



Doc. 16432

19 June 2026

Observation of the parliamentary elections in Hungary

Election observation report¹

Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau

Rapporteur: Mr Pablo HISPÁN, Spain, Group of the European People's Party

1. Introduction

1. On 13 January 2026, the President of Hungary called parliamentary elections for 12 April 2026. The Hungarian authorities invited the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to observe these elections. This was the first time since Hungary's accession to the Council of Europe in 1990 that the Assembly observed elections in the country. The invitation followed the Assembly's decision, in [Resolution 2460 \(2022\)](#), to open a monitoring procedure in respect of Hungary in the light of long-standing concerns relating to democracy and the rule of law. Under the Assembly's rules and practice, countries under a full monitoring procedure are expected to invite the Assembly to observe their elections and referenda.

2. On 30 September 2025, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#) "The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by Hungary". It expressed serious concern about the lack of progress, and the worsening situation in certain areas, regarding the recommendations made in 2022. The Assembly reiterated concerns about weakened democratic checks and balances, the instrumentalisation of constitutional and cardinal laws to entrench the preferences of the ruling majority, the continued state of danger and rule by decree, the absence of a level playing field conducive to fair elections, media concentration and political influence over media content, and measures aimed at silencing civil society and independent media. In the electoral field, it called for a complete overhaul of electoral legislation after the 2026 elections, through inclusive consultation with political parties, civil society organisations and experts.

3. On 26 January 2026, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to set up a 30-member cross-party ad hoc committee (PACE delegation) to observe the parliamentary elections. It appointed me as chairperson of the ad hoc committee, and appointed Ms Elisabetta Gardini (Italy, ECPA) as vice-chairperson to take over in case of my absence (see Appendix 1). In accordance with the Assembly's practice, a pre-electoral delegation visited Budapest on 30 and 31 March 2026 to assess the campaign environment, the state of preparations and the extent to which conditions existed for democratic elections.

4. The pre-electoral delegation met the authorities, election administration, political parties, civil society, media representatives and the diplomatic community (see Appendix 2). Interlocutors generally expressed confidence in the technical preparation of the vote, but repeatedly raised concerns about a toxic pre-election climate marked by the blurring of State and party, structural unfairness, a distorted information space, inflammatory propaganda, risks of foreign malign interference and pressure on independent scrutiny. The delegation also expressed particular concern about the differentiated treatment of Hungarian citizens voting abroad, depending on their status and place of residence, and about the need for all votes to be handled with equal guarantees of transparency and scrutiny (see Appendix 3).

1. The report is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.



5. In line with the co-operation agreement signed between the Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), on 4 October 2004, Katharina Pabel, member of the Venice Commission in respect of the Austria, represented the Venice Commission as a legal expert during the main election observation mission.

6. The Assembly delegation observed the elections as part of an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), together with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR). It benefited from ODIHR's long-term observation, legal and media analysis, and from briefings by Hungarian civil society organisations, media representatives, contestants, experts and State institutions (Appendix 4). The three delegations worked on a joint statement of preliminary findings and conclusions, presented at a press conference on 13 April² (Appendix 5).

7. The IEOM concluded that the 12 April elections were marked by active citizen engagement, record turnout and genuine political choice, but that contestants did not compete on an equal footing. The technical administration of voting was efficient and election day was orderly, yet the broader process was affected by the systemic blurring of State and party, misuse of public resources, a heavily skewed media environment, weak campaign finance oversight, disinformation and fear-based campaign narratives.

8. This report does not reproduce the detailed IEOM preliminary findings and conclusions. It focuses on the issues that the PACE delegation deemed most relevant to Hungary's obligations as a Council of Europe member State and as a State Party to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), as well as to Venice Commission and other international standards for democratic elections. The assessment covers not only election day, but also the broader political and legal environment, the campaign, media pluralism, campaign financing, equality of opportunity and voting from abroad.

9. The Assembly delegation expresses its appreciation to the Hungarian delegation to PACE and its secretariat for organising a resourceful and informative pre-electoral visit; to its international partners for efficient co-operation throughout the mission, and to Hungarian civil society organisations, media representatives and elections experts – including the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Amnesty International Hungary, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Transparency International Hungary, 20k - Free Vote Foundation, Hungarian Women's Lobby, Political Capital, Mediaforum Association and 24.hu – for their excellent analysis and for sharing balanced information in a highly sensitive and complex environment, which has greatly contributed to the completion of this report.

2. Political landscape

10. The 2026 parliamentary elections were among the most consequential in Hungary since the democratic transition. They took place after 16 years of rule by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz-KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party) coalition, during which Hungary became one of Europe's clearest examples of an "illiberal democracy" or, in the terminology increasingly used by international observers, an "electoral autocracy": a system in which elections remain competitive and citizens retain the possibility of political change, but where the governing party has entrenched structural advantages through control over institutions, resources, media and the rules of competition.

11. Since 2010, successive Fidesz-KDNP two-thirds majorities were used to amend the Fundamental Law, adopt and modify cardinal laws, redraw the electoral system, and appoint key office-holders in the Constitutional Court, the Curia, the prosecution service, the State Audit Office, the Media Council and other supervisory bodies. Qualified-majority rules, which should normally encourage consensus, instead enabled the governing majority to entrench its political preferences and limit the room for future majorities to reverse them. The continued state of danger and rule by decree further weakened parliamentary oversight and checks and balances.

12. This long-term State capture directly shaped the electoral environment. The mixed electoral system, with 106 single-member constituencies, first-past-the-post voting and a compensatory mechanism favouring the largest party, repeatedly amplified Fidesz's parliamentary majorities. Constituency boundaries were defined by cardinal law and redrawn again in 2024 without transparent methodology, independent expert input or inclusive consultation. Combined with restrictive national-list requirements, unequal rules for voting from abroad, opaque campaign finance and weak independent oversight, the system created a structurally uneven playing field long before the formal campaign began.

2. See the full text of the [statement of preliminary findings and conclusions](#)

13. The 2026 political cycle effectively began after the 2024 European Parliament and local elections, when Péter Magyar and TISZA (Respect and Freedom Party) emerged rapidly as a new anti-establishment force and the main challenger to Fidesz. Growing dissatisfaction with economic stagnation, exceptionally high inflation, declining living standards and deteriorating public services weakened the governing party's long-standing claim to stability. The 2024 clemency scandal³ further damaged Fidesz's moral authority, while younger voters and wider parts of society increasingly demanded accountability, renewal and an end to systemic corruption and institutional capture.

14. Hungary's strained relations with the European Union also formed an important part of the political background. Disputes over the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism, frozen EU funds, judicial independence, anti-corruption safeguards, civil society, media pluralism and public-interest foundations remained central to the country's European agenda. At the same time, in 2025 and early 2026, Hungary repeatedly withheld or slowed agreement within the Council of the European Union on sanctions against the Russian Federation and on elements of EU financial support for Ukraine. These positions reinforced the governing party's "sovereignty" narrative, but also deepened concerns about Hungary's place within the European family of democracies.

15. The campaign therefore unfolded in a highly polarised environment marked by the blurring of State, party and government-aligned proxy structures. Public resources, State-owned companies, government communication channels, pro-government media and affiliated civic networks were used to amplify incumbent narratives, while independent media and civil society faced pressure, including through the Sovereignty Protection Act and the Sovereignty Protection Office. The spread of disinformation, the use of artificial intelligence to discredit opponents, and foreign and domestic information manipulation further distorted public debate. The existence of genuine political choice was therefore not matched by genuinely equal conditions for all contestants.

3. Electoral framework, campaign and media environment

3.1. Legal framework and electoral system

16. The legal framework for parliamentary elections is based mainly on the Fundamental Law, the Act on the Elections of Members of Parliament, the Act on Election Procedure and the legislation on campaign costs. While this framework allowed for the technical conduct of the elections, important recommendations previously made by ODIHR, the Venice Commission and the Assembly remained unimplemented. In [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#), the Assembly reiterated that Hungary's electoral framework did not ensure a level playing field and called for a comprehensive overhaul of electoral legislation after the 2026 elections, based on inclusive consultation with political parties, civil society organisations and experts.

17. Since the 2022 parliamentary elections, several amendments have affected the electoral framework. Some were technical and administrative, but others had a direct impact on equal suffrage, transparency and fair competition. These changes were often adopted without meaningful public debate, cross-party consensus or independent expert input. The continuing state of danger, extended until 13 May 2026, also remained a concern. Although emergency decrees did not directly amend the electoral legislation for these elections, the prolonged state of danger, which enabled governing by decree, remained difficult to reconcile with normal democratic governance during an electoral period.

18. Members of the National Assembly are elected through a mixed system: 106 in single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post voting and 93 from national lists. Parties must pass thresholds of 5% when standing alone, 10% for two-party coalitions and 15% for coalitions of three or more parties. The system gives decisive weight to single-member constituencies and includes a compensation mechanism that has repeatedly amplified the seat share of the largest party. In practice, this has helped transform electoral victories into constitutional super majorities and has contributed to a significant distortion between votes received and seats obtained.

19. Constituency delimitation remained one of the most sensitive issues. In 2024, Parliament redrew the boundaries of a substantial number of single-member constituencies, including changes that reduced the number of seats in Budapest and increased those in Pest County. Demographic changes may have justified a

3. A political scandal arose in Hungary on 2 February 2024 when it became public that in 2023 the then President of Hungary, Katalin Novák, had pardoned Endre K., the former deputy director of a children's home in Bicske, who had been convicted of helping to cover up child sexual abuse by his superior, by forcing one of the victims to withdraw their accusation. The case caused a major public outcry, and led to Novák's resignation on 10 February 2024.

review, but the process was rapid, non-transparent and not based on an independent delimitation body or inclusive consultation. The Venice Commission expressed concern that the reform lacked public debate, independent expert input and meaningful involvement of the opposition, thereby raising concerns about equal suffrage and possible partisan advantage.

20. The rules for registering national lists also remained restrictive. Parties or coalitions wishing to register a national list must nominate candidates in at least 71 of the 106 single-member constituencies, across at least 14 counties and the capital. These requirements, increased in 2020, make it harder for smaller or newer parties to compete independently and can force tactical coalitions. The Assembly, ODIHR and the Venice Commission have repeatedly recommended reducing these thresholds.

21. Other elements of the framework further weakened equality and transparency. State funding for parliamentary groups was increased, campaign expenditure limits were removed in 2025, and long-standing recommendations on party and campaign finance transparency remained largely unimplemented. Domestic third-party and proxy campaigning, including online, remained insufficiently regulated, while oversight depended on bodies whose independence has been questioned. The combined effect was to leave major areas of campaign spending opaque and to reinforce the advantages of well-resourced incumbents and affiliated networks.

22. The 2023 Sovereignty Protection Act introduced the offence of “illegal influencing of the will of voters” and established the Sovereignty Protection Office. Protecting elections from unlawful foreign interference is a legitimate objective, especially in the current geopolitical context. However, such measures must be precise, proportionate and subject to effective judicial control. The Venice Commission warned that the Office’s broad mandate risked having a chilling effect on democratic debate. PACE interlocutors and civil society organisations considered that the Act and the Office had been used less as neutral safeguards of electoral integrity than as instruments to stigmatise opposition actors, independent media and civil society.

23. The national minority voting system also continued to require reform. Voters registered as belonging to one of the 13 recognised national minorities vote for the relevant minority list instead of a party list. Although the system provides for a preferential quota and non-voting spokespersons, in practice most minorities have no realistic chance of obtaining a seat. The European Court of Human Rights found in *Bakirdzi and E.C. v. Hungary* that the combined restrictions on minority voters violated the right to free elections in conjunction with the prohibition of discrimination. [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#) therefore called for reform to ensure the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in political decision making.

24. Further shortcomings concerned suffrage restrictions and observation rights. Citizens may be disenfranchised following a criminal conviction, including after release, and persons with limited mental capacity may be excluded from voting by court decision; such restrictions should be individualised, proportionate and compatible with international standards. Hungarian law also still does not provide a clear legal basis for independent, non-partisan domestic election observation. Citizen oversight is possible mainly through party-delegated or elected membership of polling station commissions, which cannot substitute for independent civic observation.

3.2. Election administration

25. Parliamentary elections are administered through a dual structure of election offices and election commissions. Election offices, headed by the National Election Office (NEO), provide technical and administrative support. Election commissions are responsible for safeguarding the legality, integrity and fairness of the process. This distinction is essential: professional logistical management cannot compensate for structural weaknesses in the bodies entrusted with impartial oversight, candidate registration, certification of results and adjudication of complaints.

26. The National Election Commission (NEC), constituency election commissions and polling station commissions are composed of elected members and party-delegated members. Elected members are chosen by political bodies – the parliament in the case of the NEC, and municipal councils at lower levels – without transparent criteria for nomination and selection.

27. The systemic concern is therefore not primarily technical capacity, but the absence of sufficient safeguards for political neutrality. The seven elected NEC members are elected by a two-thirds parliamentary majority for nine years. Unless the law is changed or individual mandates end earlier, the current elected members’ mandates should run until 30 September 2031. In practice, this enabled the outgoing governing majority to shape the permanent composition of the body. The IEOM noted that the NEC was dominated by

members either elected or directly appointed by Fidesz-KDNP, while non-parliamentary parties and national minority lists could delegate only non-voting members. This affected TISZA, MKKP (the Two-Tailed Dog Party) and national minority lists in these elections and weakened the body's inclusiveness and collegiality.

28. The same logic applies, albeit at local level, to lower election commissions, where elected members are selected by local political bodies. To strengthen public confidence, commission members should be selected through transparent, merit-based and pluralistic procedures, with clear eligibility criteria, public calls for nominations, safeguards against dominance by one political majority, equal rights for delegated members during the electoral period, and stronger professional training and ethical standards.

29. The delegation was also informed that legal remedies remained excessively formalistic and often ineffective in addressing structural abuses. The "affected party" requirement narrows standing from the appeal stage onwards and makes it difficult for independent civil society actors or ordinary voters to pursue remedies. Very short deadlines, strict formal requirements and the need for detailed legal substantiation reportedly led to many complaints being rejected without examination on the merits. Remedies that cannot realistically be used by citizens and non-partisan actors do not provide effective protection of electoral rights.

30. Civil society actors also raised concern about the interaction between the Curia and the Constitutional Court in electoral cases. In several cases concerning public broadcasters and equality of opportunity, the Constitutional Court reportedly annulled Curia judgments that had found violations. This weakened the timely adjudication of campaign complaints and contributed to the perception that structural imbalances could not be effectively remedied before election day.

3.3. Voter registration, postal and out-of-country voting

31. On election day, 8 114 688 persons were registered as eligible voters, including approximately 496 000 postal voters without a registered address in Hungary and almost 74 000 voters registered as national minority voters. Voters with a registered address in Hungary were included in the register automatically, while voters abroad and some other categories had to request specific arrangements within legal deadlines.

32. Voters abroad with a registered address in Hungary could vote in person at Hungarian embassies or consulates and could vote both in a national list and single-member constituency contests. Citizens without a registered address in Hungary could vote by post, but only for a national list. This continued difference in both voting modalities and voting rights between categories of citizens abroad raises concerns regarding equal suffrage and should be reviewed.

33. Serious concerns persisted regarding the postal voter register and safeguards for postal voting. Entries in the postal register remain valid for ten years, and civil society organisations reported that records of deceased persons are not reliably removed. This creates a risk that ballots may be sent to persons who are no longer eligible to vote, with insufficient safeguards to prevent or detect abuse.

34. The postal voting process lacks adequate safeguards for secrecy, personal voting and chain of custody. Ballots may be returned by post or delivered in person to diplomatic representations or polling stations in Hungary, but they do not have to be submitted personally by the voter. Third parties may collect and submit postal ballots without formal authorisation, and Hungarian electoral authorities have limited capacity to oversee activities outside official polling places, including collection points abroad.

35. Civil society organisations and media reported irregularities in the distribution, collection and delivery of postal ballots in neighbouring countries. Reports included ballot collection by organisations linked to the governing party, door-to-door collection, campaigning at collection points, delays in postal delivery and cases in which voters did not receive voting materials in time. Even if these practices did not alter the overall result, they reveal vulnerabilities that should be addressed before the next elections.

36. Postal voting should therefore be subject to clearer rules on personal submission, secure storage, transport and verification, and the postal voter register should be updated more frequently. The authorities should also ensure that all citizens abroad can exercise their right to vote on an equal basis, with safeguards that protect both accessibility and integrity.

3.4. Candidate registration and the campaign environment

37. Five parties submitted national lists: MKKP, TISZA, Mi Hazánk, DK (Democratic Coalition) and Fidesz-KDNP. This was the lowest number of national lists since 1990, reflecting the strategic consolidation of the opposition around TISZA and a pronounced two-bloc competition. Three competitors – Fidesz-KDNP, TISZA and Mi Hazánk – fielded candidates in all 106 single-member constituencies.

38. To stand in a single-member constituency, a candidate had to collect 500 valid supporting signatures from voters registered in that constituency. Voters could support more than one candidate. The NEO provided an online tool through which voters could check whether their personal data appeared on a candidate's nomination forms and could lodge a complaint if their data had been used unlawfully.

39. Despite these safeguards, the nomination process revealed weaknesses. Civil society organisations and independent media reported suspected misuse of personal data, including alleged use of data of deceased persons and possible reuse of data from previous elections. Election authorities identified some abuses, but available remedies did not always lead to effective consequences, such as deregistration where serious irregularities were established.

40. The campaign was active and competitive in the sense that contestants could address voters, hold rallies and present distinct political alternatives. TISZA conducted extensive nationwide in-person campaigning, while Fidesz-KDNP relied on a combination of government communication, State-linked events, partisan mobilisation networks and a highly visible media ecosystem. The election gave voters genuine choice, but not equal opportunity.

41. The central feature of the campaign environment was extensive fusion of State and party. Public resources, institutional capacities and official communication channels were repeatedly used in ways that benefited the governing party. Government campaigns, State-funded mailings, billboards, State-owned company communications and public service media messaging echoed Fidesz-KDNP narratives and targeted the opposition, particularly TISZA.

42. State-funded initiatives such as the "National Petition" and messages on the so-called "TISZA tax" were presented as public information but functioned in practice as campaign mobilisation. State databases, including databases originally created for public health communication, were reportedly used to disseminate political messages. Amendments to electoral legislation adopted in 2018 placed State communication outside the scope of campaign rules, allowing continuous publicly funded political messaging that circumvents restrictions applicable to parties.

43. State-party fusion was not limited to communication. Interlocutors referred to State institutions, State-owned enterprises and government-funded proxy organisations mobilising support, attacking the opposition and amplifying campaign narratives. These practices, combined with weak oversight, created a structural advantage for the incumbent and undermined equality of opportunity.

44. The campaign discourse was unusually divisive. Fidesz-KDNP built much of its messaging around fearmongering about war, alleged threats from Ukraine and the European Union, and claims that TISZA would serve foreign interests. Many of these claims were unsupported by evidence. TISZA focused on "regime change", restoring public services, anti-corruption and reversing State capture. Policy debate was often displaced by disinformation, conspiracy narratives and personal attacks.

45. Interlocutors considered that the campaign took place in an unusually competitive environment, shaped by the emergence of a consolidated opposition challenger, weak economic conditions, rising prices and growing public dissatisfaction with the performance of public services. These factors appeared to reduce the effectiveness of some previously dominant incumbent narratives and contributed to a campaign in which fear-based messaging, rather than substantive policy debate, played a prominent role.

3.5. Foreign interference, disinformation and the online campaign

46. Foreign interference, disinformation and allegations of external influence were defining features of the campaign. The government repeatedly alleged interference by European Union institutions and Ukraine, portraying Brussels and Kyiv as seeking to replace the incumbent government with a pro-Ukrainian and pro-European administration. These claims were not substantiated by publicly available evidence during the campaign, but they strongly shaped the political climate and reinforced polarisation.

47. Civil society interlocutors, investigative journalists and disinformation experts informed the delegation of serious concerns about Russian efforts to influence the electoral environment in favour of the incumbent. The outgoing government had repeatedly obstructed or slowed common European Union and NATO positions on Ukraine and was widely viewed by the Kremlin as a useful partner in weakening EU and Euro-Atlantic cohesion. Public reporting referred to warnings from foreign partner services about political operators allegedly linked to Russian intelligence structures and to plans by Kremlin-linked communication actors to reinforce pro-government narratives. The allegations were sufficiently serious to require a prompt, transparent and non-partisan institutional response.

48. Such a response was not evident. When possible Russian interference was raised before the National Election Commission, a proposal to seek clarification from the Constitutional Protection Office and the parliamentary National Security Committee was not placed on the agenda. The Sovereignty Protection Office publicly dismissed reports of Russian interference as foreign-backed disinformation, while amplifying narratives about alleged European Union and Ukrainian interference. This selective approach did not reassure the public that foreign interference risks were being assessed on the basis of evidence rather than political convenience.

49. The alleged Russian-related activities reported during the campaign mainly concerned influence operations rather than direct interference with the administration of the vote. They included alleged covert communication planning, amplification of existing pro-government narratives, exploitation of tensions between Hungary and Ukraine, and the use of inauthentic or AI-assisted online accounts to discredit TISZA and its leader. Disinformation monitors also reported activity by the Matryoshka network and anonymous TikTok accounts disseminating artificial intelligence (AI)-generated videos attacking opposition actors or presenting fabricated news-style content. These cases illustrated the vulnerability of the campaign to external amplification, even when the most visible disinformation originated domestically.

50. The government's own foreign-influence narrative focused overwhelmingly on alleged interference by the European Commission and Ukraine. It was closely connected to the central Fidesz message that the election was a choice between war and peace and that foreign actors were financing or directing the opposition.

51. The campaign also included unusually explicit support for the incumbent by foreign political actors. Several foreign leaders or political figures publicly endorsed or echoed Fidesz messages. The most visible example was the visit of United States Vice-President JD Vance to Budapest five days before election day, where he appeared alongside Prime Minister Orbán at a large public rally, praised his policies, repeated attacks on Brussels and took part in a setting clearly beneficial to the incumbent campaign. Such statements are not in themselves equivalent to covert interference or unlawful manipulation. However, the timing, visibility and official status of this intervention made it a significant element of the campaign environment and contrasted sharply with the government's own accusations of foreign interference against others.

52. Disinformation was not limited to foreign actors. The most pervasive manipulative content appeared to be domestic, produced or amplified by government-aligned media, proxy organisations, political influencers and party structures. It relied heavily on fear, fabricated or misleading claims, personalised attacks and emotionally charged messages. False or unsubstantiated narratives concerned alleged opposition plans to raise taxes, reintroduce military conscription, serve Ukrainian or European Union interests, endanger national and energy security, and doctored content claiming that Orbán and his family were threatened with death. The use of children, war imagery and deepfake-style content further lowered the quality of public debate and made it harder for voters to distinguish political argument from manipulation.

53. Online campaigning became a central arena of competition. After major platforms introduced restrictions on paid political advertising, Fidesz-affiliated actors increased the volume of organic content, used co-ordinated support networks such as the Digital Civic Circles and the Fighters' Club, and encouraged supporters to amplify messages through comments, reactions and shares. Civil society monitoring of almost 900 political accounts found that Fidesz politicians posted substantially more content than TISZA candidates, while generating fewer interactions; on TikTok, Fidesz-affiliated actors were particularly active. TISZA relied more on the organic reach of Péter Magyar's videos, direct communication with supporters and nationwide in-person campaigning, which proved effective despite the unequal information environment.

54. PACE observers were informed of co-ordinated fake profiles, anonymous pages, reposting of removed content, attempts to conceal the political nature of online material, and AI-generated videos designed to provoke strong emotional reactions. Some content was labelled as AI-generated, but this did not remove its manipulative effect where framed as evidence of alleged opposition plans or foreign control. The problem was not only the existence of AI tools, but the lack of transparency over who produced, financed and disseminated such content and whether it was co-ordinated with political actors.

55. The legal and institutional framework for online campaign oversight remained insufficient. Responsibilities were fragmented among the election administration, media regulator, State Audit Office, Sovereignty Protection Office, data protection bodies and digital platform regulators. Domestic law did not provide clear rules for online campaigning, third-party digital mobilisation, inauthentic behaviour or the use of AI in political communication. The authorities provided little public information about how disinformation and foreign interference risks were monitored and addressed, and awareness-raising on manipulative online content was limited. Hungary therefore needs a rights-based and politically neutral framework that protects

freedom of expression while addressing foreign manipulation, inauthentic networks, undisclosed political advertising, AI-generated deception and misuse of personal data, including through transparent co-operation between electoral authorities, the Digital Services Coordinator, data protection bodies, civil society monitors and online platforms.

3.6. Media environment

56. The media landscape was formally pluralistic, but the campaign took place in an information environment structurally skewed in favour of the governing parties. Television remained an important source of political information, particularly outside large urban centres, while online news portals and social media increasingly shaped public opinion. Formal plurality did not translate into effective pluralism: voters often needed several sources to receive a balanced picture of contestants and issues.

57. PACE observers were informed that long-standing media ownership concentration, the dominant role of State advertising and the privileged position of pro-government media continued to distort the market. The government remained the largest single advertiser, and State advertising was channelled disproportionately to outlets aligned with the authorities. The public service media system, operating through MTVA and Duna, received substantial public funding, while the Central European Press and Media Foundation and other pro-government media groups maintained a reach and financial strength that independent outlets could not match. This imbalance was particularly relevant in local and regional media, where independent voices were limited.

58. Independent journalists worked in a difficult environment. Interlocutors reported selective access to government press events, unanswered information requests, exclusion from official communication channels, smear campaigns and online threats. The Sovereignty Protection Office and the draft law on transparency in public life added to this climate by portraying independent media and civil society actors as possible vehicles of foreign influence. Such rhetoric and institutional pressure are incompatible with the role of independent journalism in a democratic election: to scrutinise authorities and provide voters with reliable information.

59. The regulatory framework did not provide sufficient safeguards for media independence. The National Media and Info-communications Authority (NMHH) and its Media Council remained vulnerable to political influence because of their appointment and governance structure. The NMHH president, appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister for a long term, also chairs the Media Council.

60. Although the NMHH is Hungary's Digital Services Coordinator under the EU Digital Services Act, responsibility for online oversight and the response to disinformation remained fragmented and unclear. In December 2025, the European Commission opened infringement proceedings concerning Hungary's compliance with the European Media Freedom Act and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, including issues relating to public service media, ownership transparency, State advertising and the independence of the regulator.

61. The law provided contestants with free political advertising in public service media, and RTL also offered free political advertisements. These opportunities were useful but could not compensate for the broader imbalance in news and editorial coverage. Public service media did not provide a full, balanced and impartial picture of the campaign, despite its special obligations under national law and international standards. The near absence of debates between party leaders or other formats for direct exchange further reduced voters' ability to compare candidates, programmes and claims.

62. The ODIHR media monitoring confirmed clear bias in favour of the government and Fidesz-KDNP in public service media and in several private broadcasters. In M1 news coverage, the government received around 43% of airtime and Fidesz a further 22%, mostly in a neutral or positive tone, while TISZA received around 29% and was portrayed predominantly negatively. Similar patterns appeared on Hír TV and TV2, whereas RTL and ATV provided more balanced coverage. Government and State-company advertising further amplified ruling-party narratives, including war-related and anti-Ukraine messages, and blurred the distinction between government communication and party campaigning.

63. Domestic monitoring by Mérték Media Monitor of high-reach television news programmes and online news portals between 16 March and 10 April 2026 found that pro-government outlets were dominated by negative narratives about the opposition and external enemies, especially Ukraine and the European Union. Positive messages about the government were significantly more frequent than criticism of the governing parties.

64. The same monitoring showed a striking asymmetry in the portrayal of the two main political forces. Public service media and TV2 presented Fidesz-KDNP largely positively or neutrally and TISZA overwhelmingly negatively. RTL's evening news programme offered a more balanced distribution, although with critical coverage of the incumbent. Online portals linked to the pro-government ecosystem showed similar asymmetry, especially hirado.hu and Magyar Nemzet.

65. These patterns seriously limited voters' access to comprehensive and impartial information. Future reform should strengthen the functional independence of the media regulator, guarantee editorial independence and balanced election coverage by public service media, ensure transparent and non-discriminatory allocation of State advertising, protect journalists from intimidation, smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits, improve access to information of public interest and clarify institutional responsibilities for the online information space. These reforms are essential not only for media freedom, but also for equality of opportunity and the integrity of future elections.

3.7. Campaign financing

66. Campaign finance remained one of the weakest areas of the electoral framework. The abolition of campaign expenditure limits in June 2025, the absence of interim reporting, weak rules on third-party campaigning and ineffective oversight created conditions for opaque and unequal financing. These deficiencies were especially serious in a context in which government communication and State-funded activities closely mirrored the governing party's messages.

67. In December 2025, party-financing rules were amended to prohibit domestic legal entities and organisations without legal personality from carrying out activities that do not directly support a political party but support its objectives in a manner not independent of party control, if financed in whole or in part from foreign sources or from foreign organisations or non-Hungarian natural persons. While aimed at preventing foreign-funded proxy campaigning, the amendment did not address the larger problem of domestically funded proxy campaigning and State-linked expenditure.

68. The State Audit Office is responsible for party and campaign finance oversight, yet interlocutors expressed little confidence in its independence and effectiveness. Shortly before the campaign, the State Audit Office indicated that it would examine concealed campaign financing primarily where foreign funding was suspected. This left domestic proxy campaigning and State-linked expenditure largely outside meaningful scrutiny, despite their scale and relevance.

69. Governing-party messages were amplified by proxy organisations, government-funded think tanks and mobilisation structures with opaque financing. Civil society reporting referred to the role of the Center for Fundamental Rights, Digital Civic Circles and the National Resistance Movement in large-scale mobilisation, influencer campaigns, poster campaigns and attacks on the opposition. The public could not easily identify who financed these activities or how much was spent.

70. State institutions and State-owned enterprises were also involved in communications with clear campaign relevance. Examples raised with the delegation included public information campaigns, mailings and billboards funded from public resources, communications by the public electricity provider, advertising by the National Bank of Hungary echoing governing-party slogans, and public events in competitive constituencies. The State-funded 15 March national holiday events were perceived by many interlocutors as indistinguishable from campaign mobilisation.

71. The legal environment also failed to encourage transparency among opposition parties. None of the parties fielding national lists provided continuously updated public accounts of campaign spending. This confirms that reform should be systemic and apply to all contestants, public authorities, third-party actors and online campaigning. It should not be designed selectively to target political opponents or civil society.

72. The PACE delegation recommends reintroducing realistic campaign expenditure limits, requiring comprehensive and timely disclosure of campaign income and expenditure, regulating third-party campaigning, ensuring independent auditing, and adopting clear sanctions for misuse of State resources. State communication during electoral periods should be strictly limited to neutral public information and subject to meaningful oversight.

3.8. Inclusivity in the electoral process

73. Women's participation in political life remains limited in Hungary, although these parliamentary elections brought some improvement. In the outgoing legislature, women held 31 of 199 seats, or roughly 15.6%, placing Hungary among the weaker performers in the region in terms of parliamentary gender balance. The previous government of Viktor Orbán had no women ministers.

74. There are no legislated gender quotas? and structural barriers to women's participation persist. However, in 2026 women constituted just under one quarter of candidates (23.4% on national lists and 24.1% in constituencies), with TISZA fielding a significantly higher proportion of women candidates (33.5% on its national list and 33% in constituencies) than Fidesz-KDNP (21.1% and 14.2% respectively). This, together with the change in governing majority, led to a somewhat higher share of women in the new National Assembly and an increase from zero to four women in senior ministerial posts in the new government led by Péter Magyar.

75. Women nonetheless remain markedly underrepresented in elected office and executive power. More comprehensive, long-term measures are needed to promote gender equality in political life, in line with Council of Europe standards.

76. Accessibility for voters with disabilities remained uneven. Voters could request assistance measures, including accessible polling stations and voting aids, but observers noted that independent access was not guaranteed in a significant number of polling stations and that internal layouts did not always allow voters with mobility impairments to vote without assistance. Accessibility should be addressed systematically, not as an exceptional accommodation.

77. Hungarian legislation recognises 13 national minorities, each of which may field a closed national minority list. Voters registered as national minority voters may vote for a minority list rather than for a party list. A preferential quota applies, but in practice only the largest minorities have any realistic possibility of obtaining a seat. In 2026, approximately 44 000 voters were registered as Roma minority voters and around 23 000 as German minority voters, but no minority list obtained the number of votes necessary for a mandate.

78. The minority voting system remains problematic because it restricts the electoral choice of minority voters and does not guarantee effective representation for most recognised minorities. The delegation was particularly concerned by reports that voters, primarily Roma voters in northern and eastern Hungary, had been entered into the minority register without their knowledge or consent and discovered at the polling station that they could not vote for a party list. Such allegations raise serious concerns about personal data protection, free choice and equal suffrage.

79. The new authorities should promptly and effectively investigate all allegations of unauthorised minority registration and misuse of personal data, strengthen safeguards for registration and deregistration, and review the minority voting system in consultation with minority communities, civil society, ODIHR and the Venice Commission. Roma voters and other vulnerable groups must be able to vote free from pressure, manipulation or dependency-based influence.

4. Election day

80. On election day, the PACE delegation, composed of 37 members from 21 European countries, accompanied by the Venice Commission legal expert, observed voting in and around Budapest, Debrecen, Pécs, Győr, Eger, Miskolc and other locations. Members consistently commended the calm and professional organisation of the day.

81. The IEOM assessed voting positively in 99% of polling stations observed. Polling stations generally opened on time, procedures were followed, voter identification was respected, and party-delegated members were present in many polling stations, contributing to transparency. Some procedural shortcomings were nevertheless observed, including inconsistent respect for ballot secrecy, voters not always entering polling booths, occasional overcrowding and uneven accessibility for persons with disabilities. In a significant number of polling stations, independent access for voters with physical disabilities was not ensured or the internal layout was unsuitable.

82. Domestic civil society organisations recorded several hundred reports, queries and complaints through incident reporting tools, hotlines and legal aid services. Many concerned basic procedural or technical issues, including the role of registry clerks, problems with polling station voter registers, allegations of bussing, the presence of apparently foreign voters in some constituencies, missing voters, deceased voters remaining in records and suspected misuse of personal data.

83. Taken together, and while not all reports could be independently verified by the delegation, these reports were not of a nature or scale to call into question the overall result. They did, however, demonstrate the depth of public distrust and the need for stronger safeguards, clearer procedures and more effective complaint mechanisms. Citizen reports should be treated not as political attacks, but as valuable information for improving electoral integrity.

84. Vote counting was transparent and assessed positively in almost all counts observed by the IEOM. The process generally followed prescribed procedures, although some minor procedural errors were noted. Tabulation at local election offices was efficient and transparent. The speed with which preliminary results became available contributed to public acceptance of the outcome.

5. International and domestic election observation

85. The presence of international observers was unusually large, with nearly 900 international observers accredited by the NEO. The IEOM comprised OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and PACE. On election day, it deployed 389 observers from 47 countries, including 218 ODIHR observers, 134 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observers and 37 PACE observers. The IEOM observed opening in 126 polling stations, voting in 1 431 polling stations, counting in 122 polling stations and tabulation in 78 local election offices.

86. The NEO also accredited many other international observers, including from foreign election management bodies, State institutions and international organisations. Some were well-established observation organisations; others lacked recognised methodology, public transparency or a proven record of impartial election observation. Concerns were raised about politically aligned observer initiatives, including the Liberty Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, which reportedly included about 100 observers from the United States and other countries and appeared closer to advocacy or political endorsement than to independent election observation.

87. Questions also arose regarding the composition of one IEOM partner delegation, following concerns expressed by some interlocutors and international media about the role of a staff member with previous high-level links to Russian State institutions. While the organisation concerned stated that it had no reason to doubt the person's integrity, the situation affected trust around the parliamentary briefings and limited opportunities for over half of the IEOM observers to engage with civil society organisations and representatives of TISZA. The joint debate "Towards trusted and inclusive electoral processes: the role of observers", held in Paris on 28-29 April 2026, underlined that decisions on mission composition should be transparent and based on clear standards, particularly where perceived conflicts of interest may affect stakeholder confidence, discourage local engagement or weaken the credibility of findings.

88. Hungarian law still does not provide for independent, non-partisan domestic citizen observation. Hungary has a vibrant and highly professional civil society, including organisations with substantial expertise in elections, media monitoring, campaign finance, legal remedies and online manipulation. Yet they could not observe polling, counting and tabulation as domestic observers unless they participated in polling station commissions as party delegates or elected members appointed by public authorities. They therefore relied on alternative forms of scrutiny, including legal assistance, media and social media monitoring, incident reporting, analysis of complaints and information gathered from voters and party-delegated polling station members.

89. These civic efforts made an important contribution to public oversight, but they cannot substitute for a clear legal right to independent domestic observation of all stages of the electoral process. Hungary should amend its electoral legislation to allow independent, non-partisan citizen election observation of all stages of the electoral process, including polling, counting, tabulation, postal-ballot handling and relevant election administration meetings, subject only to necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory accreditation rules. International observer accreditation should also be accompanied by transparency regarding mandate, methodology, funding and affiliations.

6. Results and post-electoral developments

90. The record turnout of 79.56% reflected exceptional public interest and a strong desire by citizens to decide the country's political future. Official results confirmed a decisive victory for TISZA. According to the NEO, TISZA received almost 3.4 million list votes, or 53.2%, and obtained 141 seats, including 96 single-member constituency seats and 45 list seats. Fidesz-KDNP received more than 2.4 million list votes, or

38.6%, and obtained 52 seats, including 10 constituency seats and 42 list seats. Mi Hazánk received approximately 359,000 votes, or 5.6%, and obtained six list seats. DK and MKKP remained below the parliamentary threshold.

91. TISZA's result amounted to 71% of parliamentary seats and a two-thirds constitutional majority. It also illustrated the distorting effects of the electoral system. TISZA received 53.2% of the list vote but secured a much larger share of seats because of its overwhelming success in single-member constituencies, including all constituencies in Budapest and 96 of 106 nationwide.

92. Postal ballots once again overwhelmingly favoured Fidesz-KDNP and delivered an additional list seat to the former governing parties. Although Fidesz-KDNP increased its absolute number of postal votes compared with the previous parliamentary elections, its share of postal votes declined to approximately 84%, lower than in 2022. This discrepancy between the outcome of the voting in the polling stations and the postal voting leads to certain concerns, and underlines the need to strengthen safeguards and public confidence in this voting channel.

93. In one constituency in Zala, the margin between the TISZA and Fidesz-KDNP candidates fell below 100 votes and a statutory recount confirmed the TISZA victory. After absentee votes and votes cast abroad at diplomatic missions were counted, TISZA overturned results in three constituencies where Fidesz-KDNP had been leading. These developments were handled through established procedures and did not lead to a broader challenge to the legitimacy of the result.

94. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán conceded defeat and congratulated Péter Magyar on election night. This peaceful acceptance of the result was an important democratic signal in a highly polarised environment. Following the election, the DK leadership resigned, as did senior figures of MKKP, reflecting the broader transformation of the party system.

95. The scale of TISZA's victory reflected an extraordinary demand for change. It also places a heavy responsibility on the new majority. A two-thirds majority provides the legal ability to amend cardinal laws and the Fundamental Law, but democratic renewal cannot be achieved by replacing one majoritarian practice with another. Reforms should be inclusive, transparent, rights-based and guided by European standards, including through meaningful consultation with opposition parties, civil society, and national minority representatives.

96. Following the inauguration of the new National Assembly on 9 May 2026, Péter Magyar was sworn in as Prime Minister, ending 16 years of Fidesz-KDNP government and opening a legislature in which TISZA holds a two-thirds majority. The new government, composed of TISZA ministers and several independent experts, presented its mandate as one of democratic reconstruction, rule-of-law restoration and reorientation towards closer co-operation with the European Union.

97. Since taking office, Péter Magyar's government has moved rapidly to signal a break with the illiberal State structures developed under the previous government. One of its first symbolic and institutional steps was the ending, on 14 May 2026, of the prolonged state of emergency, which had allowed the executive to govern through exceptional powers. The new parliamentary majority also acted to prevent a return to highly personalised long-term executive rule: on 15 June 2026, the parliament approved a constitutional amendment limiting prime ministers to a maximum of eight years in office. In the same spirit, the government has announced a broader constitutional reform process, including public consultation and a referendum, aimed at restoring checks and balances, limiting executive power and rebuilding public trust in democratic institutions.

98. The government has also taken concrete steps to dismantle institutions associated with political pressure on civil society, independent media and opposition actors. On 3 June 2026, the ruling TISZA party submitted legislation to abolish the Sovereignty Protection Office, an Orbán-era body established in 2023 and widely criticised for stigmatising NGOs, journalists and political opponents under the pretext of combating foreign influence. On 12 June 2026, the government submitted a public media reform bill intended to restore independent, transparent and accountable public-service broadcasting. The proposal would restructure the MTVA public media holding, re-establish MTI as an independent national news agency, create a new Independent Public Media Committee with balanced representation, reform the Media Council and replace the existing public media leadership through a more open appointment process. These measures directly address two of the most criticised pillars of State capture in Hungary: the use of public institutions to delegitimise dissent and the transformation of public media into a government-aligned information system.

99. In the field of rule of law, human rights and foreign policy, the new government has also sought to re-anchor Hungary in European and international legal frameworks. On 27 May 2026, the parliament adopted legislation reversing Hungary's planned withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, thereby ensuring that Hungary remained a State Party before the withdrawal would have taken effect on 2

June 2026. The government has also announced anti-corruption reforms intended to meet EU rule-of-law conditions, improve the transparency of public life and unlock suspended EU funds. In foreign policy, the change has been visible in Hungary's approach to Ukraine: in mid-May 2026, Hungary summoned the Russian ambassador following drone attacks on western Ukraine, and in June 2026 it lifted its obstruction of Ukraine's EU accession process, allowing the first negotiating cluster to move forward while continuing to link further progress to guarantees for the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia. Taken together, these early steps do not yet amount to the full dismantling of the previous system, but they represent a significant opening of the legal and political pathway for democratic restoration, stronger rule of law, media freedom and renewed European alignment. The durability of Hungary's democratic restoration will depend on whether these reforms are institutionalised through transparent, inclusive and legally robust procedures.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

100. The 12 April 2026 parliamentary elections were marked by a striking contrast. On the one hand, voters were offered genuine political choice, the campaign was active, turnout was historic, election day was orderly and the results were accepted peacefully. The delegation congratulates the people of Hungary, whose high level of participation demonstrated the resilience of democratic engagement despite a highly polarised and unequal campaign environment.

101. On the other hand, the broader electoral environment did not provide equal opportunities for contestants. It was shaped by authoritarian political control over democratic institutions, systemic State-party fusion, misuse of public resources, biased media coverage, opaque financing, weak remedies, distorted information flows and disinformation, including aggressive anti-Ukraine and anti-EU messaging and a crude "war or peace" narrative. The fact that voters were able to overcome an uneven playing field does not make that playing field acceptable.

102. These were also among the most consequential elections in Europe in 2026. They took place amid Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, heightened geopolitical tensions, growing transatlantic uncertainty and a wider populist challenge to European democratic values. The campaign showed how external narratives, domestic disinformation and State-controlled communication can combine to undermine informed voter choice. At the same time, the elections confirmed the indispensable role of civil society, independent media and engaged citizens in preserving scrutiny, accountability and the possibility of democratic change.

103. The PACE delegation welcomes the peaceful transfer of power and the stated intention of the new authorities to restore democratic institutions, the rule of law and Hungary's place within the European family of nations. Péter Magyar and TISZA have a clear mandate to turn the page, but also a responsibility to honour the trust placed in them, strengthen checks and balances, and avoid replacing one form of political dominance with another. Constitutional and electoral reforms should be transparent, inclusive and guided by democratic restoration, not unilateral entrenchment.

104. In line with [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#) and Venice Commission's recommendations, the PACE delegation recommends that the new authorities undertake a comprehensive overhaul of electoral legislation after these elections, based on inclusive consultation with the main political parties, civil society organisations, independent experts, national minority representatives and relevant Council of Europe bodies, including the Venice Commission. This democratic reform roadmap should include the following elements:

a. Electoral system and legal framework

- implement outstanding ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations;
- establish an independent, transparent and inclusive constituency delimitation process;
- review the mixed electoral system and compensation rules to ensure equality of suffrage and better proportionality between votes and seats;
- reduce the number of single-member constituencies and counties in which parties must nominate candidates in order to register a national list;
- remove disproportionate suffrage restrictions;
- end the prolonged use of states of exception except where strictly necessary, proportionate and limited in time;

b. Election administration and legal remedies

- review long-term appointments to key electoral and oversight bodies through lawful, transparent and rights-compliant procedures, avoiding arbitrary dismissals while ensuring that such bodies meet standards of independence, pluralism and public trust;
- reform the composition and decision-making rules of the National Election Commission and lower-level election commissions to strengthen professionalism, political neutrality, transparency and inclusiveness;
- ensure that nomination and election of commission members are based on clear, public and merit-based criteria, with safeguards against domination by any single political majority;
- guarantee equal rights for delegated members during the electoral period, including those representing non-parliamentary contestants and national minority lists;
- simplify and broaden access to legal remedies, reduce excessive formalism and ensure that electoral disputes are adjudicated in a timely and effective manner before election day whenever possible;

c. Misuse of administrative resources

- adopt explicit rules prohibiting the use of public office, government communication channels, State databases, State-owned enterprises, public events, public benefits and public funds for partisan advantage;
- ensure that government information during campaign periods is strictly neutral, necessary and proportionate;
- establish independent oversight and effective sanctions for violations;

d. Campaign finance

- reintroduce realistic campaign expenditure limits;
- require timely public disclosure of campaign income and expenditure by parties, candidates, third-party actors and relevant online advertisers;
- regulate proxy organisations, in-kind support and third-party campaigning;
- strengthen the independence and capacity of campaign-finance oversight bodies, including the State Audit Office;
- ensure robust, politically independent and impartial enforcement of political finance rules, as recommended in [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#);

e. Media and public information

- guarantee the editorial independence and balanced coverage of public service media;
- continue to reform the Media Council and the media regulator to ensure functional independence, accountability and pluralistic appointment procedures;
- ensure fair and transparent allocation of State and State-owned company advertising, including on social media;
- protect journalists from intimidation, smear campaigns and discriminatory exclusion from access to public information;
- encourage meaningful public debates among leading contestants;

f. Digital campaigning, foreign interference and disinformation

- clarify institutional responsibilities for online campaign oversight;
- implement the EU framework on political advertising transparently and in line with freedom of expression;
- strengthen safeguards against inauthentic behaviour, bot networks, deepfakes, undisclosed paid content and misuse of personal data;
- ensure effective co-operation during electoral periods between electoral authorities, the Digital Services Coordinator, data protection bodies, civil society monitors and online platforms;

- establish a non-partisan, transparent and rights-compliant mechanism for assessing and responding to foreign interference risks;

g. Voter registration, postal voting and out-of-country voting

- ensure equal suffrage for all citizens, including citizens voting from abroad;
- update the postal voter register more frequently and remove deceased persons from registers without delay;
- regulate the collection, storage and delivery of postal ballots by third parties;
- ensure ballot secrecy and freedom from undue influence;
- address delays in postal delivery;
- review the unequal treatment of citizens abroad with and without registered addresses in Hungary;

h. National minorities and inclusivity

- reform the national minority voting system in accordance with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Bakirdzi and E.C. v. Hungary* and [Resolution 2617 \(2025\)](#);
- ensure the effective participation of persons belonging to all national minorities in political decision-making and elected bodies;
- investigate reports of unauthorised minority registration and misuse of personal data;
- protect Roma voters and other vulnerable groups from pressure and manipulation;
- ensure full accessibility of polling stations and electoral information;

i. Civil society and election observation

- provide a clear legal basis for independent, non-partisan domestic election observation of all stages of the electoral process;
- ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society and independent media, in line with the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy.

105. The Assembly stands ready to support Hungary in this reform process, in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, other Council of Europe bodies and international partners. The 2026 elections opened a significant democratic opportunity. It should now be used to build an electoral framework that does not merely allow voters to choose change despite structural obstacles, but guarantees that every future election is conducted on genuinely equal, transparent, inclusive and democratic terms.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Based on the proposals by the political groups of the Assembly, the ad hoc committee was composed as follows:

Chairperson: Mr Pablo HISPÁN (Spain, EPP/CD)

Vice-Chairperson: Ms Elisabetta GARDINI (Italy, ECPA)

Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC)

- Ms Sibel ARSLAN, Switzerland
- Ms Aysu BANKOGLU, Türkiye
- Ms Jone BLIKRA, Norway
- Ms Aurora FLORIDIA, Italy
- Mr Gerardo GIOVAGNOLI, San Marino*
- Ms Kristina IKIC BANICEK, Croatia
- Mr Julian JOSWIG, Germany
- Mr Christophe LACROIX, Belgium
- Mr Didier MARIE, France

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

- Mr Christophe BRICO, Monaco
- Ms Marie-Christine DALLOZ, France
- Mr Pablo HISPÁN, Spain*
- Ms Nađa LAKOVIĆ, Montenegro
- Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI, Poland
- Mr Christian-Augustin NICULESCU-TÂGÂRLAS, Romania
- Ms Albana VOKSHI, Albania

European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA)

- Lord David BLENCATHRA, United Kingdom
- Sir Christopher CHOPE, United Kingdom
- Ms Elisabetta GARDINI, Italy*
- Mr Oleksii GONCHARENKO, Ukraine
- Lord Richard KEEN, United Kingdom

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

- Mr Roland Rino BÜCHEL, Switzerland
- Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Ukraine
- Mr James MACCLEARY, United Kingdom
- Ms Lucia PLAVÁKOVÁ, Slovak Republic
- Ms Marijana PULJAK, Croatia*

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

- Ms Gabrielle CATHALA, France
- Ms Semra ÇAĞLAR GÖKALP, Türkiye*

Co-rapporteurs AS/MON (ex officio)

- Mr Georges PAPANDREOU, Greece, SOC*
- Mr Eerik-Niiles KROSS, Estonia, ALDE

Venice Commission

- Ms Katharina PABEL, member of the Venice Commission in respect of Austria
- Mr Michal JANSSEN, Legal Advisor, Venice Commission secretariat
- Ms Martina SILVESTRI, Legal Advisor, Venice Commission secretariat

Secretariat of political groups

- Ms Denise O'HARA, EPP/CD

Accompanying persons

- Lady Tara BLENCATHRA, accompanying Lord David BLENCATHRA
- Mr Paweł SKALIK, accompanying Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI

Secretariat

- Ms Sonia SIRTORI, Director of Committees
- Ms Sylvie AFFHOLDER, Head of the Elections Division, Secretary of the ad hoc committee*
- Ms Ivi-Triin ODRATS, Deputy Head of the Elections Division*
- Ms Carine ROLLER-KAUFMAN, Assistant, Elections Division*
- Ms Amila BERKOVIC, Assistant, Elections Division*

Appendix 2 – Programme of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Monday, 30 March 2026

- 9:00-9:55 Delegation meeting with introductory words by:
- Pablo Hispán, Head of Delegation
 - Georges Papandreou, Co-rapporteur of the Monitoring Committee
 - Practical information from the Secretariat
- 10:00-11:30 Meeting with:
- Eoghan Murphy, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission
 - Stefan Krause, Deputy Head of Mission
 - and members of the Core Team
- 11:45-12:30 Meeting with Dr Imre Juhász, Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and members of his office
- Dr. Viktória Ágics, Head of Secretariat, Secretary General
 - Dr. Nóra Ivády, Deputy Secretary General
 - Dr. János Wiedemann, Director General for Equal Treatment
- 12:00-12:30 Meeting with Zenel Leku, Chairperson of the Electoral Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP)
- 14:00-15:30 Meeting with representatives of civil society
- Balázs Simonyi and Flóra Fazekas, Hungarian Helsinki Committee
 - Gábor Hacsí, Amnesty International
 - Daniel Döbrentey, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
 - Péter Kramer, 20K Election Integrity
- 15:30-16:45 Meeting with media representatives
- Éva Bognár, Mediaforum Association
 - Peter Krekó and Róbert László, Political Capital
- 17:00-17:30 Meeting with Dr Laszlo Windisch, President of the State Audit Office of Hungary (ASZ)
- 19:00 Meeting with representatives of the diplomatic community, hosted by H.E. Mr Luis Ángel Redondo Gómez, Ambassador of Spain to Hungary

Tuesday, 31 March 2026

- 8:30-9:30 Meeting with Dr András Koltay, President, National Media and Communications Authority
- 9:45-10:35 Meeting with Dr Bence Rétvári, State Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs and Deputy Minister of Interior and Dr Robert Répázy, State Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Justice
- 11:00-12:00 Meeting with Dr Attila Nagy, President of the National Election Office (NVI) and Dr Róbert Sasvári, Chair of the National Election Commission (NVB)
- 12:15-13:45 Working lunch hosted by the Hungarian delegation to PACE
- 14:00-15:30 Meetings with leaders and representatives of parliamentary parties/leading contestants represented in the parliament:
- Fidesz and KDNP
 - Zsolt Németh (Fidesz), Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee
 - Imre Vejkey (KDNP), Chair of the Justice Committee
 - Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk)
 - Richárd Sipos, Head of Office of the Our Homeland Parliamentary Group and Deputy National Campaign Director
 - Barbara Ragó, Office Secretary

- Democratic Coalition (DK): Gergely Arató, MP, deputy head of the parliamentary group

16:00-16:45 Meeting with Péter Sztáray, State Secretary for Security Policy and Energy Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

17:30-18:45 Meetings with contestants not represented in the parliament:

- Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA):
- Zoltan Tarr, deputy chairman of TISZA, head of the delegation to the EP, MP candidate in Budapest
- Martón Melléthei-Barna, chief legal consult of Tisza
- Martón Hajdu, chief of staff, Tisza EP delegation

19:00-19:55 Debriefing meeting of the pre-electoral delegation and preparation of the statement

Appendix 3 – Statement of the pre-electoral delegation of the parliamentary election

Hungary's elections must not be shaped by fear, abuse of state resources or foreign manipulation, says PACE pre-electoral delegation

01/04/2026 – A cross-party delegation of observers from PACE, visiting Budapest on 30 and 31 March ahead of the 12 April parliamentary elections, held talks with representatives of the authorities, the election administration, political parties, civil society, the media and the diplomatic community.

The delegation came away with a stark impression: that what is at stake is not only who wins votes, but whether democratic competition itself remains meaningfully open, pluralistic and fair.

The delegation observed that the electoral process appears technically well prepared overall. It appreciated the willingness of the authorities to engage in dialogue and the full co-operation of the Hungarian delegation to PACE. Many interlocutors, however, pointed to a toxic climate marked by the blurring of state and party, the massive use of all state and government resources in favour of one party, a distorted information space, inflammatory propaganda, captured institutions, growing concern over foreign malign interference and hostility towards independent civil society organisations.

“After our meetings in Budapest, one question cannot be avoided: is Hungary still a competitive democracy, or a state captured by one party? Voters must decide Hungary's future – not fear campaigns, not smear operations, not unequal rules and not foreign manipulation. They must also be able to trust that every vote is treated equally and handled with full transparency – including votes cast abroad,” concluded Pablo Hispán (Spain, EPP/CD), head of delegation.

The delegation was particularly concerned by repeated accounts of aggressive and deceptive campaign messaging, including sustained anti-Ukraine and anti-EU propaganda and a crude “war or peace” narrative aimed at stigmatising opponents rather than enabling an informed democratic choice.

Members also heard serious concerns about the broader integrity of the electoral environment: the prolonged state of emergency; weaknesses in oversight and remedies; the misuse of state resources, data and institutions for partisan purposes; serious allegations of vote-buying and the intimidation of voters; concerns about the independence of the judiciary dealing with election dispute resolution; uneven media coverage of political parties; and a media landscape in which many voters have only limited access to pluralistic and independent information.

The delegation wishes to express particular concern over out-of-country voting. Interlocutors underlined the different treatment of Hungarian citizens voting abroad, depending on their status and place of residence, raising serious questions about equality of suffrage. The delegation was also struck by concerns over the lack of transparency in the handling and verification of these votes. All votes must be subject to the same guarantees of equality, secrecy and effective scrutiny.

Another serious issue raised throughout the visit was the shrinking space for independent journalism, scrutiny and accountability. Democratic trust cannot be sustained if critical journalists, watchdogs and civil society actors are treated as adversaries rather than as an essential part of public oversight.

PACE does not take sides in party competition. It does, however, stand firmly for democratic standards. A credible election is not defined by election day alone. It depends on a fair campaign, equal conditions for contestants, transparent treatment of all votes, genuine media pluralism and protection against manipulation and foreign malign influence. These are the standards by which the electoral environment in Hungary will be assessed when the full-fledged delegation returns for the elections on 12 April.

Elisabetta Gardini (Italy, ECPA), deputy head of the delegation, expressed a dissenting opinion on this statement.

Composition of the delegation: Pablo Hispán (Spain, EPP/CD), head of delegation; Elisabetta Gardini (Italy, ECPA), deputy head of delegation; Gerardo Giovagnoli (San Marino, SOC); Marjana Puljak (Croatia, ALDE); Semra Çağlar Gökalp (Türkiye, UEL); Georges Papandreou (Greece, SOC), co-rapporteur on Hungary of the Monitoring Committee (*ex officio*).

Appendix 4 – Programme of the meetings of the PACE Electoral Observation Mission

Friday, 10 April 2026

- 09:00-10:00 PACE Delegation Briefing
- 10:00-10:15 Introductory Remarks
- Sargis Khandanyan, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission
 - Pablo Hispán, Head of PACE Delegation
 - Rupa Huq, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation
- 10:15-12:15 Joint briefing by the ODIHR Election Observation Mission
- Welcome and overview of the EOM's work – Eoghan Murphy, Head of Mission
 - Political Background and Campaign – Ajla van Heel and Nicholas Jahr, Political Analysts
 - Media – Marek Mracka, Media Analyst
 - Legal Framework, Electoral dispute resolution– Marla Morry, Legal Analyst
 - Campaign Finance – Mariam Tabatadze, Legal Analyst
 - Election Administration – Manuel Sanchez de Nogueas, Election Analyst
 - Security – Davor Čorluka, Security Expert
- 13:00-14:20 Meeting of the PACE Delegation with NGOs
- András Léderer, Head of advocacy, Hungarian Helsinki Committee
 - János Mécs, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
 - David Vig, Director, Amnesty International Hungary
 - József Peter Martin, Transparency International
 - Réka Safrany, Hungarian Women's Lobby
 - Róbert László, Elections Expert Political Capital
 - Péter Krámer, Director, 20K Election Integrity
- 14:20-15:00 Meeting of the PACE Delegation with media representatives
- Gábor Polyák, Director, Mérték Média Monitor
- 15:00-16:45 Joint briefings (continued): meeting with media representatives
- Miklos Haraszti, former OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
 - HVG, Viktória Serdült, Journalist
 - Peter Bajomi-Lazar, Professor, Budapest University of Economics and Business
 - Botond Feledy, Independent Foreign Policy Expert & Analyst for Partizan You Tube channel
 - Tamas Kovalcsik, Co-Founder, Data Analysis Center Választási Földrajz
 - Angéla Kóczé, Chair of the Romani Studies Programme, Central European University
 - Csaba Lukács, Journalist and Managing director at Hungarian Weekly Magyar Hang (Hungarian Voice)
 - Tibor Toró, Associate Professor at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
 - Andrea Virág, Director of Strategy, Republikon Institute
 - Andrea Peto, Professor at the Department of Gender Studies, Central European University
- 17:00-18:30 Candidates, Political Parties and Coalitions part 1
- 17.00-18.00 Fidesz: Zsolt Németh, Candidate
 - 18.00-18.30 Tisza: Martón Melléthei-Barna, chief legal consult, and Martón Hajdu, chief of staff, Tisza EP delegation

Saturday, 11 April 2026

Joint briefings (continued)

- 10:00-10:30 Candidates, Political Parties and Coalitions part 2
– Demokratikus Koalíció (Democratic Coalition), Gergely Arató, MP, deputy head of the parliamentary group
- 11:15–12:30 Election Administration and Legislation
– National Election Committee, Róbert SASVÁRI, Chairperson
– National Election Office, Attila NAGY, Chairperson
- 12:30–13:30 ODIHR EOM Briefing continuation – Election Day
– E-day Procedures- Manuel Sánchez de Nogues, Election Analyst
– STO Reporting – Max Bader, Statistical Analyst
- 10:50–11:30 Briefing, Long-Term Observers deployed in Budapest and Pest
- 13:45-14:45 Meeting with E-Day drivers and linguistic facilitators

Sunday, 12 April 2026

Election Day – Observation in polling stations

(PS open at 06:00 and close at 19:00)

Monday, 13 April 2026

- 8:00-9:00 Debriefing for PACE delegation
- 15:00 Joint ODIHR/PACE press conference

Appendix 5 – Press release of the Main Election Observation Mission

Hungary's parliamentary elections: vibrant, but no equal opportunities for contestants, international observers say

BUDAPEST, 13 April 2026 – The 12 April parliamentary elections saw active citizen engagement, with record voter turnout and genuine choice, but there was no level playing field, with the ruling party benefitting from systemic advantages that blurred the line between state and party, international observers said in a preliminary statement released today. While the campaign was marred by divisive and fear-mongering rhetoric on the part of the ruling party, including unsubstantiated claims of foreign interference advanced by the government, candidates were able to campaign freely.

The extensive misuse of public office and resources, government messaging, a clear bias in monitored media and news coverage in favour of the ruling party, and serious shortcomings in the regulation of campaign finance further undermined the equality of opportunities among contestants, the statement says.

"I was impressed by the spirited citizen engagement we have witnessed in these elections. It is a testament to the voters that the ruling party's divisive and inflammatory rhetoric and misuse of office did not stop them voting in record high numbers yesterday," said Sargis Khandanyan, the OSCE Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term observers. "This was a hard-fought campaign, and while the ruling party leveraged government powers to tip the scales in its advantage, it remained competitive."

The campaign was active and highly visible, both online and across the country. The ruling party's divisive messaging on Ukraine and the EU institutions dominated the highly polarized campaign discourse with domestic issue-based policies receiving less prominence. The authorities' failed to adequately address public and stakeholders' concerns regarding foreign interference. Several foreign leaders and political actors came out in support of the incumbent, reiterating Fidesz's campaign messaging on security.

"Congratulations to the people of Hungary, who expressed a clear and unequivocal choice. The exceptionally high voter turnout demonstrates that fearmongering, threats and intimidation cannot suppress the democratic will of the people," said Pablo Hispán, Head of the PACE delegation. "It's a powerful democratic response, and reflects the indispensable role played by civil society and independent media in preserving scrutiny, accountability and the conditions for political change. Péter Magyar and Tisza have a clear mandate to turn the page and now carry a great responsibility – to honour the trust placed in them by the Hungarian people and strengthen the rule of law, balance of powers and democracy."

The media landscape in Hungary, although formally diverse, is heavily skewed in practice, with independent journalism at a clear structural disadvantage compared to a much larger and better resourced pro-government media sector. Restricted access to information and a tense operating environment for journalists, marked both by physical incidents and online threats, are of concern. ODIHR social media monitoring observed the use of generative AI and manipulative content for purposes of domestic disinformation and to discredit political opponents.

"It is abundantly clear that the public service media's coverage was slanted in favour of the government and the ruling party. Admittedly, there was free political advertising available to parties, but failure of the public media to provide balanced and information is disturbing," said Rupa Huq, the Head of the delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. "Given the overall restrictive media attention to the campaign, the massive engagement of voters who turned out yesterday is all the more remarkable to have witnessed."

The legal framework, which underwent a series of mainly technical and procedural changes since the last elections, continues to fall short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, including by failing to explicitly prohibit the misuse of public office and resources for campaign purposes. Overall, the handling of election disputes was not impartial, which, together with the limited effectiveness of legal remedies, weakened accountability.

"There was an active and highly visible campaign, and candidates were able to campaign freely, but the framework for the elections does not ensure a fair basis for contestants," said Eoghan Murphy, Head of the Mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. "For example, our monitoring showed that the ruling party greatly benefitted from the misuse of government messaging to amplify campaign messages, the removal of spending limits, significant increases in public funding for parliamentary groups prior to the election – funding which can be used in the campaign – all further distorting the playing field."

The technical preparations for the elections were administered efficiently and professionally, and the election administration was transparent in its work. However, the current composition of the National Election Commission, predominantly drawn from members elected or appointed by governing parties, impacted the

impartiality and independence of its decision-making on several key campaign-related matters. On election day, the observers assessed all stages of the election process positively in the overwhelming majority of polling stations observed, despite some procedural shortcomings.

Authorities and parties have made virtually no efforts to enhance women's political participation, resulting in their significant underrepresentation, and less than one quarter of candidates were women. With few exceptions, women did not feature prominently in the campaign.

Contrary to OSCE commitments and international good practice, the legal framework continues to lack provisions for domestic non-partisan election observation, thereby constraining opportunities for independent citizen oversight of polling and counting processes.