



# Debating the Hungarian Constitution

## Roundtable Discussion

2 March 2012 15:30

Theatre, Badia Fiesolana

Please register with [Monika.Rzemieniecka@eui.eu](mailto:Monika.Rzemieniecka@eui.eu)

The new Hungarian Constitution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary that entered into force on 1 January 2012 has attracted a great deal of criticism and debate worldwide. Hailed by its proponents as the act that completed the transition to democracy, it was criticized by others as an undertaking that ends constitutional democracy in Hungary by removing checks on the power of the government and putting virtually all power into the hands of the current governing party for the foreseeable future.

The Roundtable Discussion will discuss fundamental issues linked to the Hungarian Constitution inviting key participants and observers of the Hungarian constitution making process:

Mr [Jozsef Szajer](#), Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the European People's Party and Chairman of the group who drafted the New Hungarian Constitution

Ms [Zita Gurmai](#), Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament

[Prof. Gabor Halmai](#), Director of the Institute of Political and International Studies (Budapest) and Visiting Professor at the Princeton University

[Prof. Andras Jakab](#), Schumpeter Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg. Editor of the Commentary of the Hungarian Constitution

The event is organized by the Department of Political and Social Sciences (EUI) and the European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO) and supported by the EUI Presidency.

## Short Biographies

### [Jozsef Szajer](#)

József Szájér is a Hungarian lawyer and politician, founding member of Fidesz. He has been involved in Hungarian constitutional preparations since 1989. He was engaged in the constitutional reform already in 1989 during the National Roundtable negotiations and since then, until 2004, when he became a member of the European Parliament. In the Hungarian National Assembly Szájér was a member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee and he was participating in the last constitutional process between 1994 and 1998.

Since 2004 he has been the Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's centre-right European People's Party, which is the largest political group in the EP. Szájér was also a member of the European Convention which drafted the European Constitution (2002-2003). Currently he is responsible for the legislative coordination of the EPP Group, and member of the Constitutional Affairs (2007-) and Legal Affairs (2004-) committee in the EP.

Szájér is one of the fathers of the new Hungarian Fundamental Law. Upon Prime Minister Orbán's request, he became a member of the advisory board operating under the PM, assisting the development of the new Constitution. He took a leading role during the recent constitutional process as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, which referred the draft constitutional text to parliamentary debate on 14th March 2011.

### [Zita Gurmai](#)

After finishing the University of Economic Sciences in Budapest, Zita Gurmai worked in the private sphere, in numerous companies. In parallel, she became one of the emblematic actors of the Hungarian public and civil sphere. She was founding member of many foundations, in the areas of environment protection and equal chances. She has been working in the Hungarian and international women's movement since 1993, organising trainings and presentations.

She finally turned into politics in 1995, becoming the chargé d'affaires of the Women's Organisation of the Hungarian Socialist Party, that she has been chairing since 2001. She achieved results at international level as well: she became vice-chair of the Socialist International in 1999 and 2003 until 2008. She was a member of the Hungarian Parliament between 2002 and 2004. She has been Member of the European Parliament since May, 2004 and was vice-chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the previous term, member of the Committee on Regional Development, substitute in the Committee on Transport and Tourism. She was elected President of the PES (Party of European Socialists) Women in 2004. She is also Vice-President of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies.

Currently, she is Vice-Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and substitute in the Committee on Transport and Tourism.

### Gabor Halmai

Gábor Halmai is Professor of Law and director of the Institute of Political and International Studies at the Eötvös Lóránd University. He received his PhD from Lóránd Eötvös University in 1983, and became Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1997. Between 2007-2010 he was member of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's Management Board based in Vienna. From 2003 he is the national director of the European Masters Program in Human Rights and Democratization in Venice. From 2006 to 2010, Mr Halmai was the vice-chair of the Hungarian National Election Commission. Between 1990-97 he was chief counsellor to the President of the Hungarian Constitutional Court.

Mr Halmai's primary research interests are comparative constitutional law and constitutional adjudication of fundamental rights. He has published several books and articles, as well as editing volumes on these topics. The most recent ones are as follows: *Auf dem Weg in eine autoritäre Demokratie. Osteuropa*, 12/2011; *The Use of Foreign law in Constitutional Interpretation*, in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Oxford University Press, 2012. From the "Rule of Law Revolution" to the Constitutional Counter-Revolution in Hungary, *European Yearbook on Human Rights*, 2012. *Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendments: Constitutional Courts as Guardians of the Constitution?* *Constellations* 2012.

### Andras Jakab

András Jakab is Schumpeter Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg. He holds a Ph.D. in Political and Legal Sciences from the University of Miskolc, Hungary (2007) and an LL.M in German Law from the University of Heidelberg (2005). He studied law in Salzburg and in Budapest (Pázmány), economics at the University of Western Hungary and philosophy at the ELTE University of Budapest. Formerly he worked as an Associate Professor at the Department of Constitutional Law at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest (2010-2011); as a García-Pelayo Fellow at the Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales (CEPC) in Madrid, Spain (2008-2010); as a Lecturer in Law at the University of Liverpool (2006-2008); as a Lecturer in Law at the Nottingham Trent University (2004-2006); as a Junior Research Fellow (wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter) at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg, Germany (2003-2004); as a Research and Teaching Assistant (egyetemi tanársegéd) for Administrative Law at the Calvinist University Károli Gáspár in Budapest, Hungary (2001-2003). He has published several books in Hungarian on legal theory (esp. theory of norms) and constitutional law. He is a member of the following learned societies: *Societas Iuris Publici Europaei* (SIPE) (European Association of Public Lawyers); *International Association of Constitutional Law* (IACL, Individual Member); *Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (MTA; Member of the Public Body - köztisztviselői tag); *The Society of Legal Scholars* (U.K.).