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András Baka – the New President of Hungary

On August 2026, the National Assembly elected the 8th president of Hungary since 1990. András Baka will take office eight days after the election results are announced – on August 19th, the day before Hungary's national holiday – St. Stephen's Day (Szent István napja). The newly elected president's term, according to the provisions of the 17th amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Magyarország Alaptörvénye), will last until the adoption of a new constitution, but no longer than five years. The presidential elections were boycotted by the opposition parliamentary groups KDNP and Fidesz, which dispute the legality of the termination of the mandate of the previous President Tamás Sulyok, which resulted from a one-sentence legislative amendment that ended his term on July 2026. From that date until the new president takes office, Ágnes Forsthoffer, Speaker of the National Assembly, will serve as acting head of state.

The political context of the presidential election. The proposal by the leader of the party and Prime Minister, Péter Magyar, for prominent Hungarian chess player Judit Polgár to run for president sparked a public outcry, particularly among supporters of the ruling Respect and Freedom party (Tisztelet és Szabadság, TISZA). Contrary to P. Magyar's earlier suggestions, the candidacy, suggested by more than a dozen Hungarian public figures, was not subjected to public consultations. The Prime Minister's initiative was, therefore, met with criticism from some TISZA supporters, and the chess grandmaster herself declined to run for the presidency. However, the Hungarian Prime Minister took political responsibility for the failure to communicate regarding J. Polgár's candidacy, despite stating in a discussion on a social media platform that the intention was merely to send recommendations, not to conduct public consultations.

Public opinion about the presidential election. According to a survey conducted by the Medián Institute for Public Opinion and Market Research, 68% of respondents found the lack of promised public consultations regarding the presidential election disturbing. Only 22% of respondents positively assessed TISZA's swift nomination of J. Polgár. 33% of the public considered the Hungarian chess grandmaster a proper candidate, while 42% disagreed. 36% of TISZA supporters did not support the candidacy, while 43% supported it. Meanwhile, 60% of the ruling party's voters felt that public consultations were necessary before the nomination. According to a Medián poll conducted between 22 and 24 July 2026, 57% of eligible voters would vote for TISZA, while 19% would vote for Fidesz in the election. This means a decline in support for TISZA within the margin of error compared to polls conducted before the termination of President T. Sulyok's term. It is unclear, however, whether the change in support for TISZA is related to the failure of J. Polgár's nomination. Fidesz's ratings, meanwhile, are stabilising, and according to data from Medián, if a new party were to emerge from Fidesz, it could expect to cross the 5% electoral threshold.

Nominating candidates. At least 40 members of the National Assembly are entitled to nominate a candidate for the presidential election. Formally, only members of parliament from the Fidesz and TISZA parliamentary groups have the right to do so. The far-right Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk) movement symbolically announced its own candidate, lawyer Máté Tóth, but this fraction in the National Assembly has only six members, and without the support of representatives of the abovementioned parliamentary groups, the candidacy could not be placed on the ballot. On August 8th, the TISZA leadership proposed three names for potential presidential candidates to the party's parliamentary group. After the failure of J. Polgár's candidacy, Prime Minister Péter Magyar and Head of the Prime Minister's Office, Bálint Ruff, met with the media-popular lawyer Fülöp Botond, the famous historian Ignác Romsics, and András Baka, a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judge from 1991 to 2008 and former



President of the Supreme Court, whom the Fidesz-KDNP coalition dismissed from office following the adoption of the Fundamental Law in 2011. In a secret ballot, TISZA MPs decided to nominate A. Baka, and on August 11th – with 140 votes in favour, 6 against, and no abstentions – the National Assembly elected him as the 8th President of Hungary since 1990.

Comment. The media debate concerning the election of Hungary's new president, and especially the candidacy of J. Polgár, has demonstrated the independence of TISZA supporters, gathered in a network of volunteers known as the TISZA Islands (TISZA Szigetek). The doubts expressed by some of them indicate that the party's supporters, thanks to whose involvement the highly effective campaign for the April 12th, 2026 elections was conducted, are becoming a significant actor in political life. For the TISZA government, this means increasing supporter participation in public debate. The challenge for the current ruling majority will, therefore, be to effectively incorporate the social factor into the political decision-making process, especially in the discussion on the shape of Hungary's new constitutional system announced by P. Magyar. A potential lack of broad social dialogue, contrary to pre-election promises, could pose a significant political and image threat to both TISZA and the Prime Minister himself. For the current parliamentary majority, the election of a new head of state was a test of political credibility. The selection of a non-politically associated candidate could lend credence to TISZA's declared agenda of renewing Hungary's social and political life. The current opposition questions A. Baka's impartiality, arguing that he publicly admitted that prematurely dismissing some officials with a two-thirds majority could be politically justified in a "historical situation" and that "extraordinary measures are needed to dismantle the authoritarian system". However, A. Baka's task will undoubtedly be to restore the authority of the office of head of state. The transitional nature of the presidency does not strengthen the political position of the president, who in the Hungarian constitutional system primarily performs representative functions. Maintaining political neutrality and rebuilding national unity, which A. Baka spoke about in his first speech shortly after being sworn in, will also pose a challenge for the new head of state. Given that Fidesz and KDNP question the legality of the early termination of T. Sulyok's term of office as well as the legitimacy of A. Baka, it should not be expected that the supporters of the previous government coalition will change their position.