

The state of human rights in Slovenia and in Hungary during the first wave of the pandemic

ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



Summary

The Republikon Institute's research¹ was conducted in September, and it examined the evaluation of the handling of the pandemic during the first wave, people's judgment of the state of human rights during the coronavirus, and how they view the European Union's role in the fight against the pandemic.

Since September, the situation got worse: the virus has been spreading in both countries and serious measures have been introduced. In spite of this, we think that the findings of the analysis can serve with a lot of important and valuable information that can help to understand both the processes in Hungary and in Slovenia, even now, at the end of November/beginning of December.

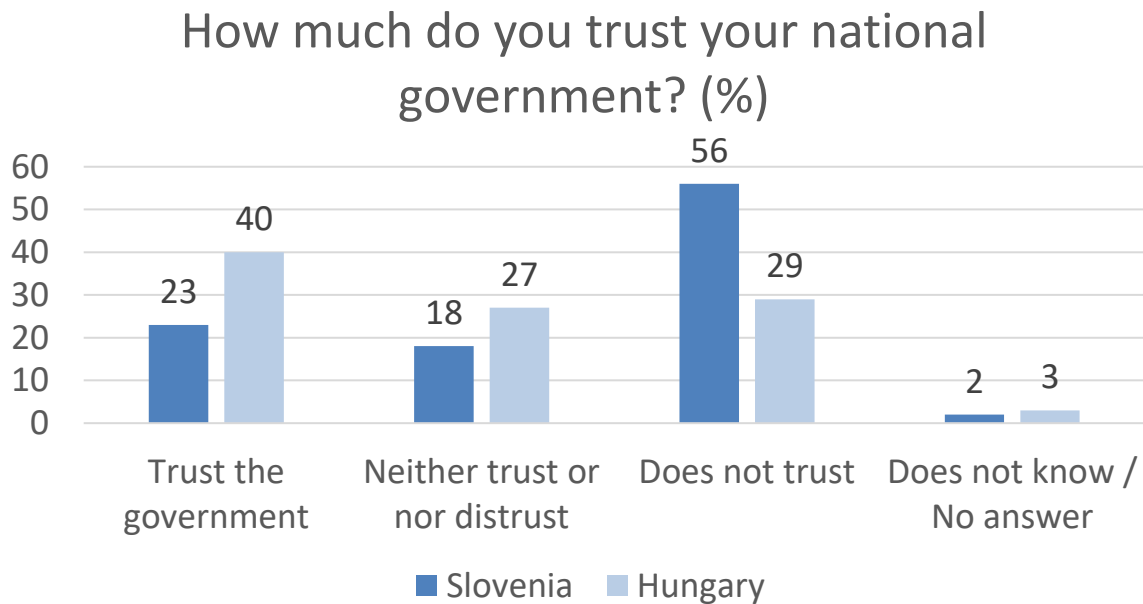
The main findings of the research

- The populations of both countries were critical of the political situation and the government's strategy for coronavirus: Hungarian respondents who were satisfied with the government's work in this area in recent months were undoubtedly in the minority.
- In the fight against the coronavirus, the majority of Slovenian respondents considered individual responsibility the most important, while Hungarians highlighted the importance of doctors. Considering the measures, the majority of Slovenian respondents think that limiting the number of participants at events is an important measure, while the majority of Hungarian respondents mentioned wearing masks as a crucial step in the fight against COVID-19.
- People living in Slovenia generally think that the state of human rights has become worse during the pandemic, the Hungarian respondents seemed less pessimistic in connection with that topic.
- During the pandemic, Hungarian respondents were more permissive considering the closing of the borders in the EU, but half of the Slovenians insists on free movement.
- People in both countries considered the EU's level important in combating the virus and supported the EU's intervention if a national state would misuse its power as well.

¹The Slovenian research was conducted with (online) interviewing 1043 respondents between the 17th and 21st of September 2020. The research is representative to the adult population of the country, in terms of gender, age and regions. The Hungarian research was conducted with phone interviewing 1000 respondents, between the 19th and 25th of September 2020. The research is representative to the adult population of the country, in terms of gender, age, level of education and type of township.

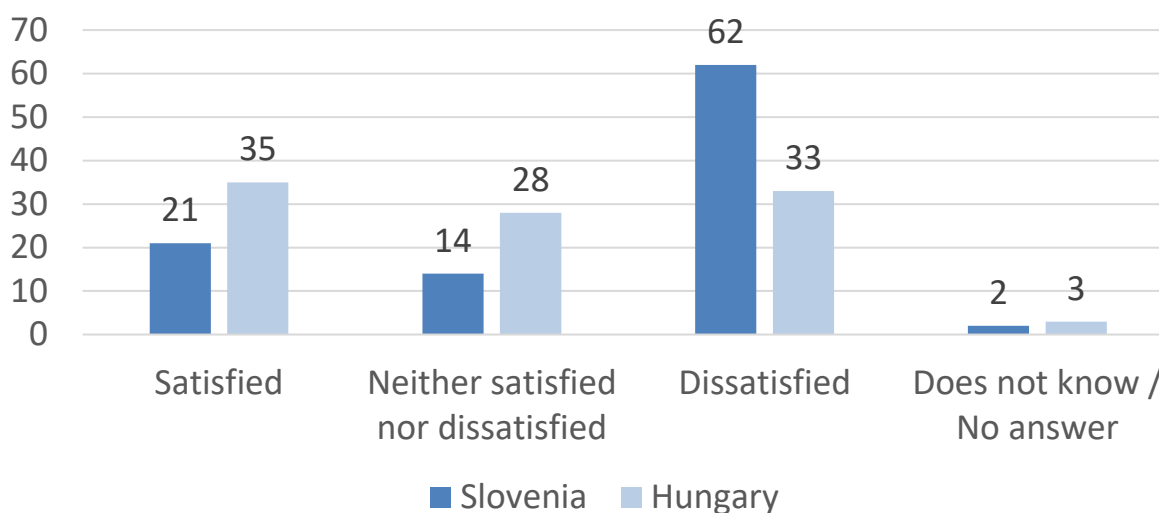
OPINIONS ABOUT THE HANDLING OF THE VIRUS DURING THE FIRST WAVE

In our research, we explored the opinions of the populations in the two countries about the current political situation. The degree of trust in the government showed a critical attitude in both countries: in Hungary less than half of the respondents, in Slovenia less than quarter of the respondents trust the government.



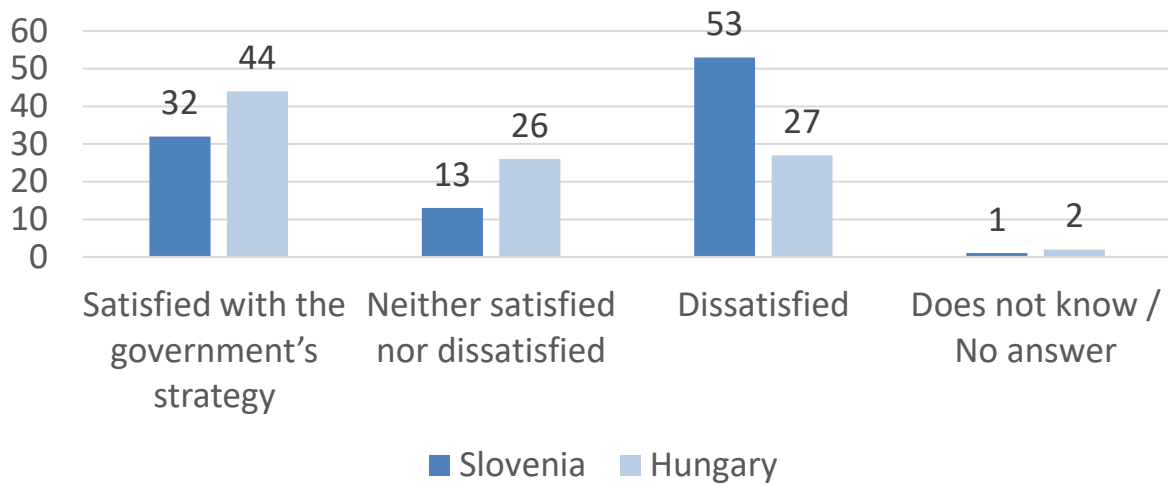
Around two-thirds of the Slovenians are dissatisfied with the working of democracy, this ratio in Hungary is one-third. The Hungarian respondents are more divided in this question, nearly the same portion of people is satisfied as dissatisfied, and almost the same percent of the respondents could not answer whether or not they are satisfied. Only one-fifth of the Slovenians, and a little more than one-third of the Hungarian said that they were satisfied with the working of the democracy in their country.

How satisfied are you with the way democracy is working in your country? (%)

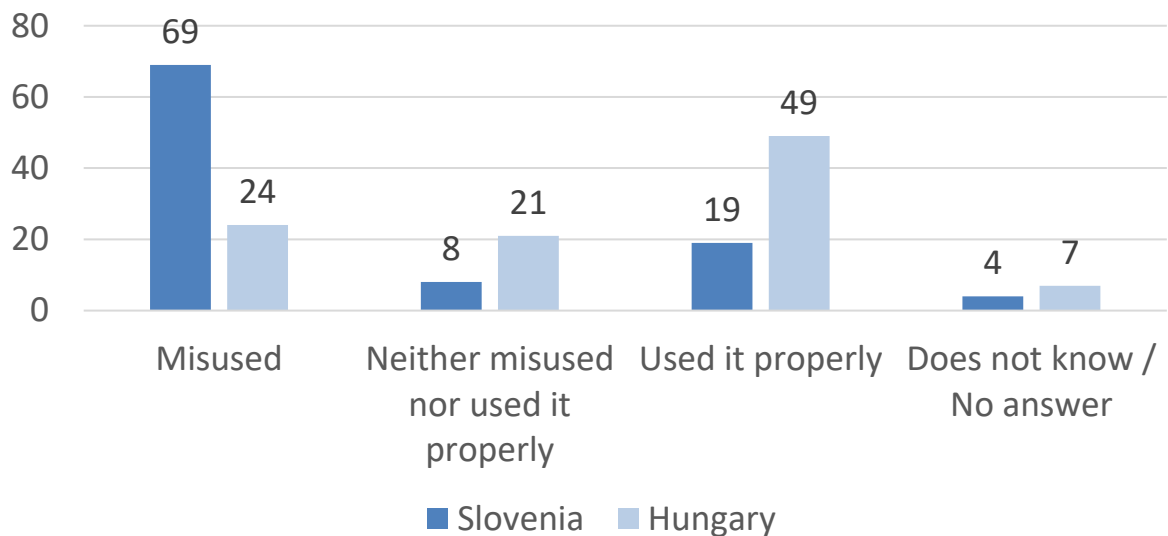


After the general evaluation of the political situation, we asked what the respondents think about the government's strategy against the virus. Interpreting the findings, we can say that both the Slovenian and the Hungarian respondents had a critical attitude towards the government's handling of the pandemic. 44 percent of the Hungarian respondents said that they were satisfied with the government's strategy for the pandemic, thus, the people who are satisfied with the government's work in this area, in recent months, are in the minority. 44 percent of the Hungarian respondents said that they were satisfied with the government's strategy for the pandemic, thus the people who are satisfied – with the government's work in this area in the last couple of months – are in the minority. While this ratio in Slovenia is 32 percent, so the Slovenian society in this aspect is even more critical towards the government than the Hungarian. The respondents also shared their opinions about whether or not the government misused its power during this period of time. In both of the countries, people who think that the government used its power properly are in the minority, in Slovenia more than two-thirds of the respondents experienced some form of anomaly in connection with the government's exercise of power.

How satisfied are you with the government's strategy for COVID-19? (%)



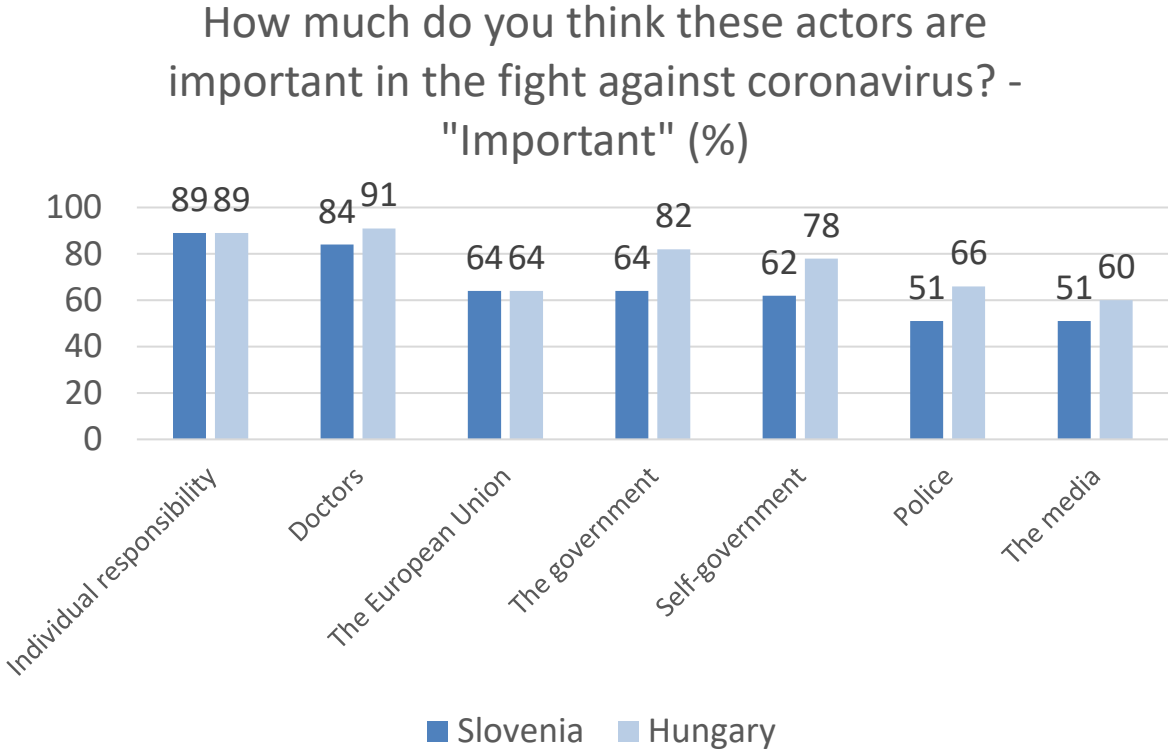
Do you think that the government misused its power during the COVID-19



The coronavirus pandemic has put society in a completely new situation, to which it was impossible to prepare for and which the handling of has constantly raised questions. One of the main questions was that which groups, which professions should have had an important role in the management of the epidemic. In Hungary for example, how much role an epidemic expert, a soldier or a police officer should have in informing people, has been the subject of debate.

In the next part of our research, we listed several relevant groups and the respondents answered how important they consider the role of each group in the fight against the virus. The results have shown that in both countries, people consider individual responsibility and the role of doctors the most important. The role of municipalities and the role of government seemed also determining among Hungarian respondents. Despite the fact that the government tried to frame itself as the only actor since the earlier phase of the pandemic, they reached

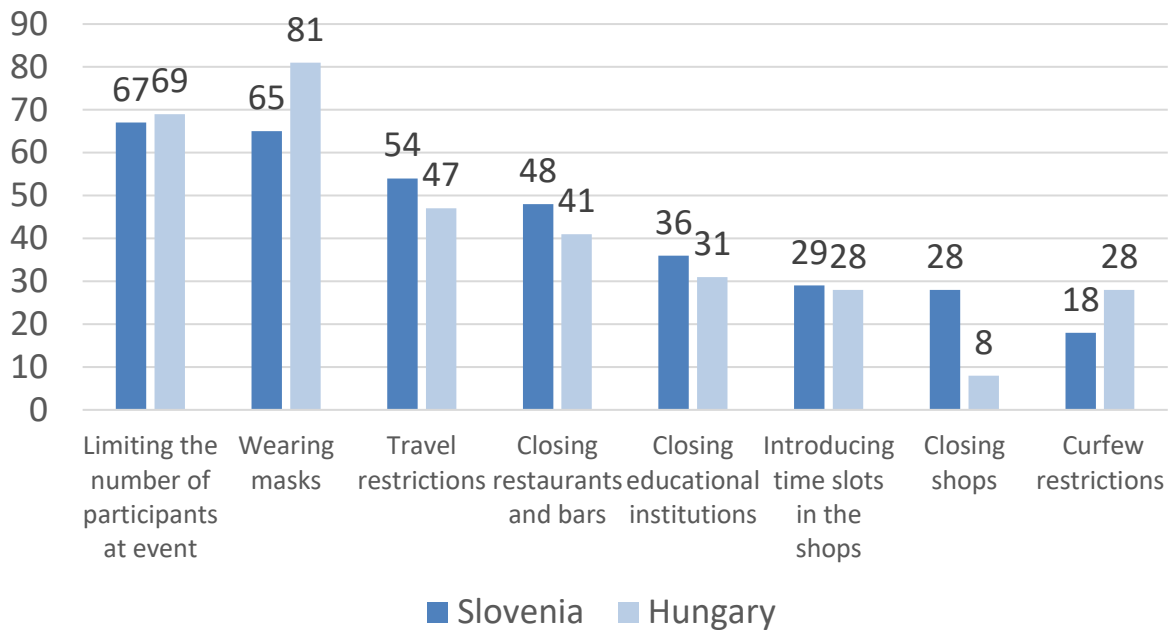
approximately the same result. In both countries, the respondents considered the media's effect the least significant, but at least half of the respondents still mentioned it as important in Hungary and in Slovenia as well.



In our study, we also examined which one of the measures – that were introduced for the sake of defense – is considered important among the population of both countries. Limiting the number of participants at events is considered important by more than two-thirds of the respondents in both countries. In Slovenia, this measure was marked by most people (67 percent) as important. In Hungary - not surprisingly - the first one on the list was wearing mask, which became an integrated part of everyday life and an emphasized element of public discourse, it was considered important by 81 percent of the respondents. The restriction of traveling was marked as critical by around half of the respondents both in Slovenia and Hungary.

The results also indicate which measures are still valid; the difficulties experienced during quarantine may cause low support for the closure of educational institutions, but it is also apparent that the respondents also were not in favor of the time restriction of shops', there aren't any rules like that in place at the moment. One of the main arguments against these types of measures is that they can have serious economic consequences.

How important do you consider these measures? - "Important" (%)

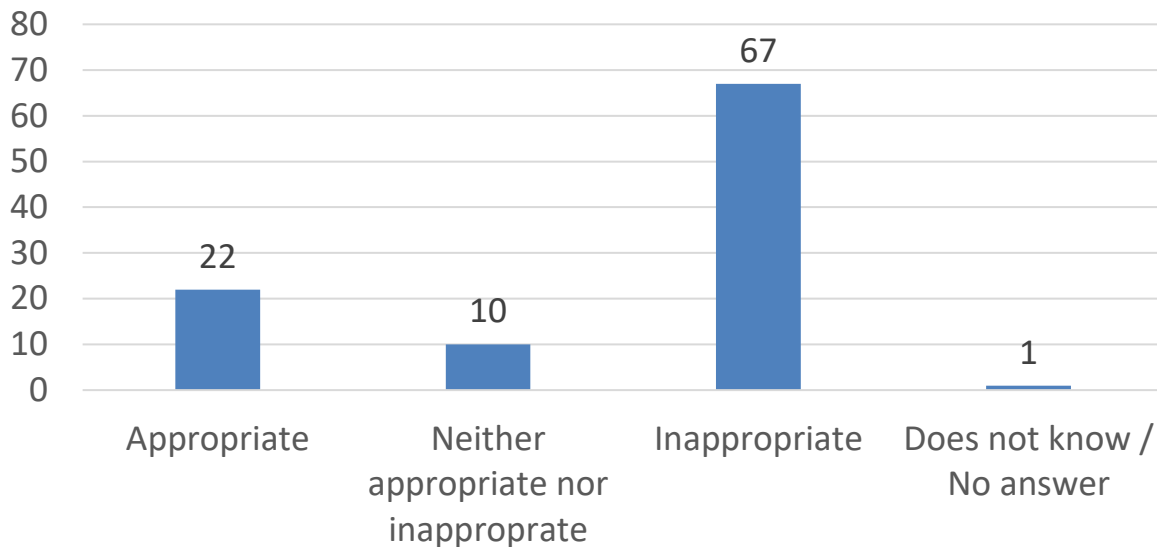


OPINIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

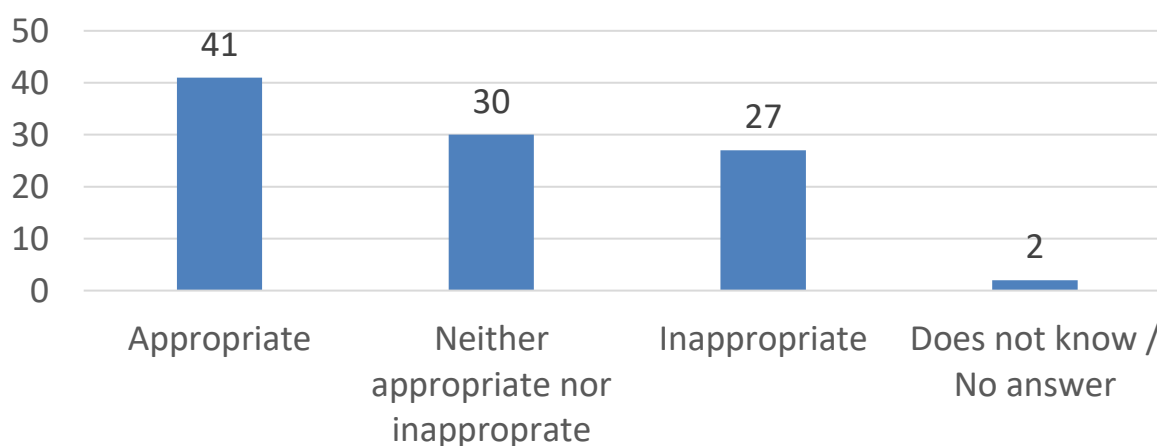
In the next part of our study, we explored the opinions of the two countries' populations. What gives this topic significant importance is that societies are facing an – in this form – 'never seen before' scenario, the virus has demanded plenty of personal sacrifices, and for the fight against the virus we must live with many restrictions. The frames of life have changed fundamentally in the last few months.

We first asked the respondent to tell their opinions about the movement restrictions. In Slovenia, we asked people about the movement restrictions between townships, and two-thirds of the respondents were rather dismissive regarding that question. Hungarians seemed less critical in connection with the partial movement restrictions, but it is also apparent that this is a divisive topic: 41 percent of the respondents support these kinds of measures during the pandemic, a quarter of the respondents do not think these are appropriate, and around the one-third of the people took an intermediate position.

How appropriate do you consider the government decisions regarding movement restrictions during the coronavirus? - Slovenia (%)



How appropriate do you consider the government decisions regarding movement restrictions during the coronavirus? - Hungary (%)



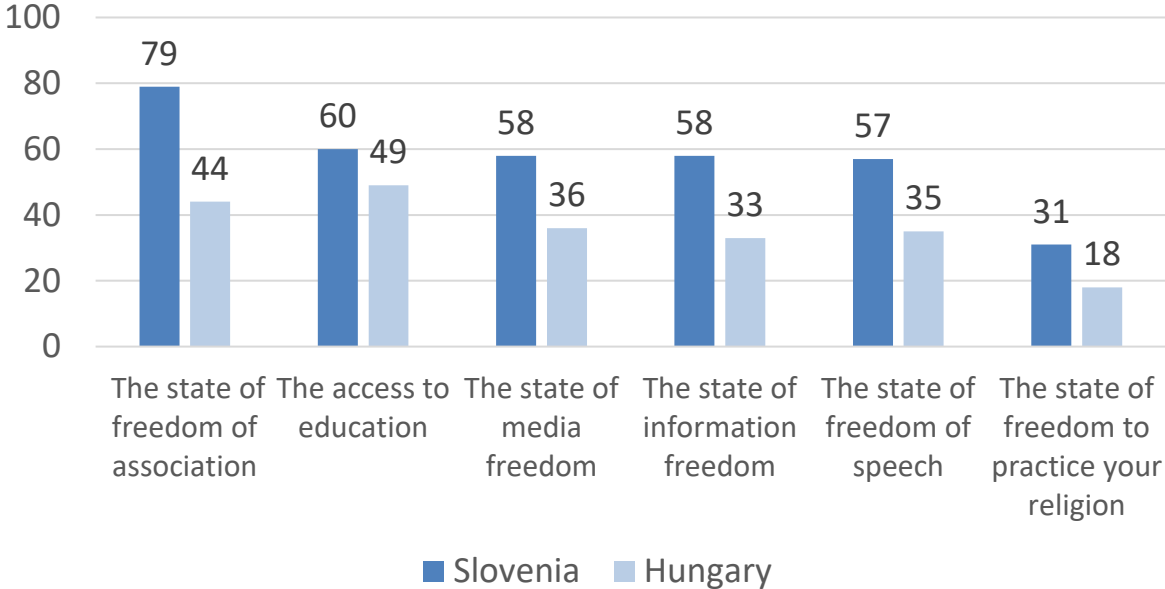
In the next segment of our research, we listed several rights, and the respondents could answer that in their perception, how these have changed during the coronavirus pandemic.

The results show that Slovenians, in general, are more critical regarding the state of human rights – respondents in Slovenia perceived more restriction in every listed aspect than the Hungarian respondents. In Slovenia, more than half of the respondents thought that the

access to the listed rights – except for one – changed in a negative way, which could indicate a general dissatisfaction of the population. In Slovenia the most people chose the freedom of association (79 percent), while in Hungary the most people said that the access to education (49 percent) have become worse during the pandemic. Concerns regarding digital education have become a huge part of public discourse since many families have experienced difficulties, and students who did not have the necessary equipment were in serious disadvantage.

In both countries, as a right to which the access to became worse, the freedom of practicing religion was chosen by the smallest proportion of people.

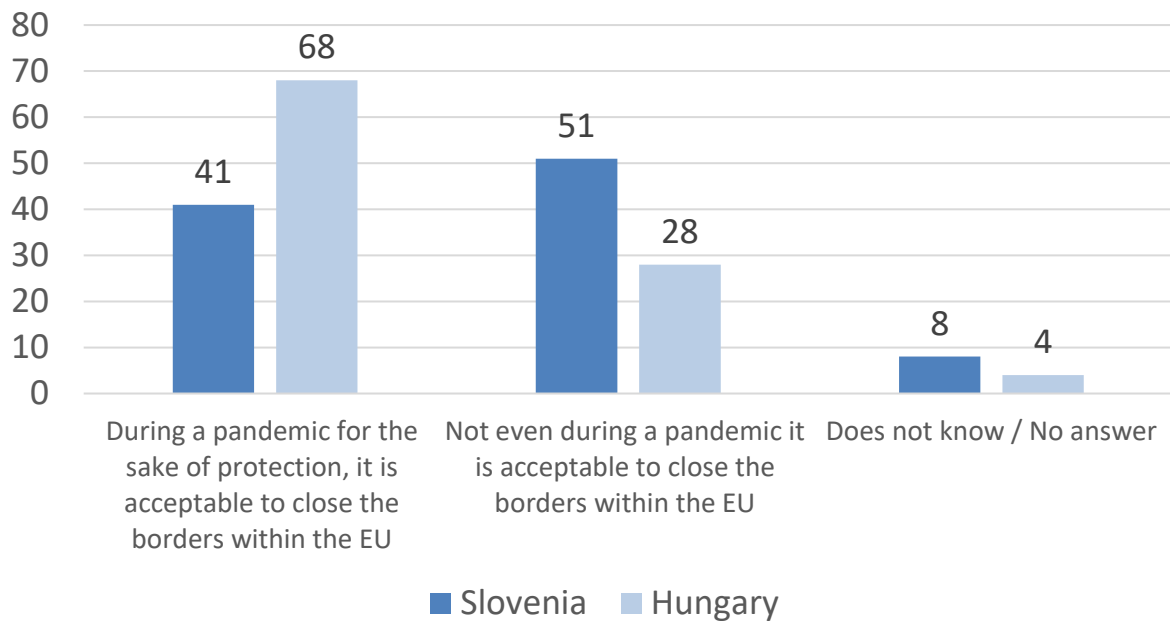
How do you think the following things have changed during the pandemic in Slovenia/in Hungary? - "Became worse" responses (%)



OPINIONS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ROLE

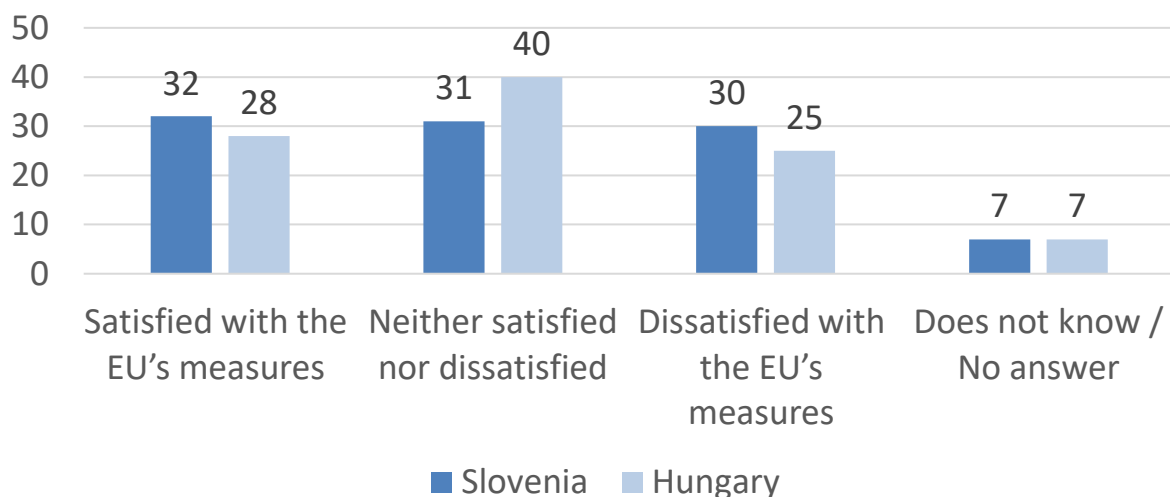
As we did on a national level, we also explored at the level of the union what people think about the restrictions of the free movement. For that reason, we asked in both countries whether or not the respondents agree with the closing of the borders within the territory of the European Union. Slovenian and Hungarian respondents' opinions differed regarding that question, around two-thirds of Hungarians accepted the closure of the borders, while the majority of the Slovenians are on the opposite side, namely around half of the respondents said that even during a pandemic closing the borders within the territory of the European Union is not acceptable.

Please choose the statement you agree with!
(%)



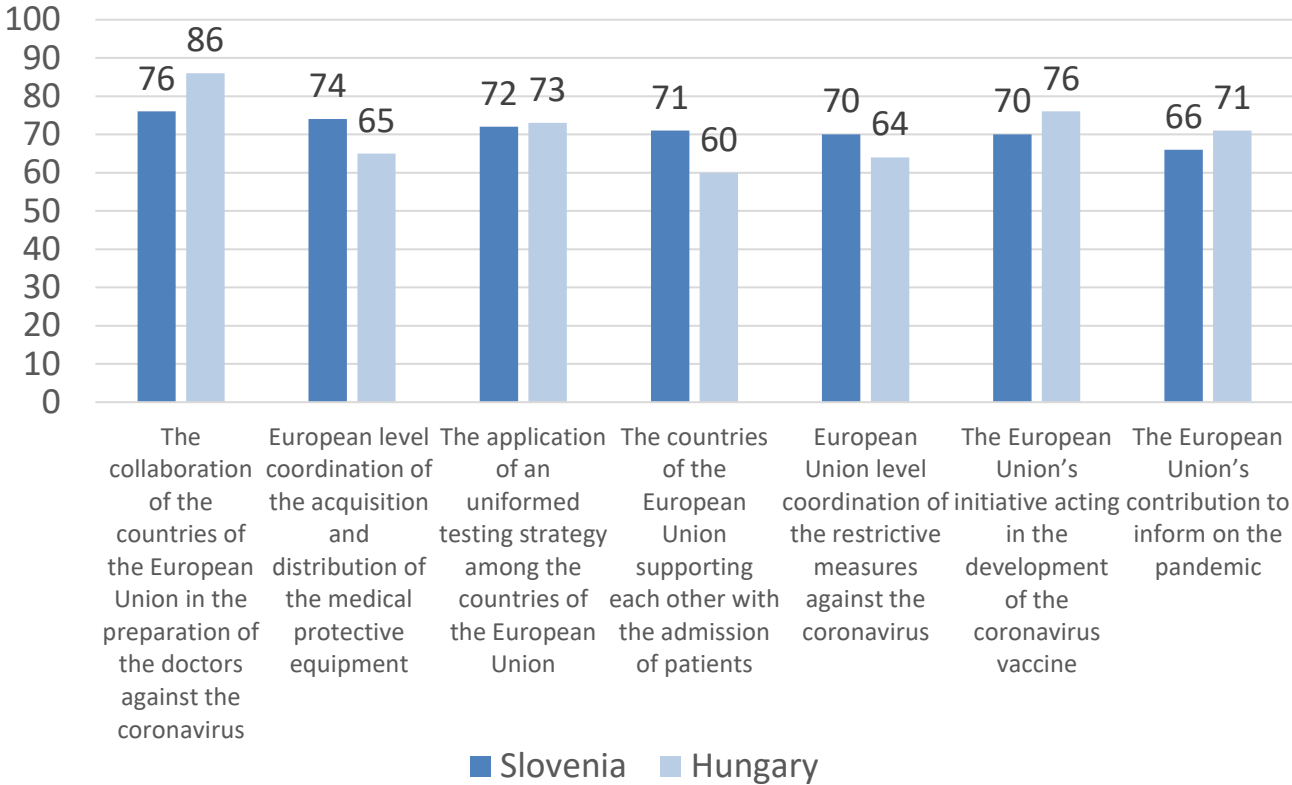
To get to know in both countries the population's opinion, besides their opinions about the governments' strategies, we also explored their thoughts on the European Union's measures. The responses show that the Slovenian society is very divided in that topic, which means that around one-third of the respondents are satisfied, one-third of the respondents said they neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied and another one-third of the respondents are dissatisfied with the measures that were introduced by the European Union. The Hungarian results indicate that Hungarians are far more satisfied with the work of the government, than with the EU, in Slovenia there isn't any significant difference in that regard.

How satisfied are you with the measures introduced by the European Union? (%)



In order to explore which are the areas where people think the European Union’s role would be essential, we asked the respondents how important they consider specific measures. In both countries, in the case of every listed item at least 60 percent of the respondents answered that the given measure was important, which means that both in Slovenia and in Hungary people consider measures on a European level essential. Both in Slovenia and in Hungary the majority of people think that the cooperation in preparing doctors is crucial, which is consistent with how in both countries respondents said that the role of doctors were really important. Among Slovenian respondents the EU’s role in informing people, in Hungary the transfer of patients between the member states seemed the least important.

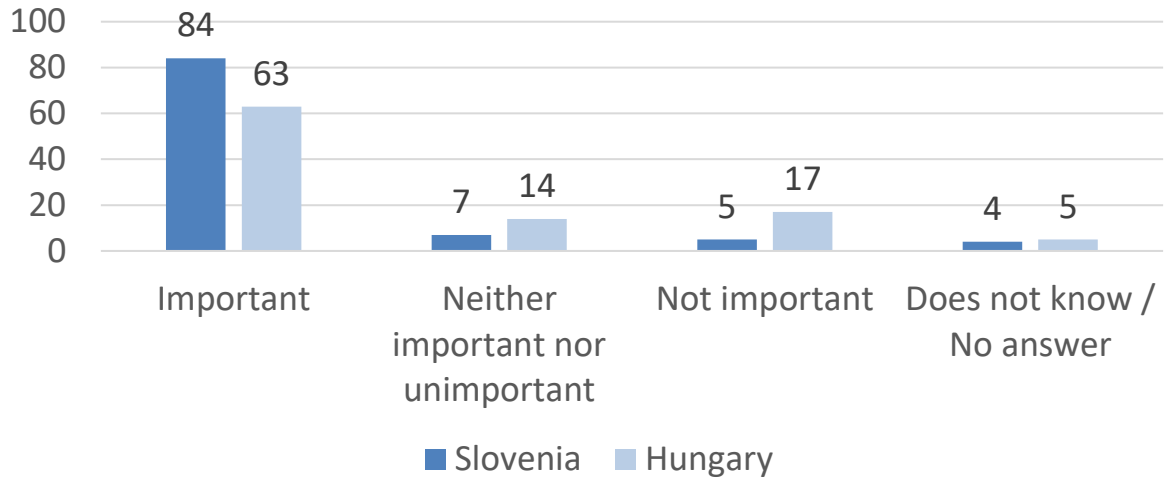
How important do you consider the measures that are? - "Important" answers



To explore the opinions about the European Union’s role, we also asked the respondents about whether or not the EU should intervene if a government misuses its power.

The results show that in the Slovenian population the overwhelming majority (84 percent) supports the EU’s intervention. While among the Hungarian respondents the supporters are in the majority as well, it is a much smaller proportion (63 percent). Interpreting the data, it is important to remember how the government has been using war rhetoric in connection with the EU for years, and how the question of the rule of law and the EU’s monitoring role in that regard became the focus of political discussions recently. Despite this, we can see that almost two-thirds of the Hungarians support the EU’s intervention, while only less than one-fifth of respondents rejected it.

How important do you consider for the European Union to intervene if a national government misuses its power? (%)



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