COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
237 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING ANNEX 2
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

(202) 225-1901

# REPORT ON THE

# PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY

Prepared by the staff of the
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

April 3, 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The Issues
The Players

II. THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

Structure of the New Parliament
Right to Vote, Nominate Candidates and Campaign
Access to Media and Funding
Complaints

III. THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

Procedures
Counting
Results
The Upcoming Second Round: April 8

* * * The U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe would like to express its gratitude to the leadership and staffs of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the National Republican Institute for International Affairs for including Commission staff in their excellent election observation program in Hungary. The Commission also would like to thank the Charge and staff of the U.S. Embassy in Budapest for their support. Thanks in large part to the efforts of NDI, NRII and the Embassy, Commission staff met with a wide variety of electoral officials, party representatives, journalists, pollsters and voters. This report is based on the information and observations gleaned from these meetings in Budapest and Miskolc from March 21 through 27, 1990.* * *

## HIGHLIGHTS

-- Hungary's first free elections in over 40 years were conducted in an atmosphere of cooperation between the country's major parties, election officials, local council representatives and voters. Earlier concerns about a tense atmosphere in the country did not bear out, as voters cast their ballots with moods ranging from quiet determination to a radiant pride in participating in the historic transformation of their nation.

-- The first country in Eastern Europe to announce fully free elections, Hungary benefited in this test of democracy from a number of confidence-building events for its parties and voters, including last year's opposition victories in several by-elections and the November 26 referendum initiated by the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats. The strong roots of Hungary's civil society were evident in its citizens' cooperative approach to carrying out complex election procedures.

-- The first-round polling confirmed that the opposition parties were competing not against a weakened Socialist Party (the reform wing of the Communist Party which has ruled Hungary for over four decades), but against one another. As one representative of the Free Democrats put it, "The question on the 25th will be not how to reject the past, but where to go in the future."

-- A second round of elections will take place on April 8, two weeks after the voters' first trip to the polls, to determine the makeup of the Parliament. The first round resulted in the election of deputies for only five of the 386 seats in Parliament, because few candidates could hope to win the over 50 percent of votes necessary to win a seat. Each contest pitted from 5 to 15 candidates against one another. In the second round, only 25 percent of voters need to turn out to validate the election, and candidates can win with a simple majority of votes.

-- The first round did determine which of the 12 biggest parties will hold significant numbers of seats in the legislative body: the center-right Hungarian Democratic Forum, Alliance of Free Democrats, Independent Smallholders Party, Socialist Party, Alliance of Young Democrats, and Christian Democratic Party.

-- The Democratic Forum exhibited significant strength in Budapest, assumed to be a Free Democratic stronghold, while the Free Democrats made unexpected inroads in the countryside.

-- The Socialist Party polled about as well as its supporters had expected. The voters' reluctance to express more confidence in the newly-packaged party, and the opposition parties' repeated pledges that they would not include Socialists in any coalition government, reflected Hungarian citizens' fundamental mistrust of those responsible for ruling the country for the past 40 years. This attitude was best summarized in the graffiti decorating a huge Socialist Party "Homeland and Progress" billboard in Kispest: "Back to Recsk" someone had painted, referring to an infamous Stalinist labor camp.

-- A number of less moderate parties were virtually eliminated in the first round, including the hard-line Hungarian Socialist Workers Party and some ultra-nationalist parties, because they did not win the four percent of votes necessary to win seats in the parliament from the regional (19 counties and Budapest) or national lists. At most, they could have a few members sitting in Parliament.

-- Authorities provided exemplary access and support to accredited international election observers, and voters were pleased to share the historic moment in their nation's history with foreign observers.

-- Voters generally were pleased about the conduct of the elections. Some did express complaints, however, about certain provisions in the election law, nomination procedures, uneven access to the media in the early months of the campaign and distorted coverage of candidates and their platforms.

-- There were also complaints about the length of time needed to calculate and announce the election results. Party representatives and voters alike suspected that information was being withheld, but they did not fear manipulation of the results. Instead, the delay -- caused by a combination of a weak communications infrastructure, kinks in a computer network system being used for the first time, improperly conducted reporting procedures from the precincts and, perhaps, deliberate obstruction in the Ministry of Interior -- held up the essential negotiations between parties on their approaches to the next round of elections. The day after the results were determined, party emissaries were already travelling from headquarters to headquarters to hammer out agreements consolidating the strength of Hungary's new political forces.

-- If voters expressed trust in the newly-empowered political parties, they exhibited less confidence in the emerging political institutions in Hungary and, especially, in the prospects for citizens to have an impact on policy-making. Many seemed to believe that casting a vote would be their single opportunity to influence change, and did not entertain the idea that they could lobby their representatives in Parliament. Party representatives will have to work hard to gain the electorate's faith in an institution that has been a rubber-stamp for the Government for so long.

-- Party representatives of all stripes shared a profound concern that Hungary's political and economic transition will be taking place in a destabilizing period in a Europe fraught with changes. A representative of the Free Democrats pointed out, "It is still easy to infect people who are not schooled in democracy with dangerous ideas." Such ideas include, of course, nationalism. As for external factors, the progress of Hungary's democratic transition will depend in part on its neighbors. As for one Socialist Party representative pointed out, "The question of who will be our neighbors is essential when calculating our future: Will it be the Soviet Union or Ukraine?"

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

After reading through Hungary's complex electoral law this winter, a Hungarian scholar concluded that if he did not yet fully comprehend the mechanics of Hungary's leap to democracy, at least he understood why it had to have been a Hungarian who invented the Rubik's cube. The law was a product of Hungary's first democratic exercise, the roundtable among the ruling Socialist Party, its allied social organizations, and the major opposition parties which together mapped out the transition to a multi-party system. It represented the first of many compromises Hungarian political leaders have made and will continue to make in the transition to democracy.

Common wisdom holds that unlike the situation in other countries in the region, Hungary's reform was masterminded by the ruling Socialist Party. Yet the issues at stake in this election underlined the essential role of the opposition in the 1970s and 1980s in setting the agenda for Hungary's journey to democracy. If massive street demonstrations did not force the ruling party to bend, unrelenting discussion of Hungary's future among the Democratic Opposition, and its sustained impact on public opinion, did. During the past two years, reform-oriented Socialist Party leaders have hustled to get to the right side of the issues, and they have consequently found themselves playing the incongruous role of morticians for the ruling party they helped to nurture.

One of the most remarkable transformations to be witnessed in Hungary over the past year was the new political engagement of people who had associated politics with dirty business all their lives. Candidates who entered the campaign with some ambivalence about the corrupting power of politics quickly shifted their attitudes. Voters who had been forced to participate in electoral charades in the past, or subjected as one Free Democratic representative put it, "to a life of unrelenting Communist Party campaigning," felt that their vote could make a difference this time. Yet some voters objected bitterly to the divisive nature of the campaign, which they attributed to the "arrogance" of the vying parties. At a time when the country needed to pull together, they felt, the parties were tearing communities apart in the run-up to elections.

Yet by the time election day arrived, the parties were pulling together after all. The major parties participated in orchestrating the country's transition with the current government. Rival party representatives staffed local electoral commissions, and worked together elbow-to-elbow to inform voters of procedures and collect and count the votes. The bitterness and personal acrimony between leaders of Hungary's two leading opposition parties, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and Alliance of Free Democrats, melted away -- at least for election day.

### The Issues

Hungary's electoral campaign seemed almost devoid of issues, or at least of issues which would elicit significantly different approaches from the various parties or influence voter allegiances. The foremost issue on voters' minds was the poor state of the

Hungarian economy and combatting its attendant inflation, and by the weeks before elections, most of the major non-Communist parties had converged on virtually the same position of support for a transition to privatization and a market economy. Political debates provoked much discussion of the pace of economic reform, but like the popular American pledge of "No new taxes," the question of pace will look very different from the vantage-point of a legislature that has to oversee an austerity program already mapped out by the International Monetary Fund and supported by most parties which will receive seats in the new Parliament.

The question of land reform called forth somewhat more dissension between the parties. The Independent Smallholders Party rose quickly in the polls as voters learned of the Party's central platform of redistributing property to its 1947 owners or their descendants. The Smallholders' program would involve parcelling out two to three million hectares, with a 160-hectare maximum on land ownership and unlimited additional land leasing. The reform could affect up to 600,000 citizens. Initially an attractive-sounding program to many voters, the Smallholders' land redistribution plan also threatened many who work the land and staff the now-nationalized enterprises. Some voters interviewed in and around Miskolc feared the additional inflation and instability the program could unleash, and instinctively objected to the possibilities for vengeance which could be found in the redistribution scheme. A number of party representatives termed the program unrealistic and irresponsible.

As in the area of economic reform, parties found much common ground in their respective approaches to foreign policy. Just about all the major parties favor neutrality ultimately and withdrawal from or a significant modification in membership in the Warsaw Pact, but they differ widely on the pace Hungary should adopt. All are well aware of the uncertain environment in which newly democratic Hungary will find itself, and seem content to be cautious in hammering out their foreign policy plans. By now the parties appear to speak with with voice on the rights of Hungarian minorities abroad, asserting the Hungarian Government's right and responsibility to look out for their welfare.

In the end, style and personalities turned out to be more essential than issues for voters. Just as parties had coalesced around earlier informal associations, so did voters gravitate to the parties where their friends were active and, in the case of some of the "historical" parties, in which they and their forebears had participated before the Second World War. As Free Democrat Gaspar Miklos Tamas coined it, Hungary's politics was "politics by tribe." Much of the pre-election political rhetoric centered on the bona fides of each party's opposition roots, and where a politician was coming from was as important as where he or she thought Hungary ought to be going.

In this way, history played as great a part in the Hungarian elections as present-day personalities or concerns. The last free elections of 1946, the revolution of 1956, and the tentative reforms of 1968 all helped shape the political consciousness of Hungarian voters. The parties themselves were molded in the crucible of the last two

years of rapid-fire political change in Hungary: the fall of longtime ruler Janos Kadar in June 1988; the reburial of Imre Nagy one year later; the opposition-government roundtable; the successful demonstrations against the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros dam and in support of minority rights abroad; the by-elections of last summer and winter; the split in the ruling Socialist Party; the Free Democratic victory in the November 1989 referendum; the scandals dogging the Socialists including improper divestment of party property; and Interior Ministry surveillance of opposition parties into this year. Each of these developments strengthened the opposition's hand and offered clear evidence to Hungary's voters that they could effect real change for perhaps the first time in their lives. Robbed of control over their future time and time again, they went to the polls asking less about what policies parties favored than which candidates could be trusted.

**The Players**

Fifty-four parties have been registered since Hungary legalized political parties last autumn. Some of these have donned the mantle of pre-war parties, while others have grown out of the opposition movement or spun off of the ruling Socialist Party. Many resemble lobbying groups rather than parties, with regional bases and limited sets of issues instead of comprehensive political platforms.

Twelve parties have gained enough popular support to put forward national lists of candidates. (Any party that has put forward lists in seven of Hungary's 20 regional electoral districts qualifies to set up a national list.) These 12 parties gained the right to send one delegate each to the National Electoral Commission, and to participate in the roundtable talks on the transition which took place over the past month. The parties were required to present their national lists to the National Electoral Committee by February 23 at midnight.

A brief description of each of the 12 parties follows:

1. Agrarian Federation -- A spinoff of the ruling Socialist Party, the Agrarian Federation is an alliance of rural managers, cooperative chairs and other members of the apparat in the collectivized sector of Hungary's agricultural economy. Organized on a local rather than national basis throughout the country's rural regions, the Agarian Federation represents the vested interests of the class most clearly threatened by Hungary's resurgent Smallholders Party.

2. Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) -- Founded in November 1988, SZDSZ has grown from about 2,000 to 15,000 members. Its strength lies in urban centers, where it finds the most support among the young and middle-aged and in the best-educated strata of the population. It carries on the liberal and social-democratic traditions of Hungary's Democratic Opposition, which was active in the late 1970s and 1980s. SZDSZ stands for the establishment in Hungary of a Western-style democracy with human rights guarantees and a brisk transition to privatization and a market economy with some state intervention to reduce the income gap between the country's richest and poorest populations.

Sometimes saddled with an egghead image, the party is widely credited for having the most economic and other experts within its ranks.

3. Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) -- Founded in March 1988, FIDESZ is perhaps the most active and often the most visible new party in Hungary. With its 4,000 members between the ages of 16 and 35, FIDESZ regards its role as much larger than that of a political party, stressing the importance of a radical transformation of Hungary's social and cultural life and emphasizing the role every Hungarian citizen can play in transforming the country. Its program is similar to that of SZDSZ, although its approach is sometimes seen as more strident and certainly more humorous. It calls for Hungary's return to the European fold and a rapid reform of Hungary's entire political structure. FIDESZ was the first party to call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, and the only major one with the nerve not to choose Hungary's national colors as its own, but instead to go with a brilliant and immediately-recognizable orange.

4. Christian-Democratic People's Party (KDNP)-- Originally founded in 1945 with the name "Democratic People's Party," KDNP was reconstituted in April 1989. With a membership of about 2,000, this liberal Catholic-based party stands for human rights guarantees, the promotion of Christian values and religious freedoms, and autonomy for local communities. It favors an economy based on free enterprise, but calls in addition for a welfare system based on the concept of "human solidarity" to shield the disadvantaged. It also supports the reprivatization of agriculture through a lease system, whereby peasant households would take out perpetual leases on plots of land.

5. Entrepreneurs Party (VP) -- Founded in October 1989, the Entrepreneurs' Party has grown to 5,000 members from Hungary's small-business constituency. The Party favors making Western support available on the basis of open and unfettered competition. The Party has urged a review of taxation practices which adversely affect entrepreneurs.

6. Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) -- The MDF dates back to September 1987, when it formed an umbrella for Hungary's populist-based opposition. With a reported membership of about 20,000, MDF fared well in last year's parliamentary by-elections which set the stage for this year's parliamentary vote. It has been one of the most outspoken and persistent supporters of Hungarian minorities beyond the country's borders. Yet MDF has been beset at times by dissension in the ranks (more than any other party, it encompasses a diversity of interests), charges of past complicity with the ruling Socialists, and allegations of sometimes aggressive nationalism. Until recently the MDF appeared to support some economic alternative between socialism and capitalism. Now it has sworn off this idea, but still opposes the speedy pace of privatization and foreign investment favored by the Free Democrats.

7. Hungarian People's Party (MNP)-- Founded in February 1989 and supported by about 10,000 mostly rural members, the MNP regards itself as the successor to the pre-war National Peasant Party. It grew out of a constituent society of the "Patriotic People's Front" which served as a transmission belt under the ruling Socialists. It seeks to

promote autonomous local communities with elected leaderships, and stands for the protection of rural interests as well as those of the poor. The MNP is allied closely with the MDF.

8. Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (MSZMP) -- The platform of this party is perhaps best expressed by its recently-stated position that "in this country . . . it is less and less a question of the problems of democratization. . . . [and] much more a question of a right-wing shift, a bourgeois restoration, the real danger of the restoration of capitalist relations." Setting out his party's strategy on the eve of the March 25 elections, an MSZMP representative dispensed with any discussion of issues or popular support and fell back on a reliance on the strength he expected his party to gain thanks to its organizational experience and divisions in the opposition.

9. Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) -- In October, the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers Party split when reform-oriented leaders rechristened the party the Hungarian Socialist Party and other leaders, including former MSZMP Party Secretary Karoly Grosz, announced that the MSZMP had not ceased to exist. The MSZP claims to have 50,000 members, while the MSZMP claims to have 100,000; in reality, the MSZP has a wider base of popular support than the MSZMP. An MSZP representative recently described his Party's platform as including planks for a "civilized transition to a market economy, integration into the world market, the reestablishment of entrepreneurial skills, diligence and hard work."

10. Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) -- This party, originally founded in 1930 and robbed by the Socialists of the 57 percent support it had won in the last free elections in Hungary in 1945, was reestablished in November 1988. With a membership of about 40,000, the FKGP seeks to revitalize Hungarian agriculture, rehabilitate dispossessed peasants, and institute price reform. The FKGP has called for the return of property expropriated by the MSZMP after the Communist takeover to its original owners and their descendants, and has found particularly strong support in rural areas among members of the older generation. Some 600,000 families would be involved in the return of land and other seized property.

11. Patriotic Electoral Coalition (HVK) -- This coalition, an outgrowth of the subservient Patriotic People's Front, brings together members of the local apparats who wish to continue their life in public service. The coalition partners seek to prevent further increases in unemployment and favor gradual reductions in budget subsidies.

12. Social Democratic Party (SZDP) -- Originally dating back to 1890, the SZDP was founded in January 1989. With an estimated 10,000 membership, the SZDP seeks to establish a West European-style democracy while championing the interests of workers. The SZDP would cut back the state sector significantly except in such areas as utilities, energy and transport. Once considered the greatest potential political threat to the ruling Socialists, the SZDP has fallen prey in recent months to infighting and intrigues among its members.

## THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

### Structure of the New Parliament

The electoral law provides for the parliament to consist of 386 members: 176 are chosen to represent local constituencies of about 60,000 residents, 152 will hold seats gained by their respective parties in regional races, and 58 seats are to be allotted through national proportional representation on the basis of the "compensation votes" above or below the number of votes necessary to elect a candidate which were gained by each party. This multi-layered system was the product of negotations between the parties whose strength lay in their names and those whose strength lay in their candidates' fame and popularity in local districts.

In addition to the 386 members elected through the March 25 and April 8 elections, eight parliamentary seats will be allotted to minority representatives to be appointed by their respective communities. The Parliament passed this measure in response to the concern of many minority members that they would lose a voice in the legislature.

### Right to Vote, Nominate Candidates and Campaign

Twenty-five days after the election date was announced, local authorities were required by law to release population census lists and lists of those citizens without the right to vote. (Those without the right include citizens who have been judged to be mentally incompetent and formally placed under guardianship, imprisoned, undergoing court-ordered medical treatment, or prohibited from participating in public affairs.)

Voter registration was confirmed with the postal delivery of the quaintly-coined "knocking card" to each voter's home. The card was in two parts: one containing the name, address, age and other information about the voter, the other requesting the voter's signature in endorsement of a single candidate. Candidates needed to collect at least 750 such knocking cards to qualify for the election. This system was developed to replace the nominating meetings which were once the norm in Hungary, subject as they were in the past to manipulation by the ruling party. Yet it still was subject to abuse, and elicited many complaints from voters and candidates alike. These included allegations that some candidates had already filled in their names on the knocking cards instead of waiting for the voter's voluntary endorsement, and that some Gypsies and agricultural enterprise workers were pushed to sign for the candidates of certain parties, and subjected to threats if they did not. Many voters were not aware that the cards would be destroyed after the election, and feared that there would be a permanent record of their political allegiance.

A total of 1,621 candidates gained the number of knocking cards necessary to compete in individual constituencies, with 5 to 15 candidates vying for each seat. Over 200 of these were candidates running independently of the parties. The FKGP, MDF, MSZP and SZDSZ entered candidates in every constituency in the country, and the FKGP,

FIDESZ, HVK, MDF, MSZP and SZDSZ entered regional lists in all the country's 19 counties and Budapest. (In order to enter a regional list, parties had to have entered candidates in at least one-quarter of the constituencies in a given county or in the capital.) From 9 to 14 parties competed in each region.

**Access to Media and Funding**

The Parliament allocated a fund of 100 million forints for the election campaign, providing about 25,000 forints per candidate. A total of 700 million forints ($11.2 million) is being provided to opposition parties for the year. Parties could receive funding from outside sources except foreign governments, and many took advantage of this right, selling campaign paraphernalia and soliciting contributions. Party representatives tended to be reticent about the sources and dimensions of their funding, but they will be required to account publicly for their spending to an auditing commission attached to the Parliament by April 24.

Reports of funding for the campaign ranged from 25 to 30 million forints for the MDF to 10 to 15 million forints for SZDSZ, FIDESZ, and People's Party, to no money at all for such marginal parties as the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies. The Socialists are widely reported to have spent about 200 million forints on their campaign.

If one area was consistently a source of election-related worries for Hungary's opposition parties, it was that of the media. Hungary does not yet enjoy a fully free press: its major county-based newspapers, for example, are in Socialist hands. While the electoral law provided for candidates to enjoy cost-free access to the media, it did not guarantee equality of access.

Candidates complained consistently throughout the electoral campaign about uneven access to the media. (MSZP leader Imre Pozsgay only recently was removed from his stewardship of a theoretically independent media supervisory board, which was thought by some to favor the MDF.) Most recently, the Free Democrats objected to the Hungarian media's failure to cover their celebration of the March 15 commemoration of Hungary's 1848-49 independence struggle, an annual celebration that has traditionally been the province of the country's Democratic Opposition.

Finally, some party representatives charged that the media purposely ignored upcoming party events. SZDSZ and FIDESZ members in Miskolc suggested that the county papers had continually announced the wrong time for their events and underreported the attendance at their rallies. Parties did not seem to have any trouble, however, in holding rallies or distributing campaign literature.

Thirty-nine of Hungary's 54 parties applied for free radio and television slots to publicize their programs, and their advertisements ranged from "talking head" shots of candidates droning on about their programs to the inventive weaving of sound bites, theme songs and heart-warming images into easily digestible if hardly recognizable

political messages. Candidates were also featured in four-way televised debates. Parties could purchase advertising space in newspapers and magazines, and all the largest ones plastered cities and villages with campaign posters.

### Complaints

According to National Electoral Commission Chair Pal Kara, most of the complaints brought to the electoral commissions' attention before the election concerned aggressive party tactics (e.g., tearing down rivals' posters), ethics code violations, disputes over the makeup of party lists (which the commissions left to the parties themselves for arbitration) and missed deadlines.

Another complaint surrounded the ambiguous lines of authority between the spheres of competence of different electoral bodies. For example, as was apparent on March 27 when the public still awaited announcement of the results of the election two days before, the National Electoral Commission did not have the authority to demand cooperation from the Ministry of Interior, which was involved in counting the votes. Not until Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth intervened with the Interior Ministry on the evening of March 27 did that agency divulge the full results of the Sunday elections. Opposition representatives sitting on that commission suggested that in the future, the election law might be amended to subordinate such agencies as the Ministry of Interior to the Electoral Commission.

Finally, many party representatives noted wistfully that there was no provision in the electoral law for sanctions against those who violated the provisions of that law. While candidates were not allowed, for example, to campaign on the day before the election, there was no clear indication that they would be punished for campaigning. Party representatives wondered if some parties would be treated "more equally than others," but few thought they would take the time and energy to lodge complaints.

## THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

The elections would take place in two rounds. During the first round, over 50 percent of the voters must turn out to make the election in each district valid. To win a seat in the first round of elections, a candidate must win more than one-half the votes cast. If fewer than one-half of the eligible voters turn out in the first round, all the candidates may compete in a second round. The candidate who wins the most votes in this round gains a parliamentary seat as long as more than one quarter of the eligible voters turns out. If no candidate wins more than one-half the votes in the first round, a second round will be held for those who win at least 15 percent of the vote, or for the three highest pollers. In the second round, a candidate can win a majority of the votes cast, and the election is valid if more than one-quarter of the district's voters turn out.

One hundred and fifty-two seats would be filled from party lists drawn up for Budapest and Hungary's 19 counties. Candidates on these lists would win election to parliament in proportion to the number of votes cast for their party list in the region. If the votes cast for any party did not exceed 4 percent of the total vote, that party would not be permitted to seat candidates from either its regional or national lists in the assembly.

Anticipating a good deal of confusion among voters participating in a complex exercise, Hungary's independent trade union federation launched a series of televised public service announcements this past January explaining the balloting procedures for March 25. The electoral commission also provided educational materials, including media announcements and "how-to" posters displayed at every polling place. Some voters observed in and around Miskolc seemed nevertheless to be confused, and many stopped to ask advice on how to mark their ballots from electoral commission representatives. Roving election law experts culled from local councils made the rounds of polling places to ensure that both voters and commission members understood the balloting and counting procedures.

On the eve of the election, opposition party representatives in Miskolc counselled vigilance in observing the work of the electoral commissions at each polling place. Noting that they had no complaints to date about the work of the county electoral commission, they worried nonetheless that the old apparat's presence in each polling place could compromise the procedures and results of the election. For this reason the parties were careful to blanket the vast majority of polling place electoral commissions in the county with their own representatives. (The MDF would cover 90 to 95 percent, while the Free Democrats would cover about 80 percent.) Mobilizing cadres to fulfill this role a full month before the election -- when the parties had to provide information to the local commissions on who would be representing them on March 25 -- was, according to some party spokespeople, one of the most gruelling tasks of the campaign. Parties such as the MSZP and MSZMP, with their strong nationwide organizations, had an easier time finding representation for each polling place.

**Procedures**

Local electoral commissions were composed of three persons appointed by the local councils, representatives of at least two parties and representatives of candidates running on independent tickets. The commissions could include up to 14 members. The party representatives and officials on the electoral commission were required to take an oath on the Hungarian Constitution.

Polling stations were to open at 6 a.m. and close at 6 p.m. In practice, polling stations in some communities opened at 5 a.m. and some closed at 8 p.m., both to accommodate the needs of those who worked far away from the polling station and to encourage a higher turnout of voters. The decision of when to close the station was left to each electoral commission chair. In general, commission chairs would extend the

voting if they had not seen the 51 percent turnout required to validate the results of the election by the officially set closing time.

Each polling place was equipped with at least two curtained voting booths with one ballpoint pen each and one or two ballot boxes with a slot in the top. These boxes ranged from the carefully painted red, white and green wooden boxes spied in one small town (where the electoral commission chair apologized for having run out of funds to repaint the room in time for elections) to the brown cardboard carton that had housed canned goods in a previous incarnation. The first voter of the day signed a slip of paper, which was put into the box to attest that it had been empty when the precinct opened. Then the electoral commission sealed up the box with regulation white tape.

Upon entering the polling stations, voters presented their voter registration cards or, failing those, their official identification papers. The local electoral commission had three lists it could check to ensure voter eligibility: a list of the district's residents, a list of the addresses included in the electoral district, and a list of residents of the district who had lost the right to vote (for reasons set out in the section above on the Right to Vote, Nominate Candidates and Campaign). The electoral law set out procedures to appeal commission decisions and calculations to the National Electoral Commission, and ultimately to higher courts.

Voters received two ballots, stamped by the electoral commission upon disbursal, and one unmarked envelope. One ballot listed, in alphabetical order, the names of the candidates for the local constituencies and the parties they represented (or indicated that the candidates were running as independents, as a number of Socialist Party luminaries chose to do). The other ballot set out in parallel columns the individuals comprising each party list for the region. Voters placed a "+" in the box next to the name of the candidate they wished to support on the first ballot, and next to the name of the party they chose to support on the second. Ballots which were unmarked, carrying extraneous marks or marked by anything but a ballpoint pen would be judged invalid (as some 3 percent of the ballots cast were, according to National Electoral Commission statistics released on March 27). Most voters stood in line when necessary to use the booths; others perched in corners, often in a huddle with their spouses, to mark their ballots.

The Hungarian electoral law makes no provision for absentee ballots. Instead, it sets out procedures for obtaining permission to vote in a district other than that in which the voter lives. If a voter has moved recently, he or she can obtain a notarized letter cancelling the voter's eligibility to vote at the old address and confirming the new address. In the event that a voter is temporarily away from his or her residence (e.g. at university, in the hospital, serving military duty or on vacation), the voter can present a notarized letter allowing him or her to cast a vote in another district. Voters can obtain these letters up to the day before the election. Hungarian citizens who are out of the country during the election do not have the right to vote.

The law does allow homebound or hospitalized citizens to cast their votes in portable ballot boxes. These citizens must submit a request in writing or over the telephone to the local electoral commission, which will send at least two members, including at least one party representative, to collect the votes. Party representatives interviewed in Miskolc flagged this practice as potentially open to manipulation, and said they would pay particularly close attention to the voters tallied before and after the portable boxes had been removed from the polling place premises. In one instance spotted by international election observers, about 70 hospitalized voters who had hoped to cast a vote in the portable ballot box were not permitted to do so, as the commission members brought far too few ballots. For its part, the commission reported that it had received only 11 requests from the hospital.

**Counting**

The election results were tallied first at local polling places, then over a much-heralded computer network which was to provide fail-safe and transparent counting procedures. Regional computers were linked with national computers, which displayed information continuously and on-line at three locations in Budapest which were accessible to the press and election monitors.

The commissions at each polling place kept a detailed list of voting information and included it in a protocol to be signed by each commission member and sent first to the regional counting center and then to the central counting center in Budapest. These protocols would serve as confirmation of the information entered on-line over the computer network.

Helsinki Commission staff observed the count in a polling station in Szerencses, a small town about 45 minutes away from Miskolc by car. As soon as the polls closed at 6 p.m., the electoral commission members counted the number of envelopes in the portable ballot boxes and in the large precinct boxes. They then opened the envelopes and separated the square local constituency ballots from the larger, rectangular regional list ballots. These were counted and checked for the commission stamp; any unstamped ballots would be invalidated. (Seven ballots of 908 cast were invalidated; some were blank, while one contained two hache-marks with an arrow next to one indicating "This is the good vote.") The commission then separated the ballots into piles for each candidate and party, and counted these twice. Commission members did not appear to be double-checking one another's work. Perhaps they felt confident that the results could be predicted clearly, as Szerencses is close to the town which claims Prime Minister, prominent Socialist Party member and independent candidate Miklos Nemeth as its native son. (Nemeth was indeed one of the five MPs to be chosen in the first round of voting.)

The nationwide tallying turned out to be slower than the National Electoral Commission had anticipated. While it had known that the country's poor communications infrastructure would make delivery of the results from the over 11,000 polling places to the regional counting centers take up to several hours (in some places, electoral

anticipated that the computers would work so slowly or, more importantly, that it would receive so many incomplete protocols from local electoral commissions. In some cases, it had to return the protocols to the local commissions for additional information. (Party representatives claimed that some local commissions inexplicably removed the protocols from the counting premises before they had been able to sign them, as is required by law.) By March 27, there were widespread suspicions that the Interior Ministry was sitting on results, though few could conjure up any motivation besides the pure pique of bureaucrats on their way out of a job. Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth called on the Ministry to release the results that evening, and the Ministry complied.

Results

On Tuesday, March 27, the National Electoral Commission announced the following results of the first round of voting in Hungary. About 66 percent of Hungary's voters turned out, and over 50 percent of the voters showed in all but five precincts in the first round, validating virtually all of the elections.

| | |
|---|---|
| Hungarian Democratic Forum | 24.71% |
| Alliance of Free Democrats | 21.38% |
| Independent Smallholders Party | 11.76% |
| Hungarian Socialist Party | 10.89% |
| Alliance of Young Democrats | 8.94% |
| Christian Democratic People's Party | 6.46% |

*** FOUR PERCENT THRESHOLD TO GAIN PARLIAMENTARY SEATS FROM THE REGIONAL OR NATIONAL LISTS ***

| | |
|---|---|
| Hungarian Socialist Workers Party | 3.68% |
| Hungarian Social-Democratic Party | 3.55% |
| Agrarian Alliance | 3.15% |
| Entrepreneurs Party | 1.89% |
| Patriotic Election Coalition | 1.87% |
| Hungarian People's Party | 0.76% |

Most political observers had expected the MDF and SZDSZ to be running neck and neck, and had anticipated that the Smallholders would gain more support than they did. The MDF polled better than expected in Budapest, where it came out on top with 28 percent of the vote as opposed to the SZDSZ's 27 percent, and the SZDSZ did better than expected in the provinces. A Budapest-based SZDSZ representative expressed some surprise at the strong provincial support for his party, claiming that the SZDSZ campaign had not targeted the countryside very hard. Yet the SZDSZ stars from the Democratic Opposition put in plenty of appearances at provincial town rallies.

**The Upcoming Second Round: April 8, 1990**

Hungarians will return to the polls on April 8 for the second round of parliamentary elections. The results will flesh out the map of the new Parliament, determining the layout not only of individual constituencies but also of MPS drawn from national party lists. They will also demonstrate in action the rather murky process for choosing candidates from the parties' national lists.

In the second round, only 25 percent of voters need to turn out to make an election valid. A minimum of three and maximum of six candidates can compete. (Each should have won at least 15 percent of the vote to qualify, but two-way races are not permitted.) Here a relative majority of votes will be sufficient to win a seat.

The Hungarian election law refers to the seats distributed to candidates on the national lists as "compensation" seats. The National List gives a second chance not only to those parties which do very well in the individual and regional contests, but also to those large parties which could run candidates in many districts but could not muster enough votes to get their candidates in through direct voting.

Fifty-eight MPS are to be drawn from the national lists of all parties that have put forward enough candidates in individual constituencies to present regional lists in 7 counties. (Twelve parties have qualified.) Additional seats may be filled from the same lists if they remain empty after the regional list seats have been distributed. Each party can put forward up to 116 candidates, and determines the order in which they appear on the national party list.

Candidates on the national list could also run in individual constituencies and on regional lists. If they win in either of these contests, they will be knocked off the national list and the subsequently listed candidates will move up on the list.

Voters do not cast ballots directly for candidates on the national list. Instead, so-called surplus votes for each candidate are added up and distributed to the candidates' parties to put towards their national lists. In individual constituencies, these surplus votes are the ones that are insufficient to elect candidates; in regional races, these include both the number insufficient to elect candidates from a regional party list and the number left over after the distribution of regional party list candidates has been decided.

Compensation seats will be divided among parties in proportion to their accumulated surplus votes. If a party does not receive at least 4 percent nationwide of the vote for its regional candidates, it loses its chances to send regional list candidates to the parliament. Consequently, it cannot send national list candidates either, leaving fewer parties to benefit from this second-chance election.

Election officials will calculate how many votes are necessary to win a compensation seat by dividing the overall number of surplus votes by the number of seats to be filled by the national list (at least 58). If open seats remain after the surplus votes

have been divided up, the total of surplus votes will be re-divided by the number of empty seats to determine how many votes are necessary to win the leftover open seats. The election law states in so many words that the adding and divided up will be done as many times as necessary to get it right, suggesting that even the Hungarians are not sure that this intricate system of compensation seats is going to work neatly.

In the interim between March 27, when the first round results were announced, and the second round on April 8, party representatives were scrambling to put together formal or informal alliances at the local and national level. Parties have come to agreements in many instances to pull one or another of their weaker candidates from races where they would be detracting votes from stronger-polling, like-minded candidates. On March 30, the MDF and Smallholders announced such an alliance, but the low level of party discipline between these loose-knit groups might interfere with such teamwork. FIDESZ and SZDSZ are natural alliance partners. Other agreements will almost certainly be hammered out in each electoral district.

The real coalition-building work will come only after the second round of elections. The MDF and SZDSZ leaderships have stated categorically that they will not enter into a governing coalition with one another, but whether either party would favor playing the role of a strong opposition is anyone's guess at this point. What is clear is that the Socialists have no place in Hungary's upcoming government -- and that they are biding their time in hopes of a renaissance of nostalgia for stability and predictability.