



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# What is the scope of the Hungarian political newcomer regarding overthrowing PM Viktor Orbán?

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Neither the ruling Fidesz Party of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán nor the divided opposition in Hungary are calm regarding the apparent rise of the until recently anonymous Péter Magyar.

Last Friday, the 43-year-old led tens of thousands of Hungarians in an **anti-government protest** in downtown Budapest. This was not beginner's luck, as he had already drawn tens of thousands of people to the streets 3 times in the previous month.

He plans to topple the government of Viktor Orbán, whom he accuses of widespread corruption in the country, control over the judiciary and the media, and distancing from the European Union and its values.

Many embraced his ideas and showed readiness to take to the streets and demand a fundamental change: not only among those in power but also the entire political scene.

For them, Magyar's sharp vocabulary against PM Orbán and his long-term rule is tempting, but so is the shift that this lawyer and businessman makes regarding the established opposition.

## How to shake up the political scene?

Until recently a member of Orbán's Fidesz Party, Magyar, positioned himself equally far from both poles, given that the Hungarian political scene has been divided for years.

Mr Magyar reckons that as a charismatic newcomer, he can shake up the ossified relations in Hungarian politics and present himself as an attractive alternative for both sides.

He has been doing well so far, judging by the numerous supporters he rallies at the street protests.

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Even though his protests are limited to Budapest, the vast majority of Hungarians have heard of his activism and ambitions. Polls show that almost 70% of Hungarians know that he has entered the political arena, and 13% already know that they would support him in the elections.

This level of support is **almost equal** to the popularity of the strongest opposition group, the Democratic Coalition (Social Democrats), and about 5% higher than the liberal movement Momentum, the second strongest opposition group.

The projections give enough reason for nervousness in the ruling party, perhaps even more so in the ranks of the opposition, which is frustrated by successive and heavy defeats by Orbán, the last time 2 years ago.

## European elections - the first test

Péter Magyar announced that he will participate in the elections for the European Parliament, which will be held in Hungary on June 9, as well as in the local elections on the same day. Even though he is not yet releasing details of his election plans, it is clear that Mr Magyar is already well into his campaign.

He desires to create a political organisation that will bring together both conservative and liberal Hungarians who have felt cheated during Orbán's rule, and he will try to reclaim political life from the hands of what he claims are "oligarchs and anti-democratic elites".

Magyar's political beginnings have been controversial, and as much as his explosiveness has done for his political promotion, it is equally his biggest handicap.

## Because of the way he entered the political arena, Magyar has faced criticism for abusing his private relationship with his ex-wife

Since February, as a Fidesz insider, he has been publishing incriminating information about the party and the government leadership, including a recording of his conversation with his ex-wife, a close associate of Orbán and former Minister of Justice Judit Varga, in which she confirmed manipulations at the top of the judiciary.

Because of the way he entered the political arena, Magyar has faced criticism for abusing his private relationship with his ex-wife, who was regarded as the leader of Fidesz's list for the European elections.

That is why the pro-Orbán media call him the "narcissistic messiah". Fidesz communications chief Tamás Menczer placed him among Orbán's US-backed opponents, calling him "the new politician of the dollar left."

## A series of crises for PM Orbán

The timing of Magyar's appearance on the political scene is a major cause for concern for PM Orbán, as it followed a major affair that led to the **resignations** of state president Katalin Novák and justice minister Judit Varga in early February.

Orban's government did not put an end to the crisis in which 2 of his close associates admitted responsibility for a child sexual abuse pardoning scandal, and the unexpected mass protests at the invitation of Peter Magyar followed.

If he motivates the voters in the interior of Hungary starting next week, as he has already announced, Magyar could count on a good result in the elections for the European Parliament in early June.



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His political future, however, is not predictable in the long term because there have been similar situations across Europe where those anonymous managed to gain significant support by using the lethargy of the political scene and offering populist ideas and programmes.

This is the first time this has happened to Hungary in the 14 years since Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz Party have been in power, giving Mr Magyar and his supporters another hope that their movement would prosper.

If he participates in the election race on June 9, Magyar will no doubt play the card of a change of attitude towards the EU and a shift away from Orbán's blackmail policy and distancing from the shared policy of the bloc.

He has a favourable ground for this in the fact that the vast majority of Hungarians (more than 80%) are committed to remaining in the Union even after 20 years since the country became a member, despite the Eurosceptic policy of the ruling bloc.

But he will need more than that to succeed. Péter Magyar could be a factor that would shake the positions of the ruling party, which still has high approval ratings (about 40%). He will, however, face a split opposition front that feels threatened by his entry into politics, in addition to Orbán and his ardent supporters.