

The 'Rise up, Hungarians' movement: a new challenge to Fidesz's domination

Ilona Gizińska, Andrzej Sadecki

The 'Rise up, Hungarians' movement, which is attempting to channel the biggest anti-government protests in many years, is becoming the second most prominent force in Hungarian politics. Its leader, Péter Magyar, will run in the elections to the European Parliament as a candidate endorsed by the TISZA party, a party whose importance has hitherto been marginal. According to a poll conducted at the end of April by the Medián polling company, which is considered the most reliable, it has become the country's most popular opposition party and can hope to receive 24% of the votes in the elections (Fidesz's level of support is estimated at 46%). Following the success of two demonstrations held in Budapest on 15 March and 6 April (the latter was attended by at least 50,000 individuals), Magyar has also attempted to build a support base outside the capital city: on 5 May he organised a rally in Debrecen, a traditional stronghold for Fidesz, which was attended by several thousand individuals.

Commentary

- Magyar is trying to promote himself as a fresh face in Hungarian politics and as a leader of the anti-government protests which were triggered in February, when information came to light that President Katalin Novák had pardoned a man convicted of covering up sexual crimes against minors (see '[Hungary: resignation of President Novák](#)'). The scandal also involved Magyar's ex-wife Judit Varga, who was Hungary's justice minister in 2019–23. Although at the start of the year the 43-year-old lawyer was a Fidesz party activist not very well known to the public, when the scandal broke out he began to harshly criticise the ruling camp, in particular Antal Rogán, an influential minister at the prime minister's office and a symbol of the oligarchisation and propaganda of Fidesz's rule. Magyar accused the party of shifting the entire responsibility for the February scandal onto Novák and Varga. He resigned from his positions at state-controlled companies and gave several interviews; these received much publicity, and in them he presented himself as an insider exposing the irregularities which had been found in the ruling camp. Subsequently, he announced the creation of the 'Rise up, Hungarians' movement (its name is a reference to a slogan used during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848). Since he would be unable to register this movement as a political party ahead of the European Parliament elections, he decided to run as a candidate endorsed by the TISZA party, which has so far been a body of marginal importance. However, Magyar does not intend to take up his seat as an MEP if elected, because his declared main goal is to oust Orbán

from power.

- The leader of the 'Rise up, Hungarians' movement criticises the government and the opposition alike. The opposition, for its part, has accused him of lacking credibility due to his long career in the ruling party structures. Polls indicate that so far he has mainly won the support of undecided voters and the opposition electorate, but has only interested the Fidesz electorate to an insignificant degree. The anti-government shift of an individual who knows the ruling camp's secrets may tarnish their image. Despite this, however, Magyar has not distanced himself completely from Fidesz's platform and has focused on criticising corruption & Hungary's oligarchisation, and on using general slogans regarding a reform of public policies (in the spheres of education, health care etc.). Although he emphasises the need for constructive cooperation with other countries within the EU and NATO, some of his statements still contain elements of the Orbán government's pro-Russian narrative. The European Parliament elections on 9 June, followed by the transition of his social movement into political party structures ahead of the parliamentary elections in spring 2026, will represent the first tests of the new political movement's potential.