

Ervin Csizmadia

## What is Needed for Social Cohesion?



The most common explanation for what is happening in Hungary is that the ship of democracy has run aground and is sinking. Viktor Orbán has become an extreme rightist, while building an illiberal system. But is all this enough of an explanation?

It doesn't seem to be enough. What happened in Hungary also has an explanation that is not directly related to party politics. To shed light on this, we need to turn to a well-known concept in Western Europe: cohesion. This has two elements: political and social cohesion. For the sake of simplicity currently we focus only on social cohesion. At no point during Hungary's democratization after 1990 was social cohesion so strong that politics could have gained sufficient support from society to maintain and build (liberal) democracy. Political scientist Hans von Zon [highlighted](#) the importance of social cohesion already in 1994. He wrote that the lack of cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe was already evident in the early stages of the regime change, emphasizing that this may lead to problems in the future. He was right.

But what is the lack of cohesion that has become a source of problems? The value uniformity of a country's society, for example, in the most basic issues of politics. In Hungary, this uniformity existed only during a short period of transition. When the dictatorship had to be replaced by democracy. However, after the mid-1990s, the democratic euphoria passed and this unity broke down. One example of this was that consensual democracy already had a rival in the form of majority democracy at this time. Even in the early years of democracy, Hungarian society did not agree on what democracy meant to them, which is unthinkable in mature democracies.

Citizens of mature democracies learned how to combine liberalism and democracy and how to create liberal democracy. In Hungary, this integration and unification process did not exist even at the start, and later this process moved in the direction of disintegration.

From all of this, firstly, it follows that Orbánism did not give birth to that system, but that Hungarian society, which lacked cohesion, could not conceive of anything other than a system of which Orbánism was just the manifestation. Secondly, it follows that a change of government or even regime change that is hoped for by many will not be enough unless it is combined with a new methodology for creating cohesion. But how can cohesion be created in a country where there was no cohesion not just after 1990, but also in previous periods of history? We don't know the answer, but we can confidently say that this is one of the most fundamental challenges of today's Hungary.