

Zoltán Novák

Two Visions of the Citizen



Umberto Eco's concept of the model reader starts from the assumption that every text constructs its own ideal recipient: the reader to whom it speaks, whom it presupposes, and whom, in a certain sense, it also brings into being. This idea can be applied not only to literary texts but also to political programmes. A programme does not merely list policy measures; it also sketches an implicit model of citizenship: the kind of person on whom the political vision is built.

From this perspective, it is worth comparing the image of the citizen that emerges from the Tisza Party's 2026 electoral programme with the one found in Fidesz's 2010 programme. Ideally, two current programmes would stand opposite each other, but Fidesz has not published a written electoral programme since 2010. The comparison is nevertheless not arbitrary: the pre-2010 Fidesz and today's Tisza can be compared insofar as both appeared as challengers seeking a change of government, and both organised their programmes around the promise of replacing the existing political order.

One of the defining characteristics of the Tisza programme is its intention to move beyond the left-right divide. The formula "there is no right, there is no left, only Hungarian" is not merely a campaign slogan, but one of the organising principles of the text. The programme seeks to bring together values that often stand in ideological opposition to one another: freedom and security, national sovereignty and pro-Europeanism, competition and solidarity, respect for tradition and progress, growth and sustainability.

What emerges from this is a model citizen who does not define themselves primarily through ideological camp logic, but through a demand for a "normal country". For this citizen, the basic conflict of politics is not an identity struggle but institutional

dysfunction: the experience of deteriorating public services, vulnerability, division, and the exercise of power without consequences. Accordingly, the programme's opening is moral in tone, but remains within a rule-of-law framework: wrongdoings must be investigated, yet accountability must proceed in a lawful manner.

In the Tisza text, the relationship between state and citizen appears primarily through the logic of service provision. Local communities and municipalities are presented as the primary spaces of democracy, while decisions should be made not in distant centres, but close to those affected by them. The critique of the central state is condensed into the claim that the state under Fidesz does not serve, but rules. The ideal citizen of the programme is therefore neither a subject nor a client, but a citizen endowed with rights and dignity, who expects institutional guarantees, fair procedures, access and predictability.

The programme's concept of homeland fits this logic as well. The homeland does not exclude, but connects, and it is the home of every citizen. Tisza's model citizen therefore embodies an inclusive patriotism: the community does not open and close on the basis of lifestyle expectations, but on the basis of civic membership. The sections on women's equality reinforce the

same logic: good public policy is not merely a matter of expertise, but becomes legitimate through the involvement of those affected.

Overall, Tisza's implicit citizen is modernisation-oriented and institution-centred. This citizen wants normality, legal certainty, decency and the creation of opportunities, and expects from politics not the deepening of identity or culture war, but functioning public services and accountable governance.

Fidesz's 2010 programme, by contrast, builds more strongly on a coherent, hierarchical value system. Here, the task of politics is to place "work, home, family, health and order" at the centre of everything. Fidesz's model citizen is primarily shaped through roles and duties: a working person, a home-builder, a citizen thinking in terms of family, and a supporter of order. The image of "the diligent families of everyday life" clearly designates the normative order to which governance should adapt, and which it should protect, support and restore.

The Fidesz programme's understanding of order is not merely a policy claim, but also a moral dividing line. Support for order becomes a test of decency: the absence of order produces chaos, fear and vulnerability. From this follows one of the programme's key propositions: security precedes justice. The ideal Fidesz citizen therefore sees the primary task of politics in

the creation of order, protection and stability, even if this pushes certain considerations of justice into the background.

Closely connected to Fidesz's image of the citizen is the demand for strong leadership. According to the programme, Hungary needs leadership that can be trusted both at home and abroad, and that is capable of restoring the country's prestige. The model citizen here is an authorising citizen: someone who supports a political force promising order, the closing of an era, and concentrated capacity for action. Work, too, is not merely an economic category but a moral one: the foundation of existential security, independence and dignity.

The difference between the two programmes' images of the human being is therefore not simply a matter of emphasis, but of distinct political anthropologies. Tisza's model citizen is rights-based: the state provides services, institutions offer guarantees, decisions are made locally, and the community is inclusive. Fidesz's model citizen is role-based: the family is the basic unit of society, while work, communal order and strong leadership receive particular emphasis. Both programmes share a demand for decency and order, but they approach the problem from different directions. Tisza seeks to respond to the loss of trust through the restoration of institutional service provision and the

rule of law, while Fidesz seeks to do so through the creation of normative order and security.

A negative image of the citizen also appears in both texts. The Fidesz programme morally delegitimises those who relativise order, or who imagine social order outside the family-work-order axis. Tisza, by contrast, places outside the circle those who see the essence of politics in cultural division, camp logic or the acceptance of a ruling state. In other words, both programmes also designate their own “bad citizen”: the person who does not fit into the desired political-anthropological order. Humanity, naturally, cannot resist inventing an ideal citizen and then immediately producing its defective counterpart.

The image of the citizen outlined in these texts also presupposes a model of community. For Fidesz, order is a moral filter and a precondition of communal life; for Tisza, it is rather predictable institutional functioning and service provision. For Fidesz, the family is the anthropological core; for Tisza, it is more one of the fields of fairness and access. For Fidesz, leadership is the instrument of restoration; for Tisza, it is the promise of governance arranged within local democracy and institutional checks.

The two programmes thus contain two clearly distinguishable ideals. In 2010, Fidesz idealised a citizen who sees a life organised around order, work and family roles as the foundation of



community, and who is willing to support a strong state and strong leadership in order to restore security. Tisza, by contrast, places at the centre of its worldview a model citizen who sees dignity, legal certainty, transparency and opportunity as achievable through functioning institutions, and who locates the foundations of democracy in local communities, participation and the service-providing state.