Presidentialization in the Hungarian Political System: New Modes of Governance in the last 25 Years

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First draft, please do not quote.
Abstract
In the last three decades political and institutional assets of modern democracies have encountered several changes. Some parliamentary democracies have become more presidentialized in their political attitude without changing their formal institutional structure. This process, the so called presidentialization of politics has three faces: the executive arena, the party arena and the electoral arena.¹ This paper analysis the change of the Hungarian political system in the last 25 years with a special focus on the changes of the executive. The position of the executive is determined by two elements, its power in the political system and the balance of power in the government. The paper studies how the presidential tendencies, such as the reinforcement of the government and of the Prime Minister, have appeared in Hungary examining the relevant reforms of the internal structure and everyday function of the government and of its decision-making processes. The paper takes into account the period between the 1980s and the 2010s.

Keywords: presidentialization, government, Prime Minister, Hungary

1. The presidentialization of politics

The interpretation of presidentialization requires distinction between de facto and de jure presidentialization. During the process of de facto presidentialization leaders increase their power resources and their autonomy both in relation to their own party and within the executive branch. Electoral processes change and as a result, attention shifts onto the candidates. While the system formally remains parliamentary, functions and relations between dominant players change fundamentally. The process of presidentialization influences a particular political system in a way that causes a shift from collective political power and responsibility to individual power and responsibility, while the form of government remains unchanged.²

De facto presidentialization is based on the working logic of presidential political systems and it generates three major changes: firstly, it ensures increased power resources for the leader of the executive branch, secondly it grants greater autonomy for the leadership, and thirdly, it personalizes the electoral process in a way, that it becomes leadership-centred. According to Poguntke and Webb, presidentialization occurs in three major fields, specifically in the executive branch, on the party level and in the electoral arena.³

In the executive branch the presidentialization of politics can be identified with the weakening of the cabinet’s collective character and the empowering of the premier’s executive power. Increasing the power of premiers has two important effects: firstly, the number of fields directly controlled by the head of government expands, secondly their ability to successfully overcome other political players with differing opinions. *De jure* presidential systems ensure a greater executive power for the leader, that is based on her/his constitutional independence from the parliament. In these systems presidents do not answer to the parliament, in most cases they can individually select their cabinet and may govern without significant external interference. The president enjoys a great degree of intra-executive autonomy, without having to face intra-party influence and leverage.

1.1. The criteria of presidentialization on the level of the premier and the cabinet

The presidentialization of politics can be grasped via numerous changes on the level of the premier and the cabinet. The conceptualization of those phenomena is of crucial importance, because these criteria will be scrutinized in the country study later in this paper. The criteria do not bear the same weight in all cases; moreover, sometimes their utilization can even be counterproductive. It is not possible to establish a generalized system of criteria applicable with maximum reliability and efficiency to each and every country, because presidentialization is an extremely complex phenomenon that is influenced by the very different historical heritage and traditions of the inspected political systems. I prioritised the following list of criteria taking into account the increase of powers and grade of autonomy, the expansion of administrative staff and functions, all belonging to the premier. The criteria of presidentialization vis-à-vis the change of relations between the head of government and the cabinet are as follows:

- the expansion of the premier’s powers,
- the greater centralization and coordination of political processes,
- the increase of the control that the Prime Minister’s Office exercises over political decision processes,
- the shifting of policy decisions initiatives from ministries to the Prime Minister’s Office or to external consultants,
- the concentration of controlling and consultative resources in centre of government,
- the growing importance of bilateral relations and meetings between the Prime Minister and certain ministers,
- the growth of the premier’s personal advisories and consultative bodies in numbers, allowing her/him to achieve greater autonomy and independence from the cabinet and from bureaucracy itself,
- the increase of financial resources the head of government has control over,


the shift towards an integrated communication strategy controlled by the premier (setting up communication and public relations offices with the purpose of articulating and explaining the Prime Minister’s political ideas to the voters),

- opinion polls concluded by the Prime Minister’s Office about the premier’s popularity and voter’s preferences,

- increasing fluctuation of ministers,

- the growth of technocrats and politicians without party allegiance in numbers.

In order to examine whether the abovementioned changes can or cannot be observed in present day’s Hungary, I shall scrutinize Constitutions, laws related to government bodies and their reforms. The application of rules and regulations and the functioning of everyday politics will be looked at through the glasses of available statistical data.

2. The institutionalisation of presidentialization on the stage of the Hungarian government

The governing system that was formed by the law XXXI of 1989 and law XL of 1990 became consolidated in the recent years in spite of the missing political consensus and its essential fundamentals remained the same until the basic law of 2011. However, the central body of the government and the working body of the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and the Prime Ministry have substantially changed.

In order to introduce how and in what measures the presidentialisation of the Hungarian political system appeared at the stage of the executive, I am going to analyse in details how the PMO has developed into a governing centre of authority in the recent 25 years, how this office has exerted a growing control over the political decision-making processes, and how the concentration of controlling and advisory means has grown within the governing centre. Has the number of the Prime Minister’s personal advisors and advisory syndicates grown, how have the available financial sources been modified, has an integrated Prime Minister lead and controlled governing communication developed?

In order to review the antecedents, I am going to discuss the predecessors of the PMO briefly before the changing of the political system, the Secretary of the Cabinet Council working until 1 April 1988 and the Office of the Cabinet Council working until 5 June 1990.

2.1. The working body of the prime Minister until 1998

2.1.1. The changing of the political system and the beginning of the 1990s

In the totalitarian state the government was not a political centre, power was not represented by the government but by the party, the secretary general of Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (MSZMP) and the Central Committee. The government practically “administrated” the party’s political decisions. This kind of structure started to change at the end of the 1980s, well before the political changes. While the Secretary of the Cabinet Council was not, the

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Office of the Cabinet Council was lead by an undersecretary from 1988 onwards. The Secretary of the Cabinet Council fulfilled the legal and administrative tasks in connection with governing. They edited the official papers, provided the necessary economic and technological conditions for government operation, furthermore, they also dealt with the high rank political leaders’ personal things. However, the secretary only had a formal role in decision-preparation. From 1987 a real political opposition started to be formed and the government had to react to it. From 1988 the Secretary of the Cabinet Council changed, its former spheres of action were expanded and its name was changed to the Office of the Cabinet Council. The Administration of the Cabinet Council was established which had an important role in political decision-making and this new office was lead by an undersecretary and the number of apparatus was increased. The coordination of the Secretaries of the Government Committees, the tasks of the government spokespeople and media management, furthermore, the coordination of the government and parliament were reorganised here.

Starting from the Németh-Cabinet, the government has gradually changed into a centre of power and a political forming factor. This tendency of course became even more significant along with the events of 1989-1990. Antall József made efforts in concentrating power and centralising. He bloated the Prime Minister’s Office and appointed a number of ministers without portfolio and political under-secretaries. With the help of the Government Committees and Cabinets, he built a structure of a double decision-making ministry system. In spite of all the efforts, in the first term the Prime Minister’s Office did not get too much central role.

It is important to highlight one more change. The political changes did not only lead to the changing of the name of the Office of the Cabinet Council, but also to the change of its essential substance as it did not work on as a government apparatus but as a prime ministry apparatus.  

2.1.2. The Prime Minister’s Office changes into a ministry: the provisions of the Horn-government

Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) – despite of having a stable majority in the beginning of the second term – decided to form a coalition. The needs of a coalition lead to another increase in the number of leading positions. As a result of the government coalition, the Coalition Reconciliation Council (CRC) got an important function in the preparation of decisions. The role of the institution was opposing a chancellor-type governing in the beginning of the first term because the important questions were not discussed within the government but at reconciliation meetings of the two parties. The under-secretary of executive lead the Office of the Prime Ministry in this term, however, it should have had a minister from 1997. This change was a huge step in the life of the institution and in the role it fulfilled in the governing system as it offered the possibility of lifting the PMO to the rank of a ministry. This change of the PMO and the possibility of appointing a minister to lead it

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6 Hungarian Constitution (Law XX of 1949) 33/A §.
7 Law LXXX of 1997, 39.§.
also re-valued its role in the political system and in decision-making processes. The role of the PMO was to harmonize the government’s parliamentary work, to prepare decision-making and to harmonize government communication. The main decision-preparatory institute however in this term was not the PMO but the meeting of under-secretary executives where the representative of the PMO, the under-secretaries of ministries, the deputy under-secretary of the PMO, the cabinet leaders of the ministers without portfolio, the Minister of Interior and the deputy of the Prime Minister’s cabinet leader took part. The cabinets working beside the government (Government Cabinet, Economic-, European Integration- and Home Security Cabinet) had an important role in preparation in which the affected ministers took part. It is important to mention the government committees which in opposition to the cabinets did not only have a consulting role but also an independent decision-making role. From 1996 onwards the PMO has had a more significant role in the preparation of decision-making and has helped the harmonizing of the government’s parliamentary work. The PMO prepared an expert’s report on the discussed proposals and bills that was not only a constitutional and legal but also an economic political valutation.

2.2. The Hungarian government system between 1998 and 2010
2.2.1. The “flagship” of governing: the Prime Minister’s Office
The most outstanding change of the term was the changing of the PMO into a central institution and as a result of a 1997 law it was lead by a minister. The minister leading the PMO appeared on sessions which operated with an increased number of participants as with the emergence of the new ministries eighteen people took part. The charter of the PMO stated that the institute lead and harmonised the government’s strategic activities. So the changing of the PMO to a chancellor office started. As a result the whole procedure of decision-making was in the hands of the Prime Minister. The government aimed to provide the conditions to a political leadership and government coalition. The coalition reconciliation order changed and became divided into two parts. Reconciliations about parliamentary work were made by the PMO leading chancellor minister while the political reconciliations were made at the cabinet sessions. This later was only attended by the leaders of the important ministries and the leading minister of the PMO. So partially the order of coalition reconciliation has also changed. It is important to highlight that although a coalition government was established this term, the necessity of reconciling with partners caused less trouble to Orbán Viktor than to Horn Gyula in the previous term because of the ideologically more homogeneous coalition partners. So according to this, one can conclude that the fact how strong and dominant the Prime Minister turns to be in the government and in the political system, is owing to the constitution and union of the coalition.

Among the reforms aiming to make the PMO stronger one outstanding thing was the referature-system. Altogether six referatures were established within the institution: an economic and financial, a socio-political, an agricultural, an environmental and

8 Government decree 137/1998
infrastructural, an internal affairs and justice one, and one on external affairs and defence. The referatures were the different specific policy units and main departments of the PMO. Their tasks were to follow and harmonise the work of the specific portfolios and to work out individual specific advice. The referatures limited the freedom of the ministries. 10

Besides introducing the system of referatures a kind of reorganisation also started because those offices that did not connect to the strategic tasks of the institution directly were reorganised. The Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad was joined to the State Department, the Government Office of National and Ethnic Minorities was joined to the Department of Justice bout youth were handed to the Youth Portfolio. These reorganisations had a positive effect on the PMO because it reduced those tasks that were not in connection with leading and coordination but rather had to do with specific policies. PMO from here did not only have administrative tasks but it turned to a political body because it was also concerned with the strategic leadership of the government and validated the needs of the local governments with the decision-making processes.

2.2.2. Reforms of the fourth term

The scope, the structure and the running of the PMO were all re-regulated as the first steps of the Medgyessy-government. 11 They did not cancel the referature-system but they changed its name. The position of a minister without a portfolio was cancelled and their tasks were taken over by the leading minister of the PMO. The scope of duties of the PMO was expanded with tourism and territorial development while previously cancelled institutions (The Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad and the Government Office of National and Ethnic Minorities) were rejoined to the PMO. The aim of the reform was only to leave those tasks for the PMO that are directly in connection with the Prime Minister’s and the government’s decision-making and coordination.

However, the position of a Government Commissioner was cancelled, a lot of cabinets, councils and committees were established and the number of honorary and political under-secretaries who had individual specific tasks increased. Due to the changes the number of the people working in the PMO increased from 700 from 540 by 2002.

When examining the interests and causes behind these reforms, it is important to highlight that Medgyessy Péter became a Prime Minister as an “outsider” therefore for him it was twice as important to strengthen the position of the PMO and his own position as well. In autumn 2004 Gyurcsány Ferenc became the new Prime Minister who – owing to the strange political situation – did not change the governing structure or the programme of the government. At the same time, he managed to develop an autarchy for himself by 2005. The party turned into a one-person party. 12 The minister leading the PMO remained Kiss Péter, but the leadership of the Prime Minister’s Cabinet was taken over by Szilvásy György. In order to increase the number of supporters of Gyurcsány, he significantly increased the number of PMO workers and turned it to be the most important institution in political

patronage. He established parallel apparatuses, formed informal advisory syndicates, increased the number of government commissioners and founded the informal Prime Minister Commissioner position. He separated his own cabinet from the PMO apparatus.

2.2.3. The changes of 2006

After the elections of 2006 some changes in the government structure were made under the second Gyurcsány-government. The basis of the reforms were given by the law LVII. 2006 which is about the government institutions, the members of the government and the status of the under-secretaries. Besides the content of the reform its preparation, elaborations and acceptance is also important as the so called government law was developed without the apparatus, without technical agreements but with the involvement of external experts. The reform had formal effects in three fields: the Prime Minister’s function, decision-making and the scope of authority of the office-leading minister. It is important to mention the introduction of the profession-political agreements, that limited the single ministers’ authority and strengthened the Prime minister a lot more than the referature-system as this new system controlled and influenced the portfolios work. At these meetings the political, professional, judicial and financial sufficiency of the amendments were examined. Besides the formal changes there were visible informal changes in government work-style as well. Among the informal changes the most important ones were: the growing number of cabinet sittings lead by the Prime Minister and the decreasing of the length of the government sittings.

As a result of the reforms of 2006 the PMO was reorganised. The office structure became vertical, its units depended on the Prime Minister or the leading minister of the PMO. The Prime Minister’s Cabinet was dissolved and as a result the Prime Minister could use the whole office apparatus to fulfill his duties. The scope of authorities of the leading minister of the PMO was expanded as the civil home security services and the National development Agency were joined to the institution.

Although the government organisation law of 2006 strictly limited the number of under-secretaries who can be appointed, this regulation was weaker in concerning the PMO. Within the PMO four or five under-secretaries could be appointed. Along with the institution leading minister, the maximum number of government leaders was ten in the PMO. It is essential to highlight among the reforms concerning the PMO structural organisation those that dissolved the prime minister’s cabinet and the cabinet leader position. The aim of this regulation was to develop a one-person, one-centre type of leadership. The change of the institution because of its size and versatile scope of authorities was a failure. In 2007, the
The Prime Minister’s Cabinet was restored.\textsuperscript{18} In 2007 the government cabinet was rearranged which then became a strategic and operative body and did not deal with decision-making only. As a result of the reforms, it was the tasks of the government cabinet to define the activities concerning the realisation of the government programme, to discuss medium- and long-term strategies, to prepare the government’s decision-making, and to state their minds about uncertain amendments.\textsuperscript{19}

Government decision-making changed first as the result of the reforms of 2006 and then 2007. The most important aim of the first actions of the second Gyurcsány-government was to ensure that only those amendments get to the under-secretary sittings that have already been technically and professionally agreed. In order to do this a three-step agreement system was developed, within which the very first step was a profession political discussion in the PMO. This was the so called pre-screening that examined whether the given amendment accords with the government’s programme. After this came agreements with the portfolios and social partners and finally a discussion on the under-secretary sitting. The second Gyurcsány-government did not only rearrange the PMO and the process of decision-making but also strengthened the Prime Minister. According to the reforms all the political leaders were appointed or dismissed by the Prime Minister, he ratified the structural and operational regulations of the different ministries and appointed commissioners to key fields who were directed by him. The reform law of 2006 stated that the prime Minister can instruct ministers and the leaders of the government offices.\textsuperscript{20}

The mentioned actions of the Prime Minister in the fifth period all served the formal and informal strengthening of the Prime Ministers authority. The PMO turned into a directly lead government centre governed by the prime Minister.

2.3. The Hungarian governing system after 2010

2.3.1. The structure of the government and essential fundamentals concerning the governing syndicate

The second Orbán-government basically maintained the government model of 1990 in spite of introducing a lot of changes concerning the structure, the operation and the character of the government. The most important elements of the government (its structure, inner connections, situation of the Prime Minister) were left without changes, however, drastic changes were made concerning the number ministries, which were radically decreased. He formed the so called “top-ministries”, rearranged the division of tasks among the portfolios and introduced the position of the permanent deputy Prime Minister with which he modified the setup and operation mechanisms of the government and dismissed the principle of all the ministers to be equal. The constitution of 2011 changed the former regulations concerning the tasks and scope of authorities of the government.\textsuperscript{21} Although it has not been totally defined in details in the law XX of 1949, as most of the constitutions do not, it only contained general

\textsuperscript{18} Müllergyörgy: Magyar kormányzati viszonyok pp. 127.
\textsuperscript{19} Government decision 1044/2007.
\textsuperscript{20} Law LIV of 2006.
\textsuperscript{21} Law XX of 1949. 35.§ a)-m).
The constitution of 2011 states that the government is the executive’s general and the administration’s major body. It explains that its scope of authority is everything that according to the constitution or any laws do not belong to any other bodies. This kind of determination of the scope of authority would not mean the strengthening of the government by itself in case all the other departments scope of authorities were clearly defined in the constitution or in any laws. Furthermore, if the tools of the controlling bodies (the Constitutional Court, the Parliament, the president of the Republic) did not decrease. The full picture is more layered and in a lot of cases totally contradictory. The Constitution differentiated the government from the other offices on a constitutional level and made it stronger opposing to them. The opportunities of the Constitutional Court for reviewing was decreased in the cases of economic and financial laws. Furthermore, it limited the cases with which one could turn to the Constitutional Court. While the law XX of 1949 said that anyone can start a procedure at the Constitutional Court, according to the Constitution now it can only be done by the government, 1/4th of the representatives and the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

It is important to mention, that some of those direct or indirect changes aiming to strengthen the government made it even weaker compensating presidentialisation of the institutions. The Constitution expanded the circle of the 2/3rd laws beside fundamental rights and the regulations of the state offices to social and economic policy cases (family protection, national wealth management, exclusive state property, burden sharing and the regulations of pension system). Furthermore, it expanded the scope of cases belonging to these institutions with the regulations on forming and operating institutions that are independent from the government and with the bank-act.

2.3.2. The structure and organisational system of the government
The government used to mean the Prime Minister and the equal ministers until 2010. This structure changed as a result of the reforms of the second Orbán-government as the position of the Deputy Prime Minister was introduced and with this one or more of the equal ministers emerged. The minister of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice emerged from the other members of the government because besides being in charge of eleven professional policies, he became in charge of the unification of government work. Besides government coordination, the minister of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice became the general deputy of the Prime Minister as well that strengthened his advantaged position and by this broke off the former principle of ministers’ equality. It was a bit modulated by the

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23 Fundamental Law of Hungary, 15. §.
24 Law XX of 1949.32/A § (3).
26 Müller György: Magyar kormányzati viszonyok pp. 29.
27 Law XX of 1949 33. §.
28 Besides the general deputy prime minister Viktor Orbán nominated a second deputy prime miniter too, Dr. Zsolt Semjén.
government regulation that said that all the members of the government have the same equal right for voting.29

The government significantly decreased the number of ministries with the development of the previously mentioned “top-ministry” system. The rearranging of the structure of the government – the general number of thirteen, in the previous period eleven ministries were decreased to eight30 – did not only simplify the structure of the government and made a more solid government policy possible, but it also centralised the procedure of decision-making. A significant task- and scope of authority concentration was realised in the ministries by fusing the different departments.31

Another change was concerning the structure of the government that the Prime Minister could appoint a Commissioner to deal with the tasks belonging to his duties. The mandate of the Prime Minister’s Commissioner is not limited in time, it is not maximised as in the case of government commissioners but it is only for a given period.32 It is outstanding that the first Prime Minister’s Commissioner – right after the shuffle of the government – was appointed as a spokesperson by Orbán Viktor and with this strengthening the Prime Minister’s communication within the institution as well.33

The regulations concerning the government commissioner position remained almost unchanged comparing to the law LVII of 2006. A change, however, was that their limitation in number was broken off and they could get appointed according to the recommendation of the Minister of Government Actions and their secretary was also in this ministry and not in the Prime Ministry.34 The new structural government law ended the limitation of the number of the ministers without a portfolio.

As a compulsory element of the structural changes of the government, the Prime Minister’s Office was broken off and the Prime Ministry was established. The tasks of the former Prime Minister’s cabinet, so the political coordination of the government was taken over by the Prime Ministry while professional and administrative tasks were given to the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice and its leading minister. The Prime Ministry was lead by the Prime Minister and operated by the under-secretary.35

The tasks of the former government coordination centre were divided between two bodies which effected in a kind of parallelism and created a “competition” between the two institutions.

2.3.3. The changes in the government coordination tools in the terms of centralisation

Among the reforms of 2010 that were concerned with the tools of coordination, we have to mention three. In the cases of all three tools, one can discover a will of centralisation and the

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32 Law XLIII of 2010. 32. §
33 Prime Minister’s decision 36/2010.
34 Law XLIII of 2010. 31. §
35 Law XLIII. of 2010. 36. §
strengthening of authority of the leading minister of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice. Owing to the 2010 reforms, the government agreements on the amendments were no more decided on according to the professional political agreements of the second Gyurcsány- government but the decision was made by the under-secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice. According to this change effectively the administration centre of the government decided whether the ministries initiatives could start their way in the procedure of government decision-making.

Government coordination from 2010 was broadened with a new tool – the personal tether – as the authority of the Prime Minister was getting stronger. According to the 2010 law on government structure, the minister of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice and the administrative under-secretary have to ratify the appointment of people from the deputy under-secretary to the department leaders of the ministries. With this centralisation reform the independency and leeway of some ministers was limited, and as there were no written conditions of suitability it became possible to re-politicise civil service.

The last coordination tool to be examined is the acceptance of the organisational and operational regulations of the ministries. The 2010 law on government structure took this right from the Prime Minister and gave it to the Minister of Administration and Justice with adding a complementation that the Prime Minister can work out and define the solid regulation system. Such a strengthening of the minister leading the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice can limit the Prime Minister’s authority in decision-making in the case of some amendments, although basically it cannot become an authority limitation tool as the minister leading the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice also depends on the PM.

2.3.4. The position of the Prime Minister within the government

After the law on the structure of the government in 2006 and 2010, the second Orbán-government strengthened the leading role of the Prime Minister within the government on a constitutional level by saying that the Prime Minister determines the general policy of the government. The former constitution defined only that the sitting on government regulations and decisions and their realisation should be lead by the Prime Minister. From 2010, the prime Minister had a determining role within the government. He formed the government policy and made the important strategic decisions. With defining the general policy of the government, he obviously lead the government. The ministers became more and more dependent on the Prime Minister’s decisions as according to the Constitution, the ministers lead their ministries within the frames of the general government policy. The general policy of the government was defined by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister wrote a list of the members of the government and under-secretaries and chose his deputy or

37 Müller György: Magyar kormányzati viszonyok. pp. 135-137.
38 Law XLIII of 2010. 60. §, Government decree 212/2010. 2.§
39 Fundamental Law of Hungary 18. § (1).
40 Law XX of 1949. 37. § (1).
41 Fundamental Law of Hungary 18. § (2).
deputies. He could appoint ministers without a portfolio. By this the Prime Minister’s personal authority fully colligated the scope of work of all under-secretaries, the commissioners and the Prime Minister’s Commissioners. While earlier it was a constitutional liability to introduce and accept the government’s programme in the Parliament, the new Constitution did not contain anything about this. It does not automatically mean that the introduction of the government programme would be dismissed, however, it is obvious that the repealing of a constitutional regulation increases the Prime Minister’s freedom as not only the introduction was repealed but voting as well. The second Orbán-government’s regulations maintain the previously introduced possibility which allows the Prime Minister to write a government regulation or resolution on his own right between government sessions if it is reasonable and these have to be introduces to the government later. The reforms - concerning the power and authority of the prime Minister - between 2010-2014 made the position of the Prime Minister even stronger continuing the previously started way but intensified.

2.3.5. The changing of the emergence of the syndicate’s principle
The government’s syndicate may originate from the concept of the government and the regulations about its content. The form of the syndicate is a government session which is regulated in a detailed resolution about the government’s procedure. The second Orbán-government reinforced the role of the Prime Minister, however, it would not have decreased or stop the aspect of the government being a syndicate. As a result of government reforms this syndicate aspect changed both in its legal and practical aspects. While the previously operative constitution named the government sittings as the government’s decision-making forum, the new constitution does not include the subject of a government sitting, nor does it contain a reference to it as the working form of the government. The regulation about the work of the government in contradiction with the constitution and the government law says that the government fulfils its tasks and scope of authority as an institutions and regularly holds sittings. However, it is important to say that the definition of a syndicate has moved from constitutional stage to government stage. Regulations say that government sittings can only be attended by the members of the government, regularly invited advisors (the leading under-secretary of the Prime Ministry, the communication under-secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, the administrative under-secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, the Prime Minister’s spokesperson and the government spokesperson), the proponents and those invited by the Prime Minister. The edict does not regulate who the Prime Minister can invite to the sitting. When talking about the characteristics of a syndicate, it is important to highlight two practical changes, that have been present in the Hungarian political life as a

42 Law XX of 1949. 33. § (3).
44 Government decision 1144/2010. point 77.
45 Law XX of 1949. 37. § (1).
result of a long tendency. One is that although according to a government regulation the government decisions are made by voting, they usually decide without a formal voting, which was publically admitted by the government’s spokesmen office in 2007. This lack of formal voting may strengthen the position of the Prime Minister as he cannot find himself in a minority position in any points. The other important tendency was the reduction of the number of government sitting that was due to agreements within the government’s inner consultation bodies, pre-decisions at meetings and the growing number of informal sittings. I am going to discuss the frequency of government sittings in the following chapter.

2.4. Indexes of the institutionalization of presidentialization
After the analysis of institutional evolution and development I focus on the practical consequences of the reforms. First of all I aimed at analyzing the changes of the PMO and Prime Ministry staff. Unfortunately the staff numbers are available only for the period of 1995-2001 and 2010-2013. Because of the lack of data for the whole studied period, I cannot examine the evolution of the staff numbers. Other important indexes are the frequency of government meetings, the number of the proposals and drafts presented at the government meetings and the budget of the PMO. In the next paragraphs I analyse in details the above mentioned indexes.

2.4.1. The frequency of government meetings and the number of presented drafts
As a consequence of the institutionalization of presidentialization the decisions are not made at the government meetings, but at other forums (for example at bilateral meetings between the PM and the most important ministers). The decrease of the government meetings and the foreshortenings of the sittings may verify the presidentialization. In Hungary there are not any official statistics about the duration of government meetings, only their frequency can be examined. From the diagrams we can see that there are not any great differences, almost every legislature has held a meeting per week.

51 The only exceptions are the periods between 1998 and 2000, and 2010 and 2013. Both periods are part of the Orbán governments.
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Diagram 1. Number of government meetings

Diagram 2. Monthly average of government meetings

It is interesting to observe that the number of presented drafts is higher in that two periods when there were less government meetings. It is presumable that more drafts were presented per meetings than in the other periods. To analyse whether the time dedicated to the single drafts was decreased in these two periods or not, so that there were not a real and detailed debate about the drafts at the government meetings, we should know the exact duration of the
sittings. Despite of the lack of this information it is supposed that the government meetings were not longer than in the other years, moreover they were shorter.\(^\text{52}\)

**Diagram 3. Number of drafts presented at the government meetings**

<table>
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<th>Average of drafts per meeting</th>
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### 2.4.2. The budget of the PMO and Prime Ministry

The strengthening of the PMO and Prime Ministry can be verified clearly not only by the development of their staffs and the increase of their rights and competencies, but also by the evolution of their annual budgets. The growth of the institutions’ budget is very visible and linear with the exception of the year 2004. It is important to note that the significant increase of the year of 2002 was realised by the Medgyessy government. The PM Péter Medgyessy is usually described as a less carismatic politician and a PM who owned less party support than his predecessors and successors.

The reason of the decrease of 2010 is that the new Prime Ministry had much less staff and tasks and competencies than the PMO had previously. As from 2011 only the total budget data is available, the diagram does not contain the last years of the second Orbán government.

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\(^{52}\) Interview with György Müller who was the legal deputy under-secretary of the PMO between 1990-2006.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Maintenance</th>
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<td>934,1</td>
<td>92972,8</td>
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</table>

Diagram 4. Budget on administration of the PMO

Both the budget on administration costs and the total budget show a linear growth in the analysed period. The significant increase from 2010 is caused by the fact that the resources for emergency cases are transferred to the Prime Ministry row at the state budget law.
3. Conclusions: a new phenomenon or a long-term tendency?

The Prime Minister’s Office and later, from 2010 the Prime Ministry are the most dynamically developing parts of the Hungarian government system. As a result of the continuous widening and increasing of their tasks and competencies and growing their staff, the two institutions have become a real center of political power. The development of the two organs has caused also the strengthening of the Prime Minister’s position both in the political system and in the government.

The governing system formed in 1989 and 1990 remained unaltered in the last more than twenty years but as a result of the government reforms the persistent strengthening of the executive (the government) towards the legislative (the parliament) and the PM’s reinforcement became general tendencies.

Several criteria of the presidentialization on the executive and the PM are presented in the reforms of the Hungarian governments in the studied period. From 1997 onwards the continuous strengthening of the PMO is observable. From 1998 the PMO was lead by a minister. The first Orbán government strengthened significantly the institution, centralised the decision making processes by introducing the system of referatures, established a new political under-secretary and unified the system of the PMO’s organs responsible for the government communication. The Medgyessy government continued its predecessor’s efforts and reinforced the institutional structure of the PMO, expanded its duties with new competencies. Ferenc Gyurcsány increased the number of PMO staff, widened the PM’s functions and the legal instruments at his disposal.

The PMO gradually became an institution led and controlled by the Prime Minister. The PMO was revalued as the principal institution which coordinates the government administration, elaborate the government’s strategic plans and creates government communication.53

In line with this process there was an other tendency in the government and in the procedures of the decision making. The bilateral meetings between the Prime Minisiter and single ministers and their informal reunions became more important at the decision making than the official government meetings.

The results of the normative and empirical research show that the signs of presidentialization are presented on the Hungarian Prime Minister and cabinet in all the analysed period. The expand of the PM’s rights and competencies, the gradual strengthening of his or her central institution (the PMO and later the Prime Ministry), the decrease of the government’s syndical character and the developing and centralisation of the organs responsible for the government communication54 are observable from the second legislation, from the Horn government.


54 From the second legislation communication has been the priority of all government in Hungary. The most important communication institutions were established and the most important communication positions were formed. They worked out and developed the coordination among the different units. The efforts to centralise government communication were visible in every period and from 2006 it became even stronger. The analysis of the laws of the recent two decades shows a linear tendency of centralization. The strong signs of presidentialization first appeared in the reforms between 1998–2002. The reforms of the first Orbán government
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Government decision 1044/2007
Government decision 1144/2010
Prime Minister’s decision 36/2010

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