

# WHAT DO THEY PROMISE?

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## CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVE

In April 2010 Hungary held legislative elections. With the aim of raising the quality of the debate during the campaign, a group of professionals from different sectors of civil society (some of them members of the Budapest Policy Analysis Institute) developed an initiative aimed at assessing the programmes of the political parties and promoting accountability.

### 1. CONTEXT

In April 2010 Hungary elected Members of Parliament for the National Assembly in what was the sixth parliamentary elections since the end of communism era. These elections were characterised for the massive dissatisfaction with MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party that had governed since 2002. Elections were won by the coalition between the conservative centre right-party Fidesz (EPP) and Christian Democrats, followed by the Hungarian Socialist Party. There were two newcomers to the Parliament – with no representative in the rows before, the radical nationalist party Jobbik that first won seats in the European elections in 2009, and the anti-establishment urban party, LMP (*Politics Can Be Different*). The dissatisfaction with the MSZP regime changed the political landscape of the country.

### 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative aimed at raising the general quality of political and policy debates during the elections and beyond, through the assessment of political parties' campaign programmes and promotion of accountability.

### 3. DESIGN OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative was organised around four main phases:

- i. Identification of the political parties in focus and mapping the parties' manifestos to be assessed.
- ii. Identification of critical policy issues for the country.

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- iii. Assessment of political parties' programmes.
- iv. Outreach campaign to raise awareness of media and civil society.

## 4. GOVERNANCE AND ALLIANCES

The initiative was set up and led by a group of 12 individuals, combining economists, financial analysts and lawyers, coming from the private sector and think tanks. Strategic decisions regarding the different components of the project were made on a consensus basis within the group.

## 5. FINANCING OF THE INITIATIVE

The group of civil society members leading the initiative worked on a voluntary basis.

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION

### Identification of the political parties in focus and mapping the parties' manifestos to be assessed (November 2009 – January 2010)

The programmes of parties that reached 5% or more at the European Parliamentary Elections in 2009 were selected for the assessment. They were the centre-right Fidesz, Socialist MSZP, far-right Jobbik and centre-right MDF. Once the political parties were selected, the team establish contact with their leaders and campaign managers to inform about the initiative and make sure they got the right document to assess.

### Identification of critical policy issues for the country (November 2009)

The team of experts listed several social-economic issues as candidates for being political priorities in the country. An online survey was circulated among an ideologically heterogeneous group of 40 opinion leaders, whose requirements were to be nonpartisan nor heavy politically involved and be an expert in a policy area. Among the policy issues listed we find:

- Quality and efficiency of public education,
- Business friendly / performance enhancing tax regime,
- Employment of low-skilled people,
- Corruption and political party financing,
- Integration of the Roma population,
- Quality and efficiency of the healthcare system,
- Stability and transparency of the budget policy.

Finally, these seven public issues turned to be the top seven priorities of the country that any political party programme should address and that guided the programme assessment next.

### Assessment of political parties' programmes (January – March 2010)

The team of experts analysed the programmes of the parties based on three scoring / evaluation criteria: 1) Targetedness, 2) Soundness, and 3) Accountability<sup>2</sup>. The assessment focused specifically on how targeted and well-grounded the programmes in the seven top priorities and whether the parties could be made accountable for the promises they make.

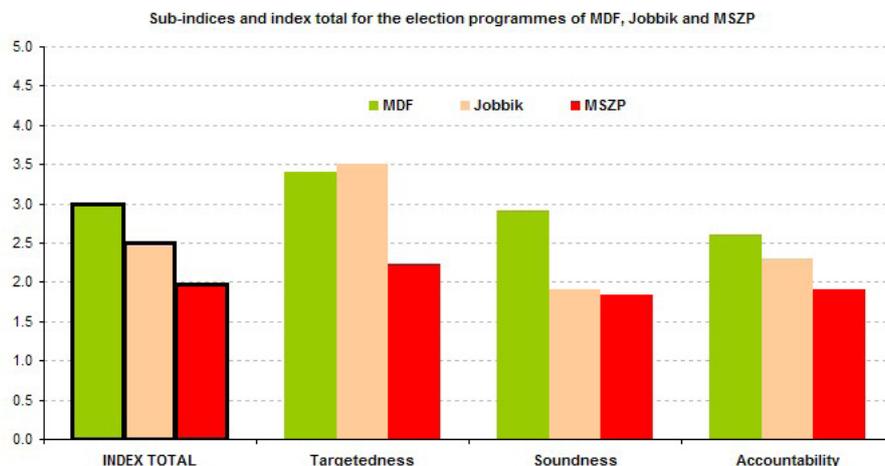
Each programme was assessed by three experts independently by assigning scores on a 5-1 scale (5=best, 1=fail) per each evaluation question, and the average of all scores gave the final score for the party. The original final score could be revised based on subsequent public statements, promises made by party representatives until election day.

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1. For the breakdown of questions related to these criteria as well as to each priority, please see the series "Tools to influence in electoral processes" at [www.onthinktanks.org/eleccionesherramientas](http://www.onthinktanks.org/eleccionesherramientas)

The final scores of the political parties were illustrated on charts. The charts ranked political parties in the three main criteria separately, and a fourth chart indicates the total score of the party. Party scores in each criteria were made public, and a brief (500 words) note was provided to summarise the overall result.

Finally, specific evaluations were sent to each of the corresponding parties in order to inform them about the scoring outcome and the potential points which they could easily improve still during the campaign.



### Outreach campaign to raise awareness of media and civil society (January – March 2010)

This component had the objective of helping the press as well as the wider public to formulate similar concrete questions for candidates. A [website](#) was developed to inform about the initiative and publish the charts and brief notes with the results of the assessment. Moreover, press announcements and short interviews and news in Hungarian media outlets (radio and TV channels) took place. The initiative appeared in the volume of Political Yearbook of Hungary 2010.

## 7. CHALLENGES

### Timing

Most of the political parties submitted their manifestos very late in the campaign, what hampered the timely assessment and due delivery of information to the media and the civil society. Consequently, results have been disseminated on a first-comes, first-assessed basis.

### Innovative ways of support

While in 2010 the initiative was completely carried out in a voluntary a basis, in 2014 the team tried to get additional support through a crowdsourcing platform<sup>3</sup>. However, this effort was rewarded to a little extent and the initiative did collect only limited funding.

## 8. RESULTS

### Higher than expected media interest

Despite the fact that the initiative missed a communication strategy (along with a communication expert), the group received high number of media inquiries and invitations.

### Political parties' responsiveness

A very low rate of political parties that received the evaluations and the tailor-made suggestions responded with acknowledgement of the results and with more detailed information on some of their campaign promises.

### Communications and outreach

The team had limited capacity to devote to communications efforts, thus diminishing a greater scope potential for the initiative.

3. The platform was [Creative Selector](#).

## 9. LESSONS

### CONTINUITY AND COMPARABILITY

The initiative was relaunched in 2014 and will be conducted again in 2018, as a seasonal exercise of accountability towards political parties' programmes. While the policy priorities and opinion leaders who help screen the political agenda have changed a little, the assessment methodology remains the same. A reason to maintain it the same is to keep the results comparable across the years.

### MORE INVESTMENT IN COMMUNICATIONS

Given that communications efforts were limited for a team working on a voluntary basis, while the media attention was considerable, a communication expert responsible for media relations will be involved 2018.

## REFERENCES

*Hungary's Socialists Almost "Fail" With Election Programme.* XpatLoop (March 2010) **Retrieved from:** [www.xpatloop.com/news/63652](http://www.xpatloop.com/news/63652)

### Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis (BIPA) – Hungary

Founded in November 2008, the Budapest Institute produces independent research and analysis to support policymaking, -tracking and -evaluation. The Institute has a double mission. First, to contribute to public policy making grounded in research evidence that would benefit both Hungary and Europe and secondly, to promote the evidence-based approach in public discourse and policy debate. The Institute operates primarily in the areas of employment and social policy, Roma integration, education policy, the business environment and good governance.

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Electoral platforms: strengthening capacities to influence the electoral cycle

[www.ilaipp.org/portfolio/plataformas-electorales](http://www.ilaipp.org/portfolio/plataformas-electorales)

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