

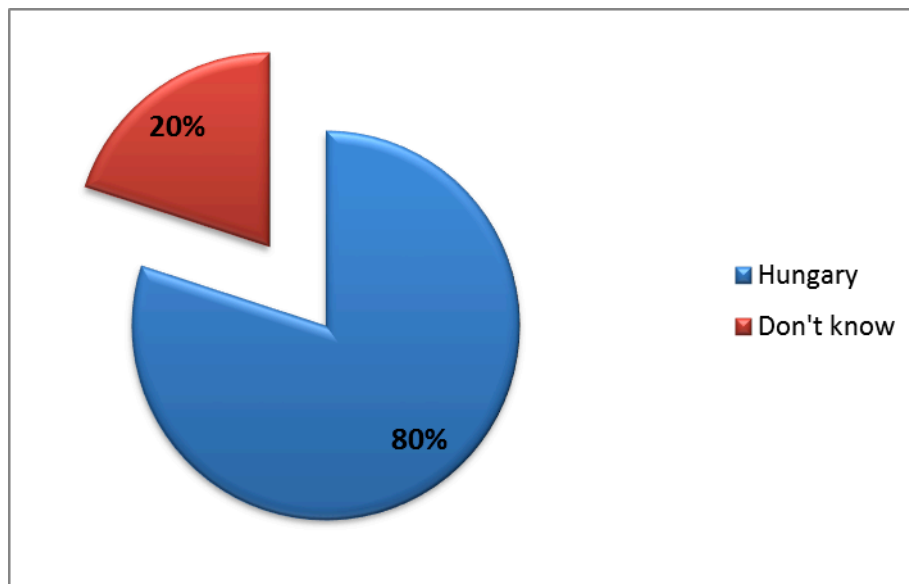
Europe - how its president sees it

A public opinion survey project conducted jointly by Policy Solutions and Medián shows that Hungary's term at the helm of Europe had little effect on the popular perception of the EU. Though most citizens have heard about Hungary's position as the rotating leader of the Union, they know little about the details of the presidency and (rightly) perceive that little has changed on account of Hungary having held this office. Even considering how difficult it is to convey the relative merits or failures of a mostly public policy-based agenda, it is tempting to feel disappointed by the minor positive impact Hungary's most important international position since letting East German refugees leave in 1989 has had on both the country's international perception and its own perception of the European Union.

The results of a joint research project by Policy Solutions and Medián, conducted during the final month of the rotating presidency of the European Union, reveal that towards the end of the presidency 80% of respondents knew off the top of their head that Hungary was holding this position in the first half of 2011. Though the news concerning the EU presidency did not reach everyone, they were by no means ineffectual: the two institutes' joint study in December 2010 had revealed that only 45% knew what role Hungary was to play in the Union over the following months.

Graph 1. As to your knowledge, which country holds the rotating presidency of the European Union?

Open question, number of mentions, percent

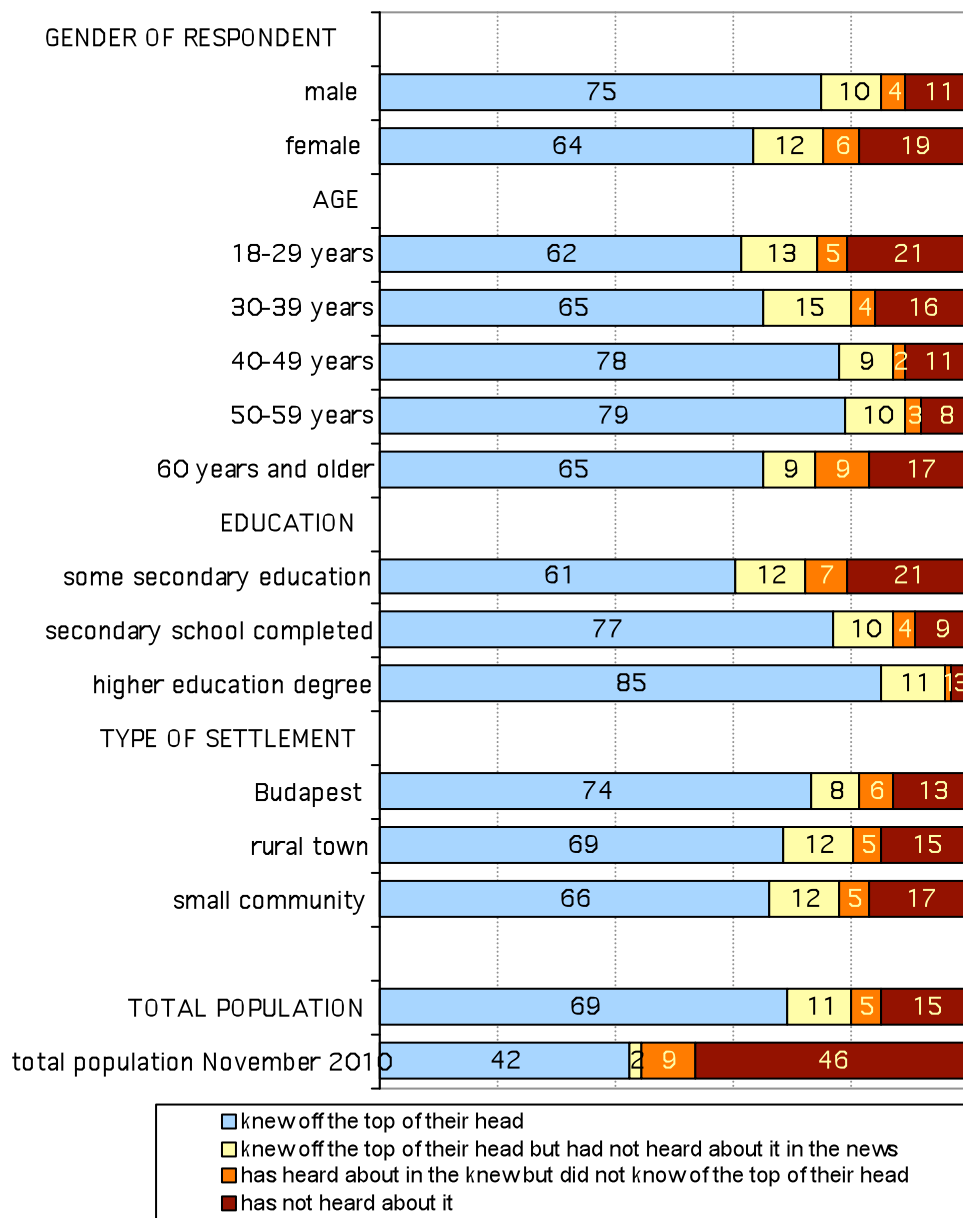


If you add those who remember based on the news they recalled, then in addition to those who knew the answer off the top of their head, the overall correct response rate was 85% (six months ago this ratio was 51%) - this was the proportion of those who in some shape or form had heard that Hungary held the rotating presidency, while 15% of the population

had failed to learn about this news. The level of awareness regarding the EU presidency shows a marked correlation with educational attainment.

While among those with a higher education degree practically everyone (96%) had heard of Hungary's rotating presidency, among those with only a secondary school degree this proportion was significantly lower (79%). A breakdown into age groups shows that ignorance – as compared to the data observed six months ago – is most widespread among the youngest: in the age group 18-29 78% knew of the presidency. At the end of 2010 this ratio had been 40%.

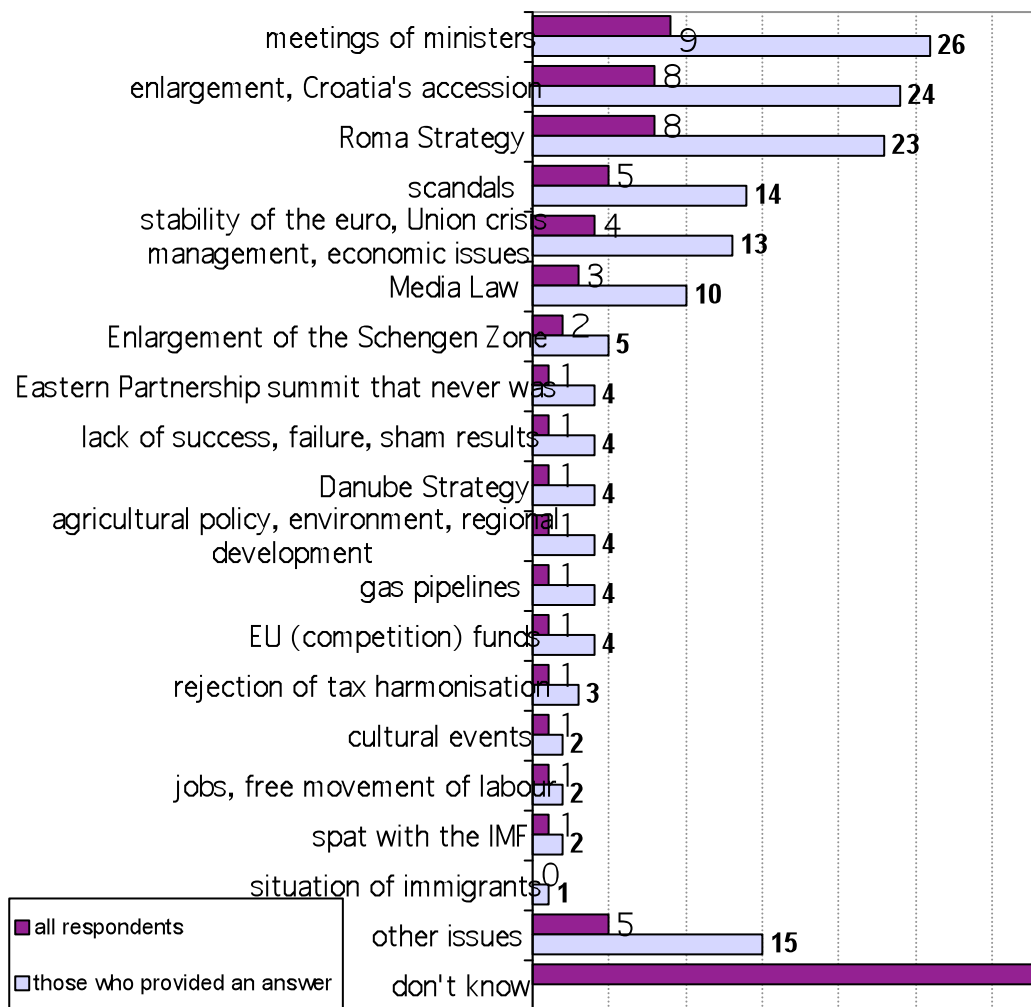
Graph 2 Awareness of Hungary holding the EU rotating presidency
by demographic groups, percent



The research conducted by Policy Solutions and Medián shows: the fact that a relatively large number of people have heard of the rotating presidency does not imply that Hungarians are aware of the main events or results of the past six months. 67% of respondents could not name a single event or achievement from the period of the Hungarian presidency. Of those who provided a response, most (26%) recalled that various summit meetings took place in the town of Gödöllő. Among the substantial components of the presidency, most respondents mentioned the accession talks with Croatia (24%) and the work on the Roma Strategy (23%). The scandals and criticisms that overshadowed the rotating presidency for months – such as the media law or the uproar concerning the constitution – on end were recalled only by 14% of the respondents.

Graph 3 Please name three events or achievements that come to mind regarding Hungary holding the rotating presidency of the European Union!

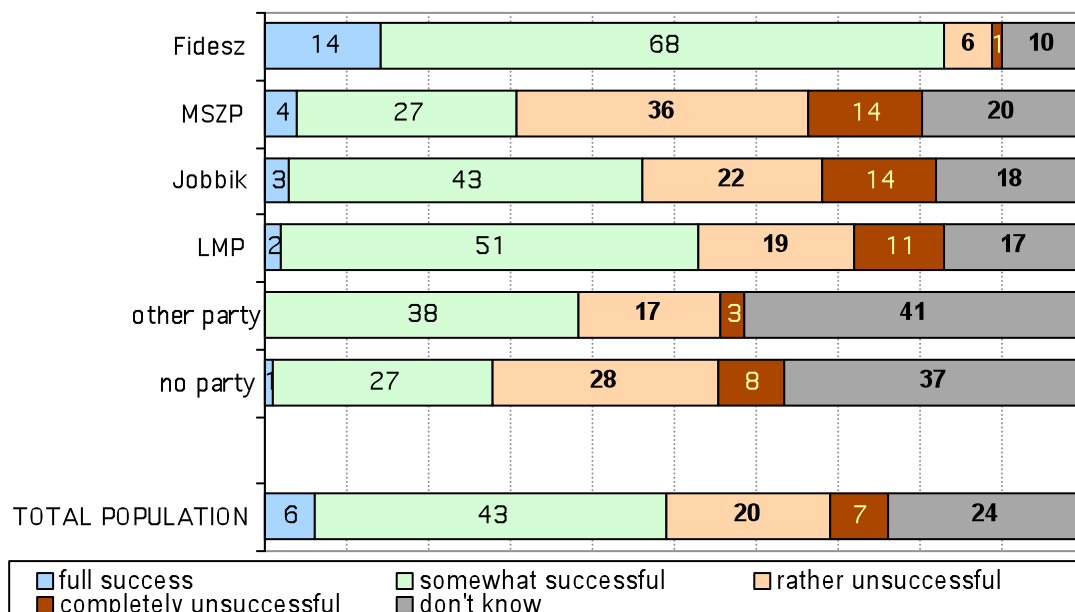
Open question, ratio of mentions among all respondents and among those who provided an answer



49% of respondents think that Hungary’s rotating presidency was successful, while 27% believe it was unsuccessful. It is hardly surprising that Fidesz supporters view the past six months most positively (82%). Among the supporters of the opposition parties, however, only among MSZP sympathisers is there a plurality (50%) of respondents who believe that the Hungarian presidency was unsuccessful. Among LMP (53%) and Jobbik (46%) voters the prevailing attitude is that the rotating presidency was more successful than not. Among those who considered the past six month a success, the most typical attitude was that it was “moderately positive”; almost no one among the opposition party supporters thought that the rotating presidency was an unmitigated success, and even among Fidesz-voters only 14% thought so.

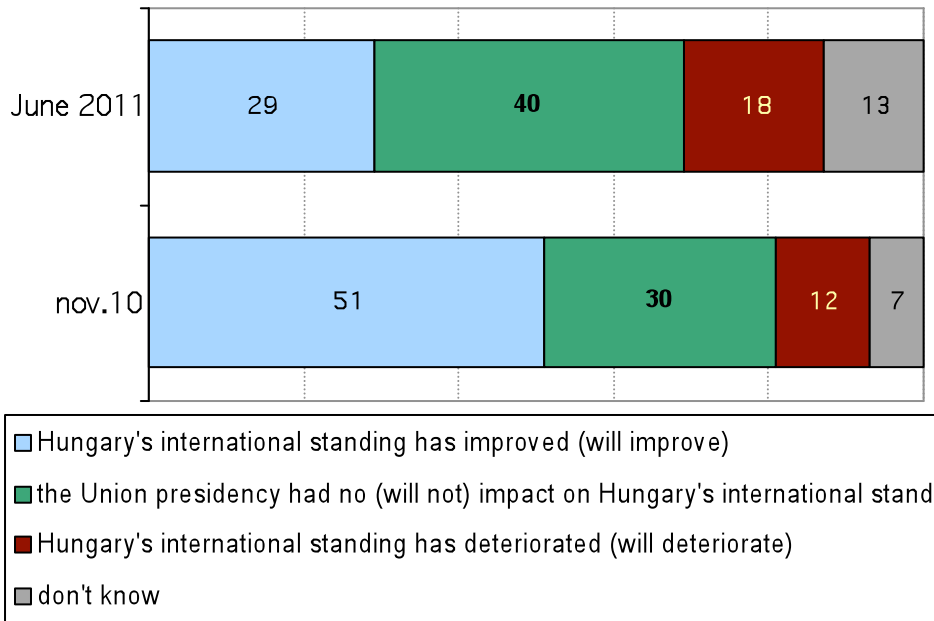
Graph 4 Evaluation of the performance of Hungary’s rotating presidency

According to party preferences, percent



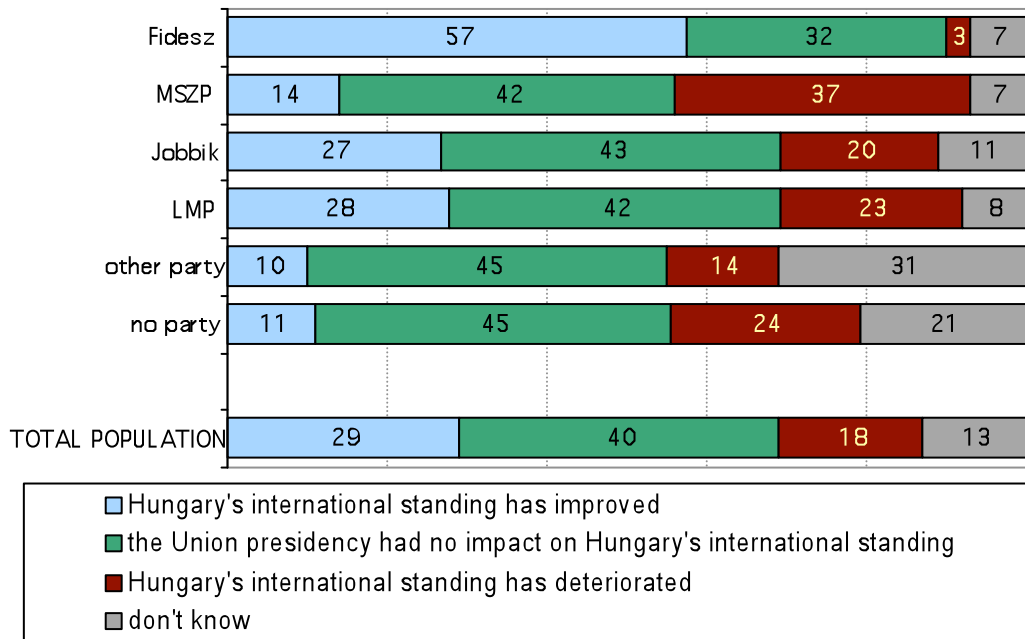
From the subsequent questions it emerges that for Hungarian voters an improvement in Hungary’s international standing is not among the criteria of success. While 49% thought that the EU presidency was a success, only 29% believe that Hungary’s reputation has improved. The largest group (40%) believes that Hungary’s assessment has not changed, a perception that displays a significant shift as compared to the preliminary expectations. At the end of 2010, 51% of respondents expected that the rotating presidency would bring about an improvement in Hungary’s international standing, while only 30% believed that it won’t bring any significant change in how the country is perceived. With the exception of Fidesz’ supporters, “no change” was the most frequently given response to this question. According to 57% of Fidesz voters, Hungary’s standing has ameliorated, while among Jobbik voters (27%) this ratio is considerably smaller, and it is downright puny among MSZP supporters (14%).

Graph 5 The effects of the rotating presidency on Hungary's international standing and the public's prior expectations of what these effects would be percent



Graph 6 In your assessment, what effect did Hungary's position as rotating president of the European Union have on its international standing?

By party preferences, percent

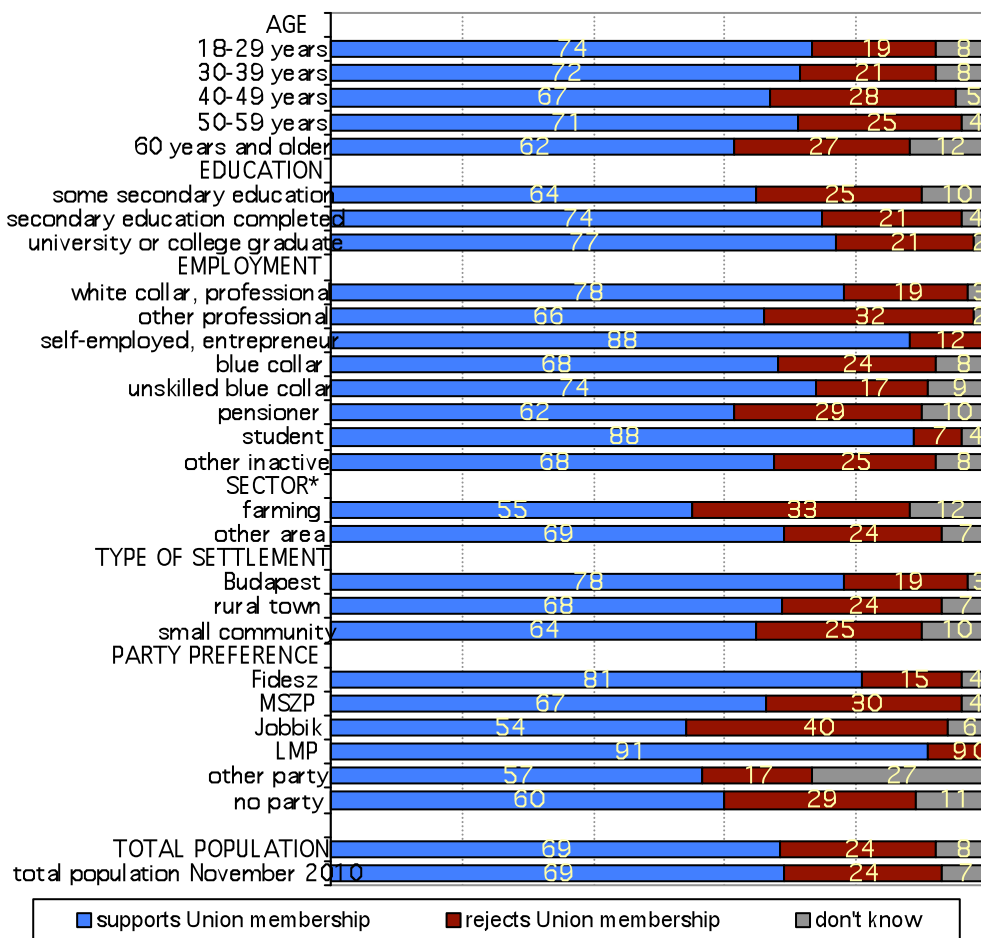


The past few months have yielded no change in how Hungarians view Hungary's Union membership. In a hypothetical referendum, the same proportion (69%) would vote for

staying in the Union as at the end of 2010. In other words, the EU has not become more popular in the past six months, though it is also true that euro-scepticism also does not exceed the level measured before the presidency (24%). Below the seemingly unchanged surface there are some identifiable shifts, however. Among potential LMP and Fidesz voters, the proportion of those who support EU membership grew, from 80% to 91% and from 71% to 81%, respectively. At the same time, support for EU membership declined among MSZP and Jobbik voters, from 73% to 67%, and from 58% to 54%, respectively. As compared to the end of 2010, the chasm between the assessments of strata most friendly towards the Union and those most inimical to it has widened: of those employed in agriculture only 55% would choose to remain in the EU, down from 58%. Among the most supportive group, students, the ratio of membership-supporters has grown from 83% to 88%.

Graph 7 If the past six years had only been a trial period in the European Union and we would have to reaffirm our willingness to be members in a referendum, how would you vote in such a referendum?

By demographic groups, percent



In the analysis of our previous survey at the end of 2010, we pointed out that in terms of the thematic subjects it decided to tackle, the rotating presidency was playing it safe. It chose issues regarding which there is a cross-party consensus. This consensus has become even stronger in the past six months. On a scale of 1 to 100, support for the Danube Strategy stood at 71 six months ago, while in June 2011 it stands at 80 points. The Hungarian public also agrees that in the framework of its joint energy policy the EU should build its own gas pipeline (76 points now, 74 points six months ago), and it also agrees with the necessity of a Roma Strategy (69 points six months ago and 70 points in June 2011).

Graph 8. I will read several statements now, please indicate in how far you agree with each of them individually

Average values on a 100 point scale (0 = does not agree at all, 100 = agree completely)

