

Hungary is more committed than ever to democracy, the rule of law and Euro-Atlantic integration, writes János Martonyi

Twenty years after a 'managed' transition to democracy left significant parts of Hungary's old communist structures almost intact, Hungary came to the brink of collapse several years ago. People's trust in government, in independent institutions and in each other was seriously eroded after long years of corrupt and incompetent governance, and as a result the economy trembled at the first wave of the crisis.

Fidesz came to power in 2010 promising a major overhaul of the old structures, and completion of the transition from communism to democracy. The signature piece of our work is the new constitution of Hungary and the cardinal laws implementing it, replacing the patched-up, temporary revision of our 1949 communist constitution.

Delivering on our promises took tremendous effort, especially against the backdrop of the global economic crisis. The changes we introduced were rapid and comprehensive and ruffled more than a few feathers. We were certainly not immune to error, including errors of judgement and of communication in our work. Thus, we are open to criticism, provided it is fair and specific, but we reject summary judgements, many of which are based on flimsy evidence and not necessarily motivated by genuine concern for the fate of Hungary.

At the same time, Fidesz is a conservative party, and it has not shied away from using its unprecedented democratic legitimacy to reflect conservative values in its legislative work, such as affording enhanced protection to families as the building blocks of our society, or implementing a debt brake to prevent reckless borrowing by any future government. While our super-majority and our conservatism has clearly exasperated some of our political opponents, that should not deny us the right to seek our own solutions to our own specific

Sentenced without trial?



challenges while remaining committed to democracy, the rule of law and Euro-Atlantic integration.

In fact, we are more committed to those values than ever. The Venice Commission welcomed that our "new Constitution establishes a constitutional order based on democracy, the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights as underlying principles" and that a "particular effort has been made to follow closely the technique and contents of the European Convention on Human Rights and to some extent the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights".

And our track record during the Hungarian presidency of the Council of Ministers in 2011 has compelled even some of our critics to admit that we worked tirelessly for advancing the cause of a "strong Europe", which was also the motto of our presidency. Our desire for an ever closer union has prompted us to participate actively in

the formulation of the new fiscal compact, which right from the outset we advocated should be incorporated into the treaties.

There is no denying that there are serious problems across Europe, including Hungary. A deteriorating sense of security, a decline in trust among peoples and countries, and a feeling of frustration pervades our Union. Some of our problems require joint solutions, while others need to be addressed individually on the basis of subsidiarity. In such times, politicians in all countries and in all institutions must be extremely careful and be culturally sensitive to avoid being counter-productive. Otherwise, they may end up strengthening the forces that they claim to be fighting against.

Let me make this very clear: a constructive dialogue, respecting the prerogatives of EU and member-state institutions, a civilised tone and co-operation in good faith is what we offer and what we are asking for. Only they

can strengthen the credentials of the EU, of its member states and of democracy both in and outside Hungary. On the contrary, summary judgements, ill-informed smear campaigns, trampling on the institutional and constitutional order of the EU and its member states, and derogatory and paternalistic language will only weaken the forces committed to democracy and European integration. That, in turn, only strengthens those, especially on the far right, who scent an opportunity in today's crisis.

Infringements may happen. Let us try to find solutions and compromises based on mutual trust and respect. If necessary, we have the institutions and procedures to deal with them. I hope our firebrand critics will reconsider whether they are interested in due process or just cheap publicity at the expense of our common democratic prospects.

János Martonyi is the foreign minister of Hungary.

EU needs a southern Mediterranean strategy

There is much to praise in the EU institutions' response to the Arab uprisings, but direction is still lacking, writes Pol Morillas

In the past year, democratic uprisings in the southern Mediterranean have overthrown some regimes, threatened others, and consigned to the dustbin pessimistic perceptions about the prospects for democracy in the region. While civil movements are still struggling to transform national political landscapes, it is clear that north Africa and the Middle East will not be the same again.

The unrest has also transformed the region from an American and European *domaine réservé* into a multipolar neighbourhood, in which Turkey and the Gulf states – to name just a few – are vying for influence.

For the EU, this test arrived at a tricky moment, in the midst of the eurozone

crisis and with the foreign-policy machinery established by the Lisbon treaty still in its infancy. Nonetheless, European institutions have responded with some remarkable financial, technical and political instruments.

The EU has revised its neighbourhood policy (though that update was already under way). It has found extra money to support democracy. It has created the European Endowment for Democracy and the Civil Society Facility to help build democratic institutions and support civil society. And it has promised to liberalise trade and ease travel.

The EU has also set up a number of task-forces to co-ordinate action on the ground and has appointed a special representative for the region, Bernardino León.

These initiatives have worn the label either of the European Commission or of the European External Action Service (EEAS). Member states, by contrast, have been remarkably absent from the responses emerging from Brussels, preferring to pursue separate national policies. This was evident when the EU failed to adopt united positions on the military intervention in Libya and on

Palestine's bid for recognition of its statehood at the UN.

Nor has there been much strategic debate in Brussels and in national foreign ministries.

Contrast this with the situation in 2003, when Javier Solana, then the high representative for the common foreign and security policy, responded to divisions over the war in Iraq by persuading national leaders to adopt a common global security strategy.

Solana's approach should now be emulated for the southern Mediterranean. In essence, the EU's member states and institutions need to set out a strategic narrative that defines the EU's values, its interests in the region and the political framework for EU policies.

The main building blocks are available, in the form of the political messages of recent communications produced by the Commission and the EEAS. These include support for democracy, economic development and civil society.

But some elements should be made more explicit. The EU should, for example, state that the outcome of free and fair elections should be respected regardless of who wins. It should declare

that the EU wants a systematic, structured dialogue with Islamist parties, which have emerged strengthened from recent elections. It needs to set out the various ways in which bilateral relations could develop. It should set out the role that Euro-Mediterranean institutions should have. Is there a value in continuing the multilateral, region-wide track embodied by the Union for the Mediterranean? And it should define a new approach to Turkey: the current impasse over its accession to the EU should not continue to preclude broader co-operation.

To persuade member states, Catherine Ashton, the EU's foreign policy chief, would need to show reinvigorated leadership. Even then, she would struggle to secure agreement. The economic crisis limits funds, and the EU's institutional crisis reduces the chances that the 27 member states will muster the political will needed.

But Arab democrats need straightforward answers from the EU. And a southern strategy would be a major stepping stone toward a revision of the global strategy set out by Solana, which has been revised just once in eight years, in 2008.

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