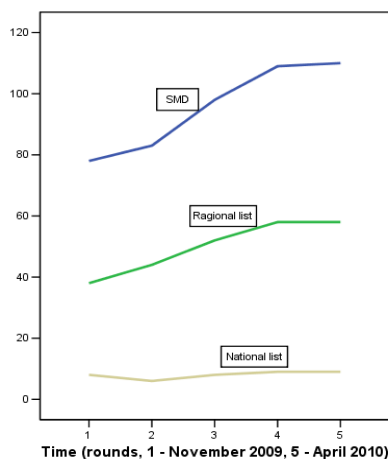
Source: Papp-Oross, 2010.

In terms of personal information given away on the websites it is interesting to see how even the proportions are. There is not any significant relationship between these variables and party affiliation. For example, 75.5 percent of Socialist representatives published personal photos, 36.2 percent mentioned the family or posted a photo of them apart from the context of their biography and 26.6 percent revealed their hobbies. Fidesz-KDNP members seem to be a bit shyer than that, but as noted before, not significantly shyer.

Three conclusions arise on the basis of these findings. First, the efforts of MPs to reach out to citizens with new technologies are impressive and the political (Conservative *versus* Socialist) as well as the time dimensions (campaign independent and campaign related activities) are clear. At the same time, in harmony with what has been found in relation to more traditional modes of connection, citizens tend to be inactive and the (low) intensity of connection between MPs and citizens largely depends on them. Although already the analysis of the ICZ context of the 2004 EP election in Hungary concluded with the statement that ..".politicians are starting to realize that online politics implies more than constructing websites, placing their programs online, and making their speeches downloadable" (Dányi et al,2007:p.190) this tendency seems not at all general, not even widespread. In line with how Leston-Bandeira has distinguished between the stages of *dissemination* of information and digital *communication* (Leston-Bandera, 2007:p.418) with respect to MP-citizens connections, this process is still largely is in the stage of dissemination in Hungary.

The parliament's own website offers wide range of information: on the activities of parliament and the legislative process including the work of committees, on the legislative work (accepted laws, introduced bills, ongoing debates), on MPs (their all parliamentary activities, even speeches). A direct mail contact is also possible. But there is no forum to

enable deliberation or online polls for direct feedback. As it is known from World e-Parliament Report 2008 and World e-Parliament Report 2010 (http://www.ictparliament.org) the main objectives of the spread of ICT would be the development of transparency, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness. Hungary has developed in terms of transparency and accessibility but lags behind with respect to accountability and effectiveness. The reasons are only partially economic or developmental. Rather, a major reason lies in an outdated understanding of politics, which often regards it as a business of the political class, separated from the citizens. This is also a kind of democracy deficit which in our field appears in relatively weak parliament-citizen connections. This is not exclusively the fault of politicians: most citizens do not believe that they could enforce accountability and more effective legislation. Inter-activity of ICT techniques or direct pressures are largely unknown. Another reason is that not all MPs are well prepared to apply new technologies: although highly educated – but late middle age, thus most were not born with a knowledge of the field like younger generations.

Conclusion

Parliament citizen connections have been examined above, first within the representation framework, then in the context of direct democracy, finally in relation to new ICT technologies. Is there an overarching pattern that is equally valid in all three respects?

The findings are paradoxical: promising and disturbing at the same time. The time framework, twenty years of experimenting with democratic institutions, has brought about some fundamental changes. Members of parliament have become more active in reaching out towards the citizens. The development of the constituency connection or the introduction and application of new ICT technologies are a clear evidence of that. In addition, various tools of direct democracy seem to increase the opportunities of citizens to have an impact on parliament. Still, citizens do not respond to MPs' initiatives, disbelief in politicians and a fluctuation of trust in parliament prevail. The paradoxes that have been identified at the beginning of the chapter have been strengthened via the analysis.

It should not be taken as surprise that public response is paradoxical. MPs' activity towards the citizens are largely motivated by partisan reasons. Citizens do not believe that the selection of a (potential new) representative or the re-selection of the sitting representative

will depend on the constituency/citizen connection. It will rather depend on the highly centralized parties' inner circle. Direct democracy instruments to influence parliament either for constitutional or for political reasons cannot establish sound parliament-citizen connections either. They proved to be party-play while some genuine public initiatives could never reach the floor of parliament. A parliamentary reform to strengthen parliament-citizen connections has never been on the agenda. Rather, the position of parliament has diminished and parliament has been put on the sideline by more powerful institutional and political actors. Without the perspective of the promotion and development of accountability and responsiveness parliament-citizen connections are hard to be lively and genuine.

Many parliaments have introduced reforms that are designed to improve the connection between themselves and the public. And there is an expectation that the reforms – in the sphere of information, education and communication – will have an effect, at least indirectly, on the level of trust in them. As Rolef notes, however, in fact these reforms have had little effect, because for example, the low level of trust apparently results more from social and cultural developments than from objective reasons, connected with the functioning of the parliaments or their reflection in the media (2006:5). And also, we can add, these connections will depend on the general functioning of the political system.

Representation deficit, regime underperformance and more recently even democracy deficit have been identified and demonstrated in the working of the Hungarian political system (Lengyel et al. 2011). These shortcomings make the focus of this chapter highly topical: how do parliament-citizen connections evolve under these conditions? Do parliament-citizen connections make up for regime underperformance? Can Parliament citizen connections fill in the representation deficit and revitalize both representation and parliament?

The analysis concludes with 2010, an election year which seems to start not only a new decade but also a new beginning. The mixed electoral system with a majoritarian bias and the high level of dissatisfaction produced a 2/3rd supermajority in parliament. A strong government with a populist agenda often turns to the citizens directly – and not via representative institutions. For example, it has applied a citizen survey to learn about public opinion concerning fundamental issues, like constitutional change or political functions of the parliamentary standing committees. In the meantime opposition parties did not take part in the constitutionalization process in parliament, claiming it undemocratic. The use of direct citizen

connections by avoiding representative institutions, including parliament, is a challenge to democracy.

At the beginning of the chapter it has been argued that parliament's place is conditioned by different political and institutional realities. So are parliament-citizen connections. In harmony with the original assumption it has been found that parliament-citizen connections reflect the broad political environment. Parliament remains a window of political life but window dressing is provided by other actors – mainly parties in the Hungarian case. After all parliament-citizen connections reflect and depend on broad systemic features.

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[i] Find more information about attitudes to politicians and trust in politicians in GfK Group Market Research Institute survey. More recently, GfK Hungária has produced these results: http://www.gfk.hu/imperia/md/content/gfk_hungariaan/pdf/press_eng/press_2011_6_30_eng.pdf

[ii] The postal surveys were conducted at the Centre for Democracy Studies, Corvinus University of Budapest, the 2007 survey was conducted within the European FP6 Project (INTUNE) at the Centre of Elite Studies, Corvinus University of Budapest, and the 2010 survey was conducted within the Hungarian Election Study supported by the Norwegian Financia Mechanim.

[iii] This and further information about the publicity of parliament can be found on http://www.parlament.hu/fotitkar/nyilvanossag_tart.htm, a connection to the Chief Clerk of the House.

[iv] Two further referendums, one about the entry to the Nato and the other about joining the EU followed from Constitutional obligations.

[v] The research was conducted within the framework of the Centre for Elite Studie at Corvinus University of Budapest