



President of the National Election Office

Report of the President of the National Election Office on the conduct
and organisation of the state tasks regarding the elections of Members
of Parliament held on 6 April 2014

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President of the National Election Office

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Honourable Parliament,

As stipulated in Article 13(1) of Act XXXVI of 2013 on Election Procedure, I am reporting on the organisation and implementation of public tasks regarding the elections of Members of Parliament 2014 as follows:

The president of Hungary set the day of the elections of Members of Parliament for the 6 April 2014. After setting the date of the elections – taking the totally changed legal framework and the renewed institutions into consideration – the election bodies had short time to prepare the elections of Members of Parliament and to organise the task regarding it.

I.

The new election system

After the elections of 2010, a restructuring of legal arrangements has begun in Hungary, whereby after the adoption of the Fundamental Law a new legislation of electoral substantive and procedural law have been undertaken. The Hungarian electoral system has been changed considerably, though it kept its mixed character. Due to these main changes, i.e. the number of Members of Parliament diminished from 386 to 199, the Fundamental Law extended the right to vote for Hungarian citizens having no domicile in Hungary and living beyond the borders of Hungary, and the constituencies were proportionally established. Compared to the previous electoral system there is an innovation in deleting the territorial lists, enabling to obtain a parliamentary mandate only on national list and in constituencies. Pursuant to Act on Electoral Procedure the National Election Office has been set up, that is an independent autonomous state agency, and may not be bound by any instructions regarding its duties. Any function may be assigned to the National Election Office only by law or other legislation issued pursuant to law, it has an independent title in the national budget within the budgetary chapter of Parliament. The president of the National Election Office is appointed by the President of the Republic on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Tasks of the National Election Office include the keeping of the electoral roll, the conduct of public tenders of the elections, implementing and operating a safe IT



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system, performing the central logistical tasks of the elections, and the conduct of financial part of the elections. It operates the official website of the elections, organises the administration and IT tests, insuring the production and transportation of central printed forms in order to conduct the elections. The National Election Office insures the material and technical conditions for the operation of the National Election Commission and prepares the cases under the jurisdiction of the commission.

II.

Information, preparation

The president of the National Election Office was appointed on 24 May 2013, and the Office was also established the same day. Thus there were just 10 months to build up a completely new institution and to organise and conduct the elections of the Members of Parliament according to the new fundamentals.

Due to the change of the electoral system, tasks like professional non-partisan training for election bodies, furthermore continuous information of voters, diplomatic corps, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the representatives of the media were of great importance.

Previous years' public administration has been transformed to a great extent and as a result of this the personnel experienced in conducting the elections has significantly changed. The management of document offices was transferred from local governments – that conducted the elections – to government offices, while the majority of self- government officials became employed in the state administration.

The National Election Office held preparatory courses for members of election offices. The new publication of the Electoral Guidelines helped the task of preparation of heads of election offices, the people conducting the elections at foreign representations, the candidates, nominating organisations and the election bodies.

The National Election Office has continuously operated the www.valasztas.hu, the official website of the elections. By visiting this site voters could file their applications on-line regarding the electoral roll, and they could receive information about the elections. Information of the actual and the previous elections could be read on the website as well.



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Elections were held in 3176 settlements, in 10 386 polling districts, at 97 foreign representations, where more than 20 000 members in election offices and about 76 000 members of election commissions took part.

The task of the National Election Office was to have more than 16 million pieces i.e. about 170 tons of ballot paper printed. The ballot boxes and mobile voting booths were delivered to the election offices i.e. 10 790 complete packages (770 pallets). The National Election Office built up its data monitoring system. After completely scanning the minutes of polling districts the results were checked with the help of an independent informational system. The data of the original minute (on paper) that contribute the basis of the declaration of the result were compared to the data stored in the National Election System.

III.

Voter turn-out

There were all together 8 241 562 voters listed on the electoral roll. At the elections of Members of Parliament held on 6 April 2014 4 943 762 voters, i.e. 61.65 % of the all voters who had the right to vote cast their ballot at 10 386 polling districts in Hungary. More voters than ever staying abroad exercised their right to vote at foreign representations. 24 119 voters, i.e. 85.65 % of foreign representation electoral register cast their ballot. 158 654 postal voters, i.e. 81.87 % of postal voters listed in the electoral register cast their ballot.

IV.

The experiences regarding the operation of the new legal instruments

Putting forward list

The most criticised element of the previous electoral rules was to bind the nomination of candidates to collecting endorsement coupons. Pursuant to the new rules these coupons were replaced by recommendation sheets. Candidates are recommended by these sheets. 500 valid supporting statements are needed to become a candidate. A new rule – a system of multiple recommendations – has been introduced for candidates wishing to take part, and organisations effectively putting forward list in the elections.



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Due to the simplified rules of putting forward list 3826 voters wanted to become candidates, who required 478 118 recommendation sheets. As a result of this, this year, 1531 individual candidates – 4 years ago 895 – could take part in the elections of Members of Parliament. Since the rules of putting forward list have been simplified, 18 party lists and 13 national minority lists were put forward. Until the dead line set by legislation 441 475 pieces of recommendation sheets were submitted to the election offices. They checked 1 372 462 supporting statements.

There were three days to check these statements, which imposed a very heavy workload on the members of the offices.

To preserve the fair elections each candidate who wants to stand for the elections and organisations putting forward lists must give detailed accounts on the recommendation sheets obtained.

Failure to do so fine shall be imposed on each recommendation sheet that has not been submitted to the office. All recommendation sheets that have not been submitted or were submitted late during the elections of Members of Parliament 2014, a fine of more than HUF 1.8 billion was imposed.

Keeping the central electoral register

After the new electoral system came into force on 1 January 2014, the task of the National Election Office is to keep the central electoral register. In order to do so the central electoral register of voters having suffrage had to be established and the IT infrastructure insuring its management and the necessary application had to be developed.

Casting ballots of voters having no domicile in Hungary

Pursuant to the Act on Electoral Procedure Hungarian citizens having no domicile could cast their ballot via mail on the elections of Members of Parliament 2014. Pre-registration is the condition of using postal voting. Applications for registration via mail could be submitted from 1 August 2013. They could be filed on-line as well to the address of the National Election Office from 1 November 2013, latest the 15th day prior to the elections.

After the examination of applications and about 400 appeals, there were 193 793 voters registered in the electoral roll for postal voters. Ballot packages were sent to



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them, and 158 654 voters submitted the packages back to the National Election Office. 128 429 postal ballots met the criteria required by the legislation.

Based on experiences inquired during the conduct of the registration and postal voting it is appropriate to simplify the application form for the central register.

Voting at foreign representations

On Election Day Hungarian citizens staying abroad and having domicile in Hungary had the opportunity to vote at foreign representations.

Only those could make use of the opportunities, who applied for enrolment on the foreign representation electoral register until the deadline specified in the Act. Due to one of the most significant technical innovations of the elections of Members of Parliament 2014 it was possible to apply on-line for enrolment on the foreign representation electoral register. This facilitation has greatly contributed to the significantly increasing number of voters that tripled at foreign representation comparing it to the number of voters 4 years ago. Most of them, namely 5 371 wanted to vote in London. It has been reported that the elections were held without incidents in a satisfactory manner.

Changing polling districts

A totally new institution, the changing polling districts was introduced instead of the much disputed and challenged voting by certificate. Those who wanted to vote in Hungary but not in the settlement they had their domicile could cast their ballot by changing polling district. The opportunity of changing polling districts on-line contributed to the widespread usage of this institution. All together 120 552 made use of changing polling districts. Those voters who changed polling districts could cast their ballots for individual candidates of the constituency of their domicile, thus excluding the possibility of "tourism of voters" that existed on previous elections. By introducing the instrument of changing polling district, the National Election Office was facing enormous logistical challenges.

Ensuring equality of opportunity during voting

Another new development of the Act on Electoral Procedure was that it provided far more help for disabled voters. Visually impaired people could require poll cards in Braille text, and ballot sheets in Braille template to facilitate their voting.



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Constructions of accessibility to polling districts for people with reduced mobility were finished. Furthermore, voters could ask for simplified information material as well.

V.

Management and financial data

After the foundation of the National Election Office in 2013 the recruitment of the staff ended in the period between August and December enabling the proper operation of the office. On 1 May 2014 there were 79 people employed at the National Election Office. 67 staff members have open-ended, while 13 fixed-term contracts. Their average age is 38. During the month prior to the elections on 6 April, about 50 co-workers were recruited from different institutions to the National Election Office. The processing of postal ballots, the processing and re-arrangement of ballots arriving from abroad, and from those changing polling district were only possible with the temporary employment of these people.

Associated directly to the preparation and conduct of the elections of Members of Parliament 12 public procurement procedures were carried out. Having regard to the type and importance of the tenders completed by the National Election Office they involved classified information, and touched the interest of the essential state security of the country. Therefore based on the prior authorisation of the Committee on National Security of the Parliament 7 classified public procurement procedures were carried out.

The establishment and the operation of IT system supporting the three national elections in 2014 required substantial resources. The changes in legislation made it necessary to redevelop the electoral applications. A depreciation change of central electoral devices obtained in 2008 and 2009 proved to be indispensable. Due to the changes in the reconstruction of administration – in order to follow and achieve an enhanced operational security – besides using existing systems of registry and document offices – it was necessary to build up an independent national network exclusively for electoral purposes. Since the three elections to be held this year – with minor changes – using the same information IT asset base – investment costs incurred decisively regarding the preparation of the elections of Members of Parliament 2014. The National Election Office built up 450 endpoint outgoing lines with high speed transmission on the National Telecommunication Backbone-Network (NTG) and established 2500 workstations and 500 printers at endpoints by regrouping them within the public administration.



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We planned HUF 8.9 billion on the elections of Members of Parliaments 2014 from the approved resources for the electoral tasks of the National Election Office in 2013 and 2014. Due to the changed legislative environment, the IT system, the postal voting, registration, an average increase with 50% of the size of voting ballots, and the usage of security paper, additional costs are regarded as a significant heading of our budget. Without these additional costs listed here the costs planned for the elections of Members of Parliament are HUF 800 million less than the sum planned for the elections of Members of Parliament 2010.

VI.

Conclusion

The elections of Members of Parliament 2014 in the new regulatory environment and in a new institutional system – having a very tight timetable, and despite of the difficulties listed – were smoothly, legally conducted and in accordance with the legislation and the Fundamental Law of Hungary.

The state and public administration of the country, the election bodies together with the participating bodies facilitating the conduct of the elections have done hard work, several times performing night work, ensuring voters' expression of will to be unquestionable, and meeting international standards.

I express my gratitude to all those 10 thousands of people, civil- and public servants, each and every member of electoral bodies and committees who assisted the preparation, organisation and the conduct of the elections, and whose work contributed to the success of the elections of Member of Parliament 2014.

I would like especially to thank the work of the National Election Committee for helping the task of the National Election Office with its guidelines, and thank the work of the election bodies regarding law-enforcement and the conduct of elections. I ask the Parliament to adopt my report.

Budapest, May 2014

Dr. Pálffy Ilona

President of the National Election Office