



**Report of the Head of the National Election Office on the public administration
duties and the implementation thereof on the occasion of the 8 April 2018
Parliamentary Elections**

**Rapporteur: dr. Ilona Pálffy
Head of the National Election Office**

May 2018, Budapest

Honoured Parliament!

According to the provisions of Article 13 paragraph (1) of Act XXXVI of 2013 on Electoral Procedure I shall inform you hereby on the public administration duties and the implementation thereof on the occasion of the 8 April 2018 Parliamentary Elections as follows:

On 11 January the President of the Republic of Hungary has set the date of the general election of the members of Parliament for the 8th of April 2018. The elections took place in 3.177 settlements in 10.285 polling districts and additionally at 118 foreign representations.

I.

Election authorities

1.282 local election offices, 97 parliamentary single-member district election offices in 106 parliamentary single districts, 118 foreign representation election offices, 19 territorial election offices plus the capital city election office and finally the National Election Office participated in organising the elections. Approximately 22.000 co-workers under oath fulfilled their election duties.

The election commissions operated with approx. 65.000 members. Independent candidates and nominating organizations putting forward lists could have appointed 2-2 proxy members into each polling station commission. During the 2018 parliamentary elections 32.129 such delegated members took part in the work of polling station commissions, that is considerably less than the more than 40.000 delegated members working during the previous, 2014 parliamentary elections. This year the Fidesz-KDNP party delegated 15.396 members, the Jobbik party 7.997, the MSZP-Párbeszéd 5.603, the DK 2.168, and the LMP 423. Nominating organisations made only limited use of the important option to closely follow along and participate in the implementation of ballot day procedures and thereby contribute to the lawfulness, fairness, impartiality of the elections and to restore the legal order of elections if necessary.

The elections have been monitored by 219 international observers.

II.

Information and Education

The National Election Office – aside from spreading the electoral notices as stipulated by law – this time again placed big emphasis on the information of voters. More than before, a total of 6 TV and radio spots have been broadcasted in public media and also published on the official election website for voting citizens. These media spots covered the topics of enrolment of Hungarian citizens without a domestic address, the procedure of voting by mail, enrolment for national minorities, nomination of candidates, how to apply in electoral matters and knowledge on ballot day procedures.

After the call for elections the Election Information Service of the National Election Office received about 6.000 inquiries via e-mail and 9.000 by phone. Most voters have been seeking and receiving information on enrolment for foreign representations voter lists, domestic absentee voting and enrolment in general.

In comparison to previous elections the number of public interest data requests has risen considerably. In the timespan between 1 January 2018 and the election results becoming final more than 300 data-inquiries have been received. Most of these have been related to information already published on the official election website, especially information related to polling stations or the number of enrolled voters at foreign representations. The week after election day minutes on the single-member district and national list results have been requested not only by the nominating organizations, but also by voters.

The polling district minutes (related to both single-member district candidate and party-list results minutes) have been processed by the National Election Office (hereinafter: NEO) in the 4 days following the voting by scanning and comparing to the data in the IT systems. The NEO provided a voluntary extra service by handing over polling district minutes for purposes of checking in electronic form also to nominating organisations which did not take fully advantage of delegating polling station commission members – such members receive a copy of the minutes on site.

Just as during previous general elections, Election Information Booklets have been published to substantially aid the training and work of polling station commissions. Separate training material has been handed out for election staff at foreign voting locations. On 4 occasions training seminars have been held for heads of territorial and single-member-district election offices, who then in turn continued with passing over the knowledge of lesser level election offices within their scope of authority. Several days have been allocated for IT training and preliminary testing of IT systems.

III.

Implementing the ballot

Number of voting citizens

A total of 8.312.264 citizens have been enrolled as voters, out of which 7.933.815 possessed a Hungarian residence and 378.449 did not. Based on registration as a national minority member, 59.235 citizens could vote for a national minority list.

Election turnout was 69,73% calculated on a basis of 5.796.268 voters (turnout for voters with a Hungarian residence was 70,22%).

The National Election Office – taking into consideration the experience gained from previous years – provided for the printing of 16.5 million ballot sheets.

Putting forward candidates

During the 2018 parliamentary elections the single-member district offices handed out more than half a million recommendation sheets for 3.690 voting citizens, and

after the notification of candidates verified quarter a million recommendation sheets in the 3 days at their disposal for this duty.

Out of the voters notified as single member candidates a total of 1.547 have been registered by the election commissions in charge, at the same time 1.258 candidates have been rejected. 195 registered candidates stepped down, 108 out of them stepped down so close to election day that there was no time to re-print ballots and therefore the names of these candidates (plus another one, who lost the right to stand for election) had to be stricken down manually from the ballots by the local election bodies.

23 out of 41 party lists met the criteria required for being put forward a national level party list and thereby to be placed on a ballot.

All of the 13 national minority self-governments put forward a nationality-list. The list of the National Self-Government of Germans in Hungary gained a preferential mandate.

Domestic Absentee Voting

Voters away from their residence but within the boundaries of Hungary could take advantage of domestic absentee voting. A total of 200.041 voting citizens cast their vote this way, while their number was 120.552 back in 2014.

During absentee voting, the voter concerned may cast his/her vote in a different location but on the very same candidate and list s/he would see in their domestic polling station. As the deadline for application for domestic absentee voting is close to election day, the proper type and amount of ballot sheets had to be delivered to the polling stations just one day before the ballot, requiring the precise and well-coordinated efforts of all election offices aside from the very fast pace of work.

The votes of absentee voters have been transferred to the National Election Office, where – together with ballots arriving from foreign voting venues – they had to be sorted and handed over to the competent domestic local election offices by the 6th day after the election. The National Election Office fulfilled duties related to domestic absentee voting smoothly, meeting all deadlines.

Voting at foreign representations

Voters with residence in Hungary but staying abroad at ballot day could vote at foreign representations.

58.310 voting citizens asked for inclusion into a foreign representation electoral roll and 51.854 of them actually did turn out to vote, meaning that participation has more than doubled compared to the election 4 years ago.

Most of them have been seeking to vote in London, 9.707 that is. Many have asked for inclusion in Munich (5.105) but also in 15 other foreign locations the number of voters went above 1.000.

According to the feedback from foreign representations elections have been held in an orderly manner, without significant problems and all voters standing in row could cast their voice. Cooperating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade the election at foreign representations went smoothly. I'd like to seize the opportunity to

thank all members of the foreign representation election offices for their dedicated work.

Voting of citizens without residence in Hungary

The National Election Office received a total of 462.550 requests related to the central electoral roll from voting citizens without a residence in Hungary. Approximately half of them have been filed after the 2014 parliamentary elections. During the 2018 parliamentary elections 378.449 voters have been listed on the roll of postal voters. The postal vote package has been returned by 267.233 voting citizens, meaning 70,64% of enrolled postal voters returned their ballots. Literally 38.412 voting packages have arrived by post, while 205.684 have been handed over at foreign representations and 23.137 have been handed over at seats of single-member districts.

Aside from the current deadlines as stipulated by procedural law it turned out to be a serious challenge that postal voting packages could only be distributed after the National Election Commission's decision on national party list ballot sheets. Sending of postal packages could only commence between 19-21 March, which resulted especially in overseas destination countries in rather late deliveries.

The processing of postal mail votes was handled by the National Election Office at 28 working stations with the support from 56 colleagues in a time span of 11 days. 225.471 of the returned postal voting packages have met the legal requirements.

Comparative data on postal votes

	parliamentary elections 2014	national referendum 2016	parliamentary elections 2018
enrolled citizens	193.793	274.627	378.449
returned postal voting packages	158.654 (82%)	154.145 (56%)	267.233 (71%)
valid postal voting packages (related to all returned packages)	128.712 (81%)	130.356 (85%)	225.471 (84%)

Securing Equal Opportunities during elections

The Act on Electoral Procedure provides considerably more aid for voters with disabilities. 142 voters with sight impairment have requested electoral notices printed with Braille code and 141 have requested Braille overlap for the ballot. The simplified information handout material on voting has been sent to 14.327 voters. In all single-member districts and all settlements polling stations with increased accessibility have been set up and 1374 voters requested the usage of such ones. 7255 polling stations (meaning 70% of the grand total) have been accessible for voters with disabilities.

The OSCE-ODIHR preliminary report highlighted „Positive steps have been taken to facilitate the right of persons with disabilities to vote”.

Duties related to Information Technology

The National Election Office conducted in light of the 2018 parliamentary elections 13 public procurements, out of which 12 required special security measures. The Commission for National Security of the Parliament gave permission to conduct these procurements in advance. Procurements have been made according to the principle of responsible and effective handling of public funding.

During preparation, for the sake of seamless implementation of IT duties, territorial and local election offices received an extra 1100 workstations and printers at the end of 2017. Also in that year, to reduce reliance on mobile networks and increase IT security, the transfer of greater settlements data-communication into the National Communication Backbone Network was completed.

Systematic changes in the legal framework and the goal to focus on security necessitated the further development of the election IT systems.

The „Election Gate” has been introduced. This new feature requires election office staff to enter the relevant systems with e-enabled ID cards. The multi-factor identification protocol of the Election Gate worked well right from the start and made in comparison to previous elections the identification of users much safer.

The refined National Election System supported electoral tasks ranging from re-districting to result aggregation. The system worked continuously and flawlessly, securing undisturbed activity of election offices during high-load work-phases such as candidate nomination and election-day itself. 90% of candidate and national list related polling station minutes have been recorded in the system by 23.50 by the election officials and by 03.00 in the morning after election-day the last minute has been entered as well.

Logistic, financial and other duty related applications performed also flawlessly.

To enhance IT security the Election IT Security Operation Centre has been set up to identify and counter possible cyber-threats as fast as possible. Thanks to this and other security measures, no critical IT security breach occurred. Neither during the preparatory, nor in the implementation phase of the election. No undue access to the systems occurred, the stored data stayed safe all along. In the entire election phase only accurate and official data has been displayed on the election website (including the new website and the backup portal as well).

The new website, introduced towards the end of 2017, faced overload problems and services had to be reduced on election-day for about an hour. For the sake of undisturbed and continuous web-broadcast the backup portal took over from 10.00 am. For nominating organizations and media the data feed was maintained continuously through VIP channels also during the phase that proved to be a challenge for the main website.

IV.

Financial Management Data

The National Election Office planned an expense of 8.9 billion HUF to cover the implementation of the 2018 parliamentary elections. 620 million HUF from the grand total have been allocated to raise the reimbursement of polling station commissioners and minute keepers. They received an honorary fee of 20.000 HUF per person during the last elections 4 years ago, this year it rose to 35.000 HUF, effectively a raise of 75%.

The sources are as follows: 2017 Act on the State Budget – 500 mill HUF, 2018 Budget – 6,6 billion HUF, savings of the NEO from previous years – 1 billion 180 million HUF plus as a supplementary aid the already mentioned 620 million HUF for the honorary fee raise.

Nearly half of the planned expenses were related to central duties (IT, network, printing, postal voting) and the other half covered the costs of local and foreign representation election bodies.

Fees imposed by election commissions due to violation of electoral law related to nomination sheets or campaigning amounted to 739.756.500 HUF

V.

Experiences, amendment proposals

Legal amendment proposals formulated by the National Election Office aiming to enhance electoral procedure and eliminate legal gaps are still relevant. In my current report I'd like to underline the following findings related to the 2018 parliamentary elections:

Prolonging the election phase

Based on experience gained from previous parliamentary elections, the timespan available to dispatch and return postal vote packages is currently severely limited. A few days more ahead would enable voters to return postal votes timely from distant locations.

Verifying nomination sheets

More than ever before concerns have been raised with copying and forging nomination sheets. Election offices do not have the means to check supporting signatures of voters by comparing them to some authentic sample, filtering forged signatures is currently not possible within the framework of electoral procedure. Criminal investigation is needed to clarify such fraud but this is time consuming and can take even years to be concluded successfully. Therefore I deem it necessary to refine the nomination procedure and adjust criminal action deadlines to the rules of candidate nomination. The National Election Commission issued a number of

guidelines for the purpose of a more uniform verification procedure of supporting signatures, and I consider them to be worthy of legal codification.

Modifying the deadlines of enrolment requests

Processing the high amount of last-minute enrolment requests (domestic absentee voting, mobile ballot box) requires substantially prolonged work and resulted already in many national level elections in the late night start of the printing of local electoral roll in all local election offices over the country. Therefore I suggest setting an earlier deadline for filing electoral roll requests by switching it from the currently in-force 16.00 pm to 12.00 am. Taking advantage of this new deadline, printing of electoral rolls for all polling stations could commence on Friday afternoon and ballots for domestic absentee voters could be dispatched to the election offices earlier as well.

Domestic Absentee Voting

It is clear that, the biggest challenge within the current legal framework are cases of long queues of voters, standing in line for hours at polling stations designated for receiving domestic absentee voters – this was the case in 2018 and already in 2014 as well. Standing in line after 19.00 has the effect that – following NEC guideline 8/2014 - informative data on results cannot be published until the very last voter casts his ballot. Domestic Absentee Voting is increasingly popular and nowadays not 5-6.000, but 10-12.000 voters can be expected at the most cramped polling stations. It is utmost necessary to modify the rules for special polling stations used by domestic absentee voters.

VI.

Final thoughts

Sadly, administrative errors – not influencing the final results – occurred during this election, too. To name a few examples: polling station commissions did not fill in the proper row the results of some national lists (these errors have been fixed following legal remedies); in some cases voters did not get the proper ballot (based on a regulation dating back to 1997 this is remedied by eliminating the same amount of votes from each list, thus also increasing the number of invalid votes in the affected polling stations).

Still, despite above mentioned issues we can conclude that during the year 2018 elections the execution of public administration duties went lawfully, according to the Fundamental Law (Constitution) and the legal framework. This is confirmed by the OSCE-ODIHR preliminary report: “The election administration at all levels enjoyed overall confidence among stakeholders and was generally perceived as impartial. “ furthermore: „The NEC and the NEO fulfilled their mandates and managed the elections in a professional and transparent manner at all levels, generally meeting deadlines”.

Finally I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to all those taking part in preparing and organising the election: public and government officials, public employees, members

of all election bodies and commissions, whose dedicated efforts contributed to the successful implementation of the election.

I hereby ask the Honoured Parliament to accept my report.

dr. Ilona Pálffy

Head of the National Election Office

Budapest, May 2018