# Fact Sheets on Hungary

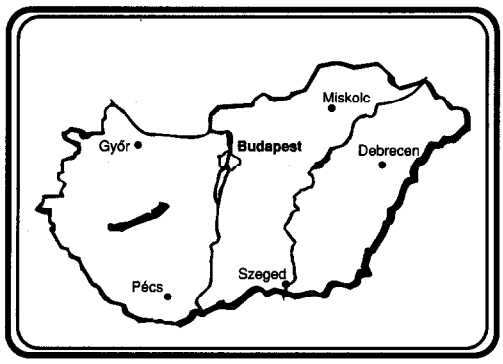
1992

# Hungary and its People

**REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY**

*Area:* 93, 000 sq. km, 1% of area of Europe
*Population (1991):* 10, 335, 000
*Population density(1991):* 112/sq. km
*Main ethnic groups:* German, Slovak, Croat, Romanian, Serb, Sloven, Gypsy
*City population:* 63%
*Capital:* Budapest (2,018,035 – 1991)
*Official language:* Hungarian
*Form of Government:* Republic
*Administrative division:* 19 counties and the Capital
*Pattern of occupations:* agriculture 18,4%
industry 37,4%
others 44,2%
*Religions:* Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Orthodox
*Main cities (1991):* Debrecen (213,927), Miskolc (194,033)
Szeged (176, 135), Pécs (170, 023), Győr (129, 598)
*Communications (1990):* Railways 7,770 km, of which 2,224 km electrified; public roads 29, 832 km
*Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP):* 3,077 USD (1990)
*National currency:* forint (=100 fillérs)

H U N G A R Y




**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
**BUDAPEST**

**5**

## *GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT*

Hungary lies in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin formed by the Alps, the Carpathians and the Dinaric Alps. The country covers about 1% of the area of the European continent. The vast majority of the population speak Hungarian, a Finno-Ugric language.

Hungary's greatest extent from North to South is 268 km and from East to West 528 km. Its frontiers measure 2, 242 km.

The country lies at the junction of three climatic zones—the continental zone of Eastern Europe, the maritime zone of Western Europe, and the subtropical zone of the Mediterranean—which gives it a veriable climate. The mean annual temperature at Budapest is 12°C, with a mean temperature in the hottest month (July) of 21.7° and in the coldest month (January) of -1.2°. The mean annual precipitation is 561 mm. There are around 2,015 h of sunshine a year (1990), and the average wind speed is 2.2 m/s.

Hungary is a low-lying country, two-thirds of it being plain with an altitude of less than 200 m above sea level. Six main areas of relief can be distinguished. The Great Plain covers the central and eastern parts of the country. The Little Plain at the Western „gateway" to the country was formed by the alluvial deposits of the Danube. The southern rim of the country has been eroded by wind, water and various historical processes.

The Transdanubian Uplands—the Central Transdanubian Hills, Alpine foothills and North-Central Range—are an area undergoing geological degradation. Several ancient geological formations can be found on their surface.

The country forms part of the Danube catchment area. Its rivers flow from the surrounding hills towards the lowest area, the Great Plain, and directly or indirectly into the Danube. The 417-km Hungarian length of the Danube (total length: 2,860 km) cuts across the country. The other major river is the Tisza, with a length in Hungary of 598 km. Its numerous backwaters and dead branches on the Great Plain are the result of major regulation work in the last century.

Hungary has some 1, 200 natural and artificial lakes, of which Lake Balaton is the best known and most extensive. Balaton has a length of 77 km, a maximum width of 14 km, and a surface area of 598 sq. km. It is a shallow lake with an average depth of 3 m, and so warms up quickly in the summer (to a seasonal average of 26°). Also in Transdanubia is Lake Velence (26 sq. km), which is largely covered with reeds. Only the Southern tip of Lake Fertő (Neusiedl, 83 sq. km) on the Western border belongs to Hungary.

Hungary is rich in underground thermal waters. There are vast stocks of artesian water between 1, 000 and 2, 000 m beneath the Great Plain, and their stored geothermal energy represents a high calorific value. The country's mineral and medicinal waters contain a variety of mineral substances as a result of earlier volcanic activity.

# *HUNGARY'S REGIONS*

### The Capital

Budapest, the capital of Hungary, was formed in 1873 by amalgamating three cities: Buda, Pest and Óbuda. With a population of more than two million, it is both the administrative and the cultural, scientific, industrial, commercial and transport centre of the country.

The capital, which lies on both banks of the Danube, is divided administratively into 22 districts (boroughs), of which 15 are on the Pest side, six on the Buda side, and one on Csepel Island, between two branches of the Danube. The Buda side is hilly, while Pest lies on the terraced plain of the Danube. Gellért Hill (235 m), almost in the centre on the right bank of the Danube, offers a fine view over the city.

There are six road and two rail bridges across the Danube at Budapest. All the bridges destroyed in the Second World War except Elizabeth Bridge have been rebuilt in their original forms.

Among the many and varied sights of the city are the Royal Palace and the Castle District, now restored in their original style and form. The palace contains the rich collections ot the Hungarian National Gallery, and also the National Széchényi Library, the country's largest. On the Pest side opposite the Castle District stands the Neo-Gothic Parliament building, not far from which is one of the city's loveliest natural sights, Margaret Island, which is about 3 km long and given over to parks, sports grounds, swimming pools and spa hotels.

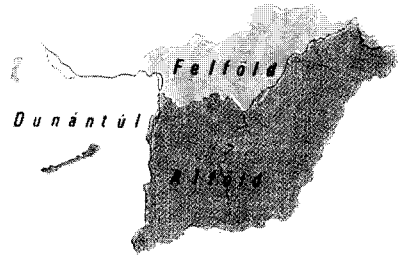
The city contains the country's national scientific and cultural institiutons, including the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the many research institutes belonging to it. Well over half Hungary's university and college students study in Budapest.

Eight main railway lines and seven of the eight trunk roads lead out of Budapest, reflecting the development around the turn of the century of a radial system of national communications centred on the capital, which is also the centre of Hungarian shipping, air travel and bus transport. The drawbacks of this are being remedied by reorganizing the transport system, promoting regional development, and planning motorways along new routes. There are three underground railway lines to relieve some of the traffic congestion in Budapest. Several railway stations have been modernized and linked with underground stations.

This infrastructural predominance has also led to a concentration of industry in Budapest, a situation was exacerbated by the false political notions behind post-war industrial development. Although the proportions have been altered by provincial industrialization in recent years, Budapest still employs 21% of the country's industrial workforce.

The many thermal and medicinal springs in the capital make it a spa city. (Its baths were praised even in Roman times.) In fact Budapest in 1990 had 80 sources of thermal water at temperatures between 24 and 78°. Twelve of the city's 47 bathing places qualify as thermal or therapeutic baths. The medicinal springs are mainly recommended for motor, muscular, digestive and circulatory diseases and various gynaecoligical conditions. Digestive diseases, for instance, are treated by drinking the waters.

Budapest's architecture, facilities, natural advantages and beautiful setting have won it well-deserved popularity as a tourist destination.




### The Great Plain

The Great Hungarian Plain in the centre of the Carpathian Basin is the largest geographical unit in the country, covering about half its area. The lowest point on the Great Plain is 78 m above sea level, and the highest point 220 m. Covering 50.800 sq. km, it has about 4 million inhabitants. Among its main cities is Debrecen (population 212, 247), the economic and intellectual centre of the north-eastern region known as the Trans-Tisza. The centre of the Nyírség district is Nyíregyháza (114,166), while Szeged (175,338), on the banks of the Tisza, is the centre for the southern part of the Great Plain. The largest city in the central, Danube-Tisza region is Kecskemét (102, 528).

The natural conditions on the Great Plain are mainly suited to arable farming and stockbreeding, whose demands in turn gave rise to a distinctive settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads with widely separated villages and small market towns. The Great Plain is not only the country's largest region, but its most important one from the agricultural point of view, growing the most wheat, maize, industrial crops, vegetables, grapes and fruit, and with the largest herds of pigs, sheep, cattle and poultry. The economic crisis that broke out suddenly after looming for a decade has dealt a heavy blow to agriculture in the region, even though it was performing far better than the average for East-Central Europe. There will be a radical change over the next few years in the ownership pattern that developed under the

communist regime (71% of the land farmed by cooperative farms formed through forcible collectivization, 15% by state farms, and only 14% as private smallholdings and plots received as a benefit in kind to cooperative members and state-farm employees).

The Hortobágy Puszta (52,000 ha), in the East of the Great Plain, is strictly protected. The country's oldest library, full of unique and rare books, is to be found at the Reformed College in Debrecen, founded in 1500. There is well-known and excellently laid out medicinal spa at Hajdúszoboszló. Szeged's famous Dom tér (Cathedral Square) is the scene of an internationally recognized arts festival in the summer. The Danube-Tisza region has a strong tradition of folk arts and crafts, centred in Kalocsa.

Industry on the Great Plain was dominated for a long time by food processing and light industry, but that profile has been augmented by the development of the oil and gas field in the South of the region and by the arrival of engineering and chemical concerns.

### *The Northern Hills*

To the North of the Great Plain lies a region that is one of the most varied topographically in the country. Covering 11,100 sq. km, with a population of almost 1.5 million, it consists of forested uplands punctuated by valleys, basins and gently sloping cultivated hills. It is also one of the most developed industrial areas in the country.

The bow of the Northern Uplands includes the highest point in Hungary, Kékestető (1,014 m) in the Mátra Hills. Incidentally, there is more autumn and winter sunshine here than in other parts of the country. The natural conditions are favourable as well, and the many spas and other resorts are well frequented.

The largest city in the Northern Hills is Miskolc (196, 449). Considered the centre of Hungary's iron and steel and engineering industries, it also trains many of the country's engineers at its universities.

The region includes Gyöngyös, celebrated for its wines, the city of Eger (61, 908), which is especially well endowed with buildings and monuments of historical, artistic and cultural value, Mezőkövesd, noted for its folk-craft traditions and its spa, and Sárospatak, which has a famous college and the 11th century Rákóczi Castle. Other notable places are Lillafüred, which is among the country's finest resorts, and Aggtelek-Jósvafő, where there are miles of stalagmite caves.

Before the change of political system, the region provided 15% of the industrial jobs in the country and was of paramount importance in heavy industry. The aims of the economic policy-makers were matched by the natural resources, for much of the country's iron ore and coal is found there. The first iron foundry in Hungary was set up near Miskolc. Nowadays, the great iron and steel complexes at Miskolc-Diósgyőr and Ózd are undergoing great upheavals as they seek a new role that accords with the economic rationale and market conditions of the 1990s. The collapse of the markets in the ex-socialist countries has placed Hungarian heavy industry in a difficult position, since it was tailored to their requirements. One social consequence of the reorganization is unemployment, but this can be considered transitional provided new jobs can be created and labour retrained.

The Gyöngyös wine district lies on the slopes between the Mátra Hills and the Great Plain. The same zone contains the vineyards for the famous Eger wines, while the volcanic slopes of the Zemplén Hills, further East, form the most famous Hungarian wine district of all, producing the Tokaj wines mentioned even by the writer of the Hungarian national anthem 200 years ago.

### *Transdanubia*

Transdanubia, a region with an area of 36, 000 sq. km, is bounded by the Danube, the River Dráva and the borders of the country. It is divided in two by the line of the Transdanubian Hills. The Northern part of the region forms the Little Plain, while the South-Eastern triangle is made up of the rolling Mezőföld, Somogy and Hegyhát districts, from which the Mecsek Hills above Pécs, the region's largest city, rise almost like an island.

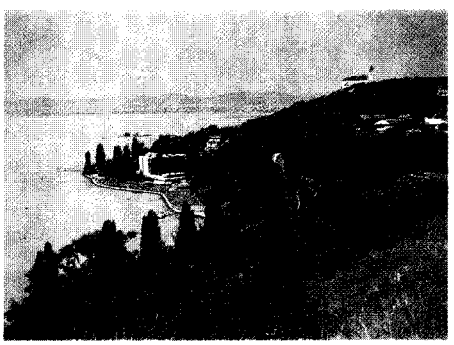
The region contains 30% of Hungary's inhabitants, about 3.2 million people. Among the major cities is Győr (129, 356), the centre of the Little Plain, while the economic and cultural capital of the district adjacent to Austria is Szombathely (85,418). To the North-West, amidst the Alpine foothills, is Sopron (55,088), a town particularly rich in historic buildings. In the opposite direction, towards Budapest, lies the city of Székesfehérvár (108, 990), where Hungary's kings were crowned in the 11th and 12th centuries. Another ancient city is Esztergom (29, 845) in the North of Transdanubia, which is the centre of Catholicism in Hungary and the seat of the primate-archbishop.

Hungary's first university was established at Pécs (170,119), on the South side of the Mecsek Hills, back in 1367, and it is still a prominent university town. There is another university at Veszprém (63,902), while Keszthely (22, 235), the „capital" of Balaton, is also a centre of higher education: the first regular agricultural college in Europe, the Georgikon, was opened there in 1797.

Transdanubia is well endowed with mineral resources. There is brown coal, bauxite and manganese to be found in the Bakony Hills, black coal and uranium in the Mecsek Hills, and gas and oil in the Zala district. This fact, of course, has had an influence on the social and environmental changes taking place in the region. Transdanubia also contains the only nuclear power station in the country, which is sited by the Danube at Paks.

On the agricultural side, substantial quantities of vegetables and fruit are produced in Transdanubia. Sopron, the Mecsek Hills and the Balaton area are all famous as wine districts, while cattle and poultry farming are prominent as well.

In addition there is the „Hungarian Sea": Balaton, which is the largest warm-water lake in Central Europe, is a resort area with a big international tourist trade.



### The inhabitants

Hungarian is the native language of 96.6% of Hungary's inhabitants. (Another 5 million Hungarians beyond the country's borders, the largest community being in Transylvania, which belongs to Romania.) So Hungary can really be considered a single-language nation-state. The national minorities are ensured full freedom and equality and free use of their languages under the Hungarian Constitution.

The Hungarian people, which is of Finno-Ugric origin, has inhabited its present home in the Danube Basin for more than a thousand years.

The largest of the ethnic minorities are the German-speakers, to be found mainly along the western borders, in the Central Transdanubian Hills, around Budapest and in the Mecsek district. The South Slavs (Serbs, Croatians, Slovenians, Sokác and Bunyevác) are to be found along the South-West border, the Romanians along the South-East border, and the Slovaks both in the South-West and in the area round the capital.

According to the estimates made by the minority associations, there are approximately 200-220 thousand Germans, 110 thousand Slovaks, 80 thousand Croatians, 25 thousand Romanians, 5 thousand Serbs and 5 thousand Slovens living in Hungary. The Bulgarian minority numbers about 2,500; the Greek 6,000; the Armenian 3,000; and the Polish 10-15,000.

There was a rapid natural increase in Hungary's population in the first decade after the Second World War. The number of births began to fall after the abortion laws were liberalized, and that had led by the end of the 1980s to a demographic crisis. The steady fall in the population since 1981 is unlikely to be reversed in the near future.

The present distribution of the population has resulted from industrialization and the concomitant internal migration. The density of population is highest in the cities and the urbanized areas which have grown up around them, and in certain other industrialized areas. The natural increase in the population of the Nyírség district has resulted in a higher than average density of population there.

The age distribution reflects the stagnation in the population, more than half of which is over 35. The over-60 age group is substantial.

The alteration in the economic structure as the country became less agricultural in nature brought rapid changes in the breakdown of employment, accompanied by a sharp rise in the proportion of women in the workforce. Industrial employment rose continuously at the expense of agriculture. Over the last 15 years there has been a steady rise in the numbers employed in the services.

Of those declaring a religious affiliation (1989), 67.8% are Roman Catholic, 21% Reformed (Calvinist), 6.2% Evangelical (Lutheran), 5.9% Jewish, 2.2% Greek Catholic (Uniate), and 0.6% Orthodox.

### The settlement pattern

Hungarian settlements belong to three main types: farmsteads, villages and towns. There are geographical and historical reasons for their development.

Urbanization has speeded up in recent decades. Whereas 37.5% of the population lived in the 50 communities classed as urban in 1949, 63% of Hungarians were living in the 166 communities classed as urban in 1989.

However, the towns and cities have also been affected by the decline in Hungary's population since the early 1980s. The population has increased in 70 of them and declined in 96.

Two-fifths of the population live in villages. The original function of a village was agricultural production, and they were arranged and organized accordingly. An irregular pattern known as the „agglomeration" village developed on the Great Plain, with a radial system of roads leading out to the open fields. Typical of the hills, uplands and valleys is the „single-street" village. Settlements with a chessboard pattern are typical of the Southern Great Plain.

Hamlets and tiny villages dominate in the Southern and Eastern parts of Transdanubia, while the villages of the Little Plain are medium-sized and those of the Great Plain large.

Resort villages have developed round Lake Balaton and in the Mátra Hills, while peripheral, dormitory settlements have developed round the larger cities, particularly Budapest.

### The land as a national resource

Over 70% of the country's area is farmed, and another 18% is woodland. The area available for agriculture has fallen by 9% in recent decades with the expansion of the towns and industry.

Post-war Hungarian agriculture, however, has followed a long and devious path from private ownership via forcible collectivization to the present transformation of ownership relations. Landless peasants were granted farmland after the Second World War under a programme of agrarian reform. Forcible collectivization into state-controlled cooperatives took place in two stages between 1949 and 1963, and the coercion and intimidation used, coupled with production based on planning directives and lack of incentives to produce meant that agricultural production hardly reached its 1938 level until the mid-1960s.

Considerable progress, however, has been made in the last 25 years in farming and the food industry.

The distribution of the land by types of cultivation in 1989 was 50.7% agriculture, 6.1% horticulture, orchards and wineyards, and 18.1% forestry.

It should be pointed our here that Hungary is taking care that its natural resources should not be damaged either by development or the structural changes taking place. At present an area of 141 ha is officially designated as national parkland: 52 ha of the Hortobágy puszta, 30.6 ha of the Kiskunság puszta, 38.8 ha of the Bükk Forest, and 19.7 ha at the Aggtelek caves. In addition, 29.7 ha are designated as nature reserves and another 380 ha as protected areas.


**MTI PRINTING SHOP**, March 1992.

# Fact Sheets on Hungary

# General elections in Hungary '94

## The Hungarian electoral system

A new constitutional system was established alongside the change of regime in 1989-90 in Hungary. Although formally no new Constitution was promulgated, nearly all essential aspects of the Constitution of 1949 were amended. The principle of the unity of power and the centralized model of state structure build thereon was replaced by a system of institutions based on the division of power. The constitutional safeguards and protection of human rights (Constitutional Court ombudsman) gained prominence in addition to the regulation of the parliamentary system of governing. The new acts on voting rights played a major role in the peaceful change of regime, since they made possible the establishment of a multi-party Parliament and democratic local-government as approved by the decision of the electorate in 1990.

### 1. The constitutional regulation

Act XXXI of 1989 which implemented a revision of the constitution (similar to recently adopted European constitutions) regulates — among fundamental rights — active and passive voting rights and specifies those who are denied the right to vote.

Accordingly adults (persons over 18 years of age) whose permanent residence is in Hungary have the right to vote and are entitled to stand for election. To exercise one's active voting right, the law requires that he/she stays in Hungary on the day of the election and thus those abroad at the time of the election are unable to cast their ballot. As opposed to parliamentary elections non-Hungarian citizens who have settled in Hungary permanently are entitled to vote at local elections.

The Constitution excludes from exercising the right to vote those,

a) who are under guardianship, which limits or prevents their freedom of activity,

b) who are under a court order banning them from participating in public affairs,

c) who are serving a term of imprisonment,

d) who are under medical treatment at a mental home as a result of criminal proceedings against them.

It follows that exclusion from voting rights is always based on a court order.

The Constitution specifies the basic principles of elections in a separate chapter: the general features, and the equality of voting rights as well as the directness and secrecy of balloting. Finally, the Constitution stipulates that separate acts must provide for the elections, and the passing of such acts requires the endorsement by a two-thirds majority of all members of Parliament present at the time of voting.

Accordingly Act XXXIV of 1989 — amended several times — provides for the election of Members of Parliament and a separate act (Act LXIV of 1990) regulates the election of officers of local government and mayors.

From now we shall deal with the election of Members of Parliament.

### 2. The origin of the Act on voting rights in Parliament

The establishment of the new multiparty Parliament, the legal frameworks for elections based on competition between parties was created by the passing of the new law on voting rights.

The Act on Hungarian parliamentary elections combines two basic types of electoral systems that have been developed in West European

states. This Act applies the system based on the absolute majority (the French type) and an electoral system based on proportional representation by national and regional list.

Although similar in many respects to the laws of a number of Western countries on voting rights, the Hungarian Act on election is unique in Europe both as far as the way it was enacted and the complex nature of the solutions it offers.

Without going into the details of the history of the enactment of the Hungarian electoral law, it is safe to say that the concept behind the law and a number of its essential provisions - under the conditions of the emerging multi-party system -were reached at multilateral political negotiations. Parliament accepted a compromise suggested by parties and organizations which were considered politically satisfying at the time.

The essence of this is that in the interest of bringing about multiparty parliamentary representation and government, and by keeping in view the circumstances marking the political transition, Hungary required an act on voting rights which would promote the development of proportional representation of the parties. At the same time the act focuses not only on competition between the parties but on the individual election of Members of Parliament. It was not easy to reach this compromise, and several of the smaller parties even today consider the act as unacceptable. Initially, seemingly irreconcilable positions clashed. Some of the parties considered only the system of personal constituencies as acceptable, arguing that voters wanted to know exactly whom they may vote for and voters' attachment to their "own" MP was a great deal stronger than subordinating it to party considerations. Parties located at the other end of the political spectrum claimed that elections would only be democratic if the voters cast their ballots in favour of party lists only and parties then received seats in proportion to the number of votes cast. Finally they agreed to establish a mixed or combined electoral system which provides for voting for both individuals and parties.

This compromise formula - an effort to meet two kinds of needs at the same time - explains the complexity of the law, that is, the three different ways of obtaining parliamentary seats. With some simplification one could say that two electoral systems exist side by side: first, there is the system of individual constituencies where a candidate may become an MP by winning the majority of votes and then there is a proportional system where parties win seats in proportion to the number of votes cast in favour of party lists. Proportional representation is promoted by the way of winning seats: the re-utilization of fraction votes.

### 3. The system based on constituencies and the election formula

The country has been divided into 176 constituencies and from each constituency one MP - on the strength of winning the absolute majority of votes in the first round or by winning the relative (simple) majority of votes in the second round-takes a seat in Parliament. Irrespective of this, 20 regional constituencies (one constituency in each of the 19 counties plus one in the capital) were established where one may cast one's ballott for lists offered by parties. By virtue of the law 152 seats are to be allocated in proportion to the votes cast in this way. However 120 seats could be allocated on the regional list by using the method of predetermined distribution of votes (the 'Hare formula' which requires the computations of a separate quota in each constituency). So by virtue of this law the remaining 32 seats are added to the national list. This 'national list' is the point where the two divergent systems link up.

The Hungarian electoral system is not a proportional system in the strict sense, but it is one which is designed to move close to such system by virtue of containing elements of proportional representation. The 58 seats for MPs maintained by the law on the national list serve to ensure that the proportion of parliamentary seats reflects the proportion of votes cast for the individual par-ties as best as possible. Therefore all so-called 'fraction votes' - votes cast in the first round in the individual and regional constituencies for party lists but not resulting in seats - will be combined and reallocated from the national list on the basis of the D'Hont formula.

In 1990 only those parties won seats from the national lists in proportion to their combined 'remainder' votes that gained more than four per cent of the votes on their regional lists. If a party failed to reach the four per cent threshold of the total votes cast, it was barred from taking seats either on the regional or on the national lists. Such parties could only send MPs to Parliament if some of their candidates were elected individually in a constituency. At the 1990 elections six parties were over the threshold defined by law and thus these had the opportunity of taking seats from the national lists which increased to ninety in the meantime.

The three ways of winning seats (the individual list, the regional list and seats on the national list) express that while representatives of minor parties and independent candidates can win seats to Parliament from individual constituencies, the seats available on national lists go to parties with considerable political weight and with a significant support of votes.

The principle of 'all votes should be put to good use' - which was considered by parties an essential factor when the law was drafted (since no party had reliable knowledge about the extent of its would-be support) - benefited the major parties only. An this was determined by the proportion that emerged on the regional lists. Thus parties under the four per cent threshold could not win seats to Parliament, the votes cast in their support were lost and this accounted for more than 15 per cent of all votes cast.

Many pay tribute to what they consider the best feature of the law, that it prevented large-scale waste of political forces and helped the six major parties win seats in an appropriate number in Parliament to ensure a relatively stable form of government. Another positive feature of the law, as compared to systems employing solutions based on lists only, is that it

also offers an opportunity to voters to choose among individuals.

One of the questionable points in proportional electoral systems is that voters have relatively little influence on the election of individual MPs since it is up to the parties to select their candidates, and subsequently casting votes on fixed lists does not enable voters to determine the person of the MP. Therefore various methods are used in the proportional election systems to provide for the voters' influence. The most widespread method is to introduce so-called "preferential votes". The Hungarian election system - by maintaining the system of individual constituencies - largely avoids this problem and thus does not require correctional mechanisms. Rather, casting a vote for individuals derives from the essence of the system.

### 4. The system of nomination

The Act of 1989 on voting rights basically changed the system of putting toward a candidate that was in force from 1966 to 1985. Formerly it was a criterion that the mechanism of selecting the candidates should provide "ample safety" for the composition of the Parliament to be elected and hence a political screen was applied in the first phase to filter out 'undesirable' elements. Today in line with European practice nomination is exempt from all political restrictions while the legal strictures for fielding a candidate have been tightened. The category of occupations and public offices incompatible with accepting membership of Parliament has been introduced in Hungary as well.

The former system of nomination in a public meeting ceased when the new act on voting rights went into effect. One can become a candidate in the individual constituencies by collecting 750 signatures from citizens who have full voting rights. Any citizen who collected the required number of signatures can become a candidate provided he/she meets legal provisions in other respects regardless of whether he/she stands for a party or wishes to become an independent MP. The candidate must declare whether he/she is willing to accept the nomination and that he/she does not hold a post incompatible with the functions of a Member of Parliament, or is willing to retire from such position once he/she is elected. The election committees are under obligation to register any candidate who meets the legal requirements without any additional conditions.

The fielding of candidates on party lists differs substantially from this practice. The parties decide for themselves whom to include on their list. It is a different matter as to how democratic the selection process of candidates is. It varies according to parties to what extent members of the local organisations in this party are involved or to what extent decisions are reached centrally at party headquarters. Party membership is not a prerequisite for becoming a candidate on party lists; in fact candidates running as independent in individual constituencies may also be included by parties on their lists.

The procedure of nominations which requires direct votes by constituents is terminated by this event. The national lists belong in the sphere of election mathematics. The parties that produce a list under the above conditions in at least seven regional constituencies become entitled to field a national list. This assumes significance for those parties that exceed the threshold determined by law since they can win additional seats from the votes previously cast for the party in question. The seats available on national lists derive from a re-allocation of votes that failed to win seats earlier and thus no votes can be cast for this list.

Nomination, a system of step-by-step procedure of lists represents a major trial of strength for parties. However producing a national list is not an impossible precondition for any political force that has considerable support.

Within this electoral system an individual candidate may stand simultaneously in a personal constituency and may appear on a regional and on the national list. Insofar as he/she is elected an MP in a personal constituency the candidate shall be removed from the other lists and his/her place will be taken over by the next candidate in line. A similar solution is adopted if a candidate appears on the national and regional list. The candidate who gains a seat on the regional list is, as a matter of course. withdrawn from the national list. This rule, which makes possible the nomination of the same individual in three instances simultaneously, represents absolute security for parties and ensures that their. leaders and prominent personalities have safe seats in Parliament.

### 5. Openness and opportunities to seek legal remedy

According to what has been said above, the new act on voting rights made nominations for individuals and parties freely accessible. Political differences - in line with democratic changes - surface and clash with one another openly during a campaign. Any citizen, furthermore non-Hungarian citizens with permanent residence in Hungary, may take part in the campaign, collect recommendation papers, propagate programmes, promote candidates and organize election meetings. It is not required to obtain permission to print posters and leaflets. There are, however, separate regulations to guarantee that Television and Radio - in order to ensure equal chances - carry party political broadcasts and reports during the election under identical conditions.

The whole electoral process - as a matter of course, by ensuring secret balloting under the strictest terms - is marked by openness. The operation and activities of the electoral bodies are open and the access of the press and of the representatives of parties is guaranteed. In fact the committees handling the elections are formed from the outset in a way what ensures that in addition to its elected members, persons delegated by the various parties can become fully authorized members.

The Act on the Right to Vote extends the possibility of legal remedy to all phases of the electoral process. There are no separate electoral arbiters, but it is possible to appeal to a

court against rulings passed by electoral bodies in order to overrule all objections. It is possible to appeal to the country and the capital's arbiters against rulings reached by local and regional electoral commissions and to the Supreme Court against of decisions of the National Electoral Commission. The courts are bound to make a ruling within three days, with the cooperation of three professional judges. If the reported violation of law has influenced the outcome of the election, the court can declare the election or the affected part thereof null and void and order a fresh election or part of it.

In spite of the complexity, its "excessive guarantees", and the absence of accurate regulation the Act on voting rights has been suitable for providing a legal framework for free and democratic elections.

Act XXXIV of 1989 on the Election of Members of Parliament which was passed by Parliament on October 20, 1989 has since been amended on several occasions (Act II of 1990; Act XLV of 1991; Act of 1991; Act III of 1994). The essence of these amendments was to expand and clarify the procedural and guaranteeing regulations. The amendments mainly aim at preventing access by unauthorized persons to recommendation papers, and details the relevant obligations of electoral committees. The extension of legal remedies and the regulations of registering voters do not change the fundamental rules of the electoral system.

### 6. The working of the electoral system

At the 1990 elections 42.5 per cent of the seats were won by the Hungarian Democratic Forum, 11.4 per cent by the Independent Smallholders' Party and 5.4 per cent by the Christian Democratic People's Party. These three parties subsequently formed a governing coalition. The other three parties played the role of opposition in Parliament. The Alliance for Free Democrats gained 23.6 per cent of the seats, the Hungarian Socialist Party 8.5 per cent and the Federation of Young Democrats 5.4 per cent of all seats. Consequently, the second largest party went into opposition.

The creation of the terms for governing the country in this way won acclaim from many domestic and foreign commentators. On the other hand the act was exposed to voilent attacks by opponents claiming that too many "filters" were built in obstructing smaller parties from winning seats.

Parties not gaining entry into Parliament consider this system particularly unjust. They submitted a petition to the Constitutional Court to squash the four per cent limit since in their view it was an unconstitutional and discriminatory measure. The petition was rejected by the Constitutional Court which deemed that maintaining the four per cent limit is an appropriate measure for creating conditions for a stable government.

If one looks back on the by-elections of the past four years that have passed since the general elections, then one may compare the results of five valid and successful by-elections. As a matter of course one cannot draw general conclusions from these events, but they provide an indication of trends. The low turnout at by-elections and the poor performance of the governing parties are not uncommon in well-established democracies. In Hungary this is complicated by the requirement for the turnout as determined in the act on voting rights (in the first round at least 50 per cent of the voters and in the second round at least 25 per cent of the voters are required to cast their ballot) to make the elections valid. The fact cannot be ignored that in some of the constituencies six consecutive by-elections had to be held to elect a single MP.

Seats were won in by-elections as follows: one seat was won by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (the largest governing party) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (the largest opposition party). Two seats were gained by the social democratic-oriented Hungarian Socialist Party, which also obtained strong support in several other by-elections. One seat was picked up by a candidate of the Agrarian Alliance with support from a new non-parliamentary party (the Republican Party). The Federation of Young Democrats, which has for long held a strong lead in the parties' list of popularity, was unable to translate this popularity into seats at any of the by-elections.

On December 22,1993, Parliament amended the Election Act as follows:

a. it raised the minimum number of votes for enabling a party entering Parliament from four to five per cent of all valid votes cast,

b. it raised the parliamentary limit of the common and combined list to 15 per cent,

c. in the future, by-elections are to be staged once a year, in the month of April.

The President of the Republic of Hungary set May 8th, 1994 as the day of the 1994 elections.

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