

# **The Policy Specialists, the Defenders of the Nation, and the Invisible Parliamentarians**

## **Executive summary of the FES – Policy Solutions study on the activities of Hungarian MEPs since 2014**

Since 2009 Policy Solutions has regularly publicly evaluated the performance of **Hungarian MEPs working in Brussels/Strasbourg. With our most recent analysis compiled jointly with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung**, we continue this worthy tradition. Our study examines what the work of Hungarian MEPs focused on until **the middle of the 2014–2019 term**, what issues they sought to put on the agenda in Brussels, as well as how active individual Hungarian MEPs were in their roles as legislators and/or policy specialists.

### **The policy work of the Hungarian MEPs**

We examined the **policy work** of Hungarian MEPs based on the **reports and shadow reports, opinions and amendments** they have drafted since the beginning of the 2014–2019 term. In evaluating individual work on public policy issues, we assessed that rapporteur assignments represent the apex of work in the European Parliament. Correspondingly, MEPs who were entrusted with assignments as rapporteurs definitely moved up in our rankings. **Based on our assessment, Benedek Jávor (Greens/EFA), Tibor Szanyi (S&D), Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz (EPP), Tamás Meszerics (Greens/EFA) and Tamás Deutsch (EPP) were the most hard-working Hungarian MEPs.**

Two Hungarian politicians, **Benedek Jávor, who is a member of the Greens–European Free Alliance group in the EP (hereinafter referred to as the Greens), and Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz, who is a member of the centre-right EPP Group**, performed outstandingly in all four areas we investigated, and they were among the five most

active Hungarian MEPs in all areas we evaluated. Jávör was in the top position in three categories, reports drafted as a rapporteur, reports drafted as a shadow rapporteur and opinions drafted as a shadow rapporteur; he has written the highest number of the aforementioned document types among Hungarian MEPs, but he is also near the top in drafting opinions and proposing amendments. None of the Hungarian MEPs wrote more rapporteur opinions than Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz and, moreover, her one rapporteur report ties her for second place in this category, while she came in third in the ranking for shadow rapporteur reports and shadow rapporteur opinions.

Other politicians who were very active in policy work were the **EPP MEP Tamás Deutsch, the socialist Tibor Szanyi and the Greens MEP Tamás Meszerics**. The EPP politician and his colleague from the Greens each drafted two reports as rapporteurs, while Deutsch also emerged as one of the most active Hungarian MEPs during the first half of the current term with respect to shadow reports and rapporteur opinions. Among the socialist MEPs, Tibor Szanyi was the most active in terms of public policy activities.

At the same time, however, not all Hungarian MEPs were as active in policy work as the abovementioned politicians. **There were five among the 21 Hungarian MEPs who did not write a single opinion or report – neither as rapporteurs nor as shadow rapporteurs – during the nearly three years we investigated. Three of them are independent MEPs delegated by Jobbik, who have fewer opportunities to participate in such policy work because they are not attached to a parliamentary group in the EP. There are, however, also two EPP MEPs who evinced a similar passivity in terms of policy work as the three Jobbik legislators: Despite serving as members of the largest group in the EP, Norbert Erdős and László Tókécs did not draft any reports or opinions between 2014 and 2017, which is why it would be fair to call them the most passive and “most invisible” Hungarian MEPs in terms of activity.**

## **The political activity of the Hungarian MEPs**

The formal **political activity** of MEPs consists primarily of **speeches** in the plenary session, **parliamentary questions submitted** to EU institutions, **motions for a resolution** and **written statements**. With respect to these activities, we find that **Tibor**

**Szanyi was the most active Hungarian MEP.** The Socialist representative **spoke up most often during the plenary sessions**, he filed the **most written statements and motions for a resolution**, and finished in the third place of our virtual ranking in terms of parliamentary questions, too. In addition to Szanyi, two other Hungarian colleagues of his in the S&D Group, **Csaba Molnár** and **István Ujhelyi**, also performed a significant amount of work in the past three years. In addition to writing the most parliamentary questions, Molnár also occupied a top position in our virtual ranking in terms of parliamentary speeches, while Ujhelyi in turn was among the most active Hungarian MEPs with respect to three political activities pursued by MEPs in Parliament.

**Among the MEPs in the ranks of the EPP group, two politicians stand out in terms of their political work: Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz and Norbert Erdős.** Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz, who also serves as one of the **vice presidents of the EP**, was outstandingly active both in terms of **parliamentary speeches and motions for a resolution**, while Erdős, whose career as an MEP began in 2014, was among the top performers with respect to three categories. **The most passive Hungarian MEP in terms of political activities was György Schöpflin**, who ranked last in three categories. Another interesting case is that of another EPP MEP, **László Tóké**s, who ranked second in terms of motions for a resolution, but was nevertheless in the last place of the rankings in three categories and must be counted as one of the most passive Hungarian MEPs overall.

We encounter the two Hungarian Green Party MEPs both in the rankings of the politically most active and most passive MEPs. **Benedek Jávor is in the top half of the list in terms of parliamentary questions and written statements**, while with respect to speeches he is among the less active MEPs. The LMP politician **Tamás Meszerics** was among the most active Hungarian MEPs in terms of filing motions for a resolution, but ended up at the bottom of the list in two categories, parliamentary questions and plenary speeches, and as a result **Meszerics was the second most passive Hungarian MEP after György Schöpflin in terms of political work.**

Two of the three Jobbik MEPs, **Krisztina Morvai** and **Béla Kovács**, were among those who weakly performed in terms of their political activities: **Krisztina Morvai was in the rearguard in three categories while Béla Kovács was among the last in two categories.** As a result, overall, they finished among the most passive politicians.

Reviewing the work of the 21 Hungarian MEPs overall, it became apparent to us **what understanding of their roles individual MEPs brought to their work in the European Parliament, what kind of politics they pursue there.** We distinguished between four different roles: **EU policy experts, national policy experts, EU politicians and national politicians.**

The category of *EU and national policy experts* is made up MEPs whose work focuses either on drafting EU-level policy proposals or on improving the EU's policy effectiveness in general, or whose main objective is to attain policy changes that are favourable for their home country (i.e. Hungary). An *EU or national politician* is someone who either places the political challenges facing the European Union as a political unit or the political issues that are especially important for Hungary or for Hungarian citizens front and centre in his or her activities.

In the nearly three years that have passed since the current Parliament began its term in 2015, several of the 21 Hungarian MEPs have delivered an outstanding **public policy performance**, while others have acted as “**patriotic defenders**” of the real or presumed interests of Hungary, Hungarian citizens or the European Union overall. **Media coverage in Hungary, however, focused almost exclusively on the latter cases;** the media evinced almost no interest at all in the policy work performed by MEPs.

Several of the MEPs confirmed the stereotype that the European Parliament is where political careers go to die, and as “**invisible MEPs**” they hardly presented any policy or political achievements in the last years. This is especially true of Jobbik politicians, but some more prominent politicians who are considered influential, such as József Szájer or László Tóké, have also taken a step back in terms of the intensity of their work.

On the whole, we hope that with the help of [our study](#) the **esteemed reader will have the opportunity to decide to which category each of the 21 MEPs we analysed can be assigned to based on his/her performance until now.**