

# **Active, sociable and autonomous**

**The first six months of the new President of  
Hungary**



**NÉZŐPONT INTÉZET**

## Summary

On 10 November, Katalin Novák, President of Hungary, completed her first six months in office. The Nézőpont Institute has reviewed the evolution of the President's conception of her role as president and the impact this has had on her popularity.

The proportion of those satisfied with the performance of Katalin Novák as the President of Hungary has increased significantly. While in August, 52 percent of Hungarians who were familiar with the figure of the President, believed that overall, she is fulfilling her duties as the President of Hungary in line with expectations, in November 63 percent believed the same. The share of those dissatisfied fell by a fifth over the same period, from 30 to 24 percent.

Katalin Novák's growing popularity can be traced back to three presidential characteristics: her active and bridge-building diplomacy, her sociable personality open to everyday challenges of ordinary people, and her autonomous political role based on her own values.

During the first six months of her term of office, she was very active in diplomatic work. She participated in some 37 high-profile events in 19 countries. Her intense international activity was characterized by a pro-peace policy in relation to the war, and a door-opening policy in relation to Hungary. Her work over the past six months has undoubtedly contributed to her growing popularity, which is well proved by the fact that 57 percent of Hungarians who are familiar with the President believe that she represents Hungary well in international diplomacy.

Her dense programmes showed her sociability, creating a new presidential style compassion and understanding of people. Her personal presence, her conversations and her advocacy of everyday challenges have all contributed to her high popularity. This is also reflected in public opinion, with the majority of Hungarians (53 percent) who are familiar with the President believing that Katalin Novák understands the problems of ordinary people.

Her autonomous political role was reflected in her embrace of her own values and her transcendent attitude towards factional debates. Her decisions were based on personal conviction, uninfluenced by pressure from opposition parties or the media, but she did not ignore the decisions of the governing majority. The majority of Hungarians see her as a president with strong values. This is proved by the fact that the vast majority of Hungarians who are familiar with the President, 68 percent, think that Katalin Novák stands for what she believes in, and only 12 percent think otherwise.

## 1. First half of the year: growing recognition, stable profile

It was half a year ago on 10 November that Katalin Novák, President of Hungary, took office. Already after her first 100 days<sup>1</sup>, despite her short time in office, she was known by the majority of Hungarians and enjoyed high support among informed Hungarians. This time, the Nézőpont Institute examined how her conception of her role as president evolved during the first six months of her term<sup>2</sup> and what impact this had on her profile and popularity.<sup>3</sup>

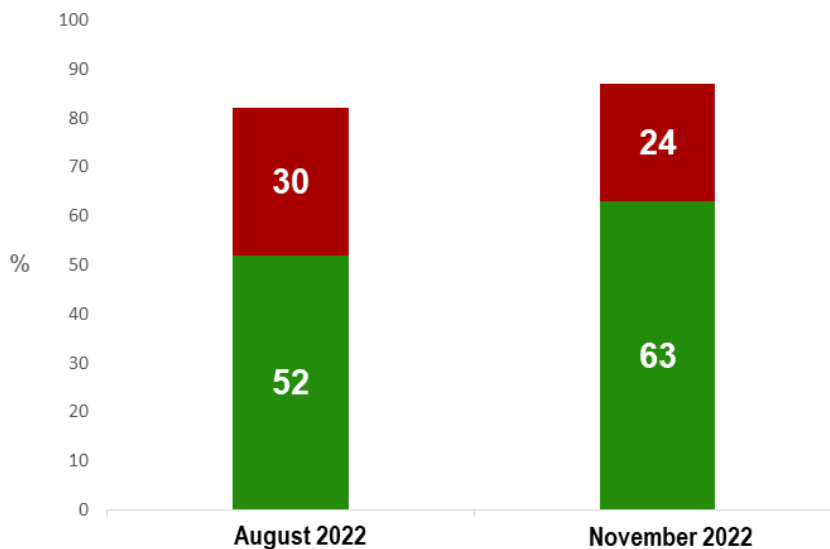
Similar to the results in August (53 percent), the majority of Hungarians (54 percent) in November were able to associate the position of the president with the person of Katalin Novák. However, a higher proportion of those who are informed think that overall, she is doing a good job as president. In almost three months, the share of those satisfied with Katalin Novák's performance so far has increased from 52 to 63 percent, while the share of those dissatisfied has fallen by a fifth, from 30 to 24 percent.

KATALIN NOVÁK IS AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR PRESIDENT



**QUESTION:** Do you think that, overall, Katalin Novák is fulfilling her role as president in line with expectations?

■ rather yes    ■ rather no



Base: those familiar with the president

## 2. Active, sociable and autonomous president

Below, we discuss the factors that have contributed to the rise in popularity of Katalin Novák after six months and already a tenth of her five-year term. Her growing recognition can be traced back to three presidential characteristics: her active and bridge-building diplomacy, her direct personality open to everyday challenges of ordinary people, and her autonomous political role based on her own values. These qualities are well reflected in the President's activities over the past six months and in the Hungarian public's perception of the President.

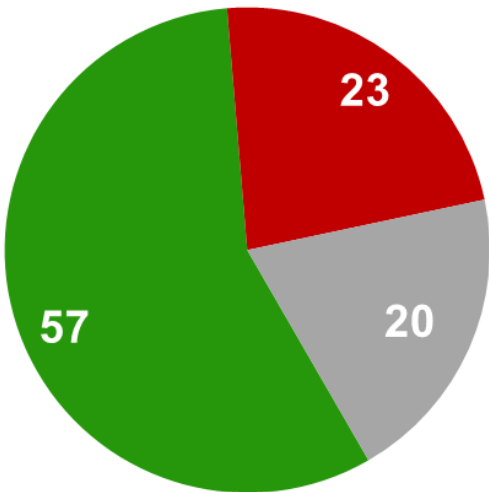
### 2.1. Active: ambassador No. 1

Part of the representative function of the president is to represent the Hungarian state at home and abroad, before diplomats and political leaders. Thanks to the war in the neighbourhood, which was only seen during Árpád Göncz's term of office, it was clear from the moment of her election that her diplomatic activity would be a key element of her office. Her international work over the past six months has undoubtedly contributed to her growing popularity. This is confirmed by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Hungarians who are familiar with the president, 57 percent, think that Katalin Novák represents Hungary well in international diplomacy, while only a quarter of them think the opposite.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF KATALIN NOVÁK: SHE REPRESENTS HUNGARY WELL



■ rather characteristic ■ rather not characteristic ■ DK/NA



*QUESTION: Do you think that the following qualities are rather characteristic or not of President of Hungary Katalin Novák? - She represents Hungary well in international diplomacy  
Base: those familiar with the president*

The war context clearly defined her role, the central element of which was the pro-peace position expressing the will of the majority of Hungarians. From the very beginning of her term of office, she anticipated that she wanted to be a "woman of peace"<sup>4</sup> and that "we want to win peace, not war", and expressed her "willingness to play a mediating role"<sup>5</sup> between the warring parties, arguing for the promotion of peace at the UN plenary session.<sup>6</sup> At the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, she also travelled to Paris for the peace forum, where she also intends to represent the bridging role of Hungary.

In wartime, it is exceptionally important to represent the Hungarian position as effectively as possible, which she introduced in her inaugural speech with the metaphor of "opening doors" policy. She intends to overcome the walls of good international relations not by knocking down walls, but by "opening doors" and "looking for keys". She wanted to be at the forefront of international understanding of the Hungarian worldview over the past six months: "good wine needs a label, and I am honoured to be a label for this wine."<sup>7</sup>

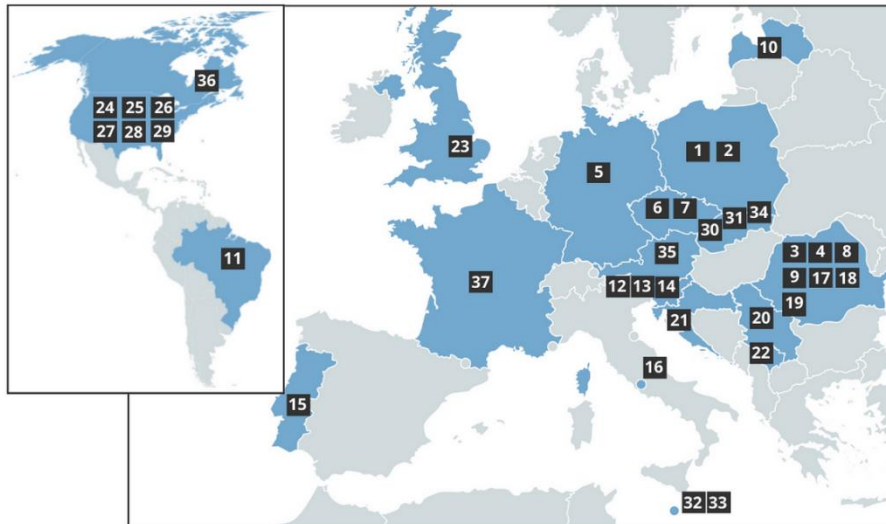
Given her pro-peace and 'door-opening' policy, it is not surprising that her first trip was to Poland, where she met Polish President Andrzej Duda and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who have a different view on the neighbouring conflict.<sup>8</sup> She found the key to normalising relations between the two countries, as after the meeting she simultaneously condemned Russian aggression in line with the pro-peace government's foreign policy, spoke in the name of "friendship for a thousand years" and made a united call to the European Commission to disburse EU funds.<sup>9</sup>

For the remainder of the first half of the year, she continued to open doors to Hungary as "ambassador number one". This is evidenced by the fact that she has visited 19 countries and had 37 diplomatic and other events abroad in the last six months. Most notably, she was received by Pope Francis in a personal audience at the Vatican, where they also discussed the importance of restoring peace, the Hungarian way of supporting families, and formally invited the Holy Father to Hungary, a visit which has only taken place three times so far.<sup>10</sup>

It was a real diplomatic achievement that, in addition to her Transylvanian tour, she also met the Romanian President, who is not always so keen on his Hungarian friendship, at the meeting of Central European heads of state in Bucharest, and paid a visit to Bucharest, where the doors between the Romanian and Hungarian presidents were reopened again and they met again officially after twelve years. But in addition to her pragmatic good neighbourly relations, she has also maintained active contacts with Hungarians beyond the border, including her meetings with Hunor Kelemen, President of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), and her participation in a series of Reformed Church events in Transylvania. Instead of a divisive national border policy, she advocated a borderless national policy by interpreting the representation of Hungarians beyond

the border not as a separate nationality policy, but as a natural part of the representation of the Hungarian position. As a motto for this, she stated that "...there is no difference between living within the borders and living beyond the borders. A Hungarian is a Hungarian."<sup>11</sup>

## Diplomatic events abroad by President of Hungary Katalin Novák



- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>1</b> 17.05.2022 - Poland<br><i>Meeting with the President of the Republic of Poland</i>                         | <b>13</b> 15.07.2022- Slovenia<br><i>Meeting with the Slovenian Prime Minister</i>   | <b>25</b> 21.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Address to the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly</i>   |
| <b>2</b> 17.05.2022 - Poland<br><i>Meeting with the Polish Prime Minister</i>                                       | <b>14</b> 16.07.2022 - Slovenia<br><i>Meeting with the President of the Democratic Party of Slovenia, former Slovenian PM</i>  | <b>26</b> 21.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Meeting with the President of the World Jewish Congress and leaders of several international and American Jewish organisations</i> |
| <b>3</b> 19-21. 05. 2022 - Romania<br><i>Participation in a series of reformed church events</i>                    | <b>15</b> 06-07.08.2022 - Portugal<br><i>Meeting with President Trump's Chief of Staff and former Presidential Advisor</i>   | <b>27</b> 22.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Meeting with the Finnish president</i>   |
| <b>4</b> 20.05.2022- Romania<br><i>Meeting with the President of the RMDSZ</i>                                      | <b>16</b> 25.08.2022 - Vatican City<br><i>Personal audience with Pope Francis</i>  | <b>28</b> 22.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Meeting with the Prime Minister of Andorra</i>   |
| <b>5</b> 02.06.2022- Germany<br><i>Meeting with the German Federal President and the President of the Bundestag</i> | <b>17</b> 07.09.2022 - Romania<br><i>Meeting with the President of Romania</i>   | <b>29</b> 24.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Meeting with US President Joe Biden</i>  |
| <b>6</b> 07.06.2022- Czech Republic<br><i>Meeting with the President of the Czech Republic</i>                      | <b>18</b> 07.09.2022 - Romania<br><i>Meeting with the Romanian Deputy Prime Minister and Hungarian members of the Romanian gov.</i>                                  | <b>30</b> 30.09.2022 - Slovakia<br><i>Meeting with the Slovak president</i>   |
| <b>7</b> 08.06.2022- Czech Republic<br><i>Meeting with the Czech Prime Minister</i>                                 | <b>19</b> 08.09.2022 - Romania<br><i>Meeting with the Romanian Prime Minister, the President of the Romanian Senate and the President of the Chamber of Deputies</i> | <b>31</b> 30.09.2022 - Slovakia<br><i>Meeting with the President of the Federation</i>  |
| <b>8</b> 10.06.2022- Romania<br><i>Participation in the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting</i>                      | <b>20</b> 09.09.2022 - Serbia<br><i>Meeting with the Serbian president</i>   | <b>32</b> 05.10.2022 - Malta<br><i>Meeting with the Maltese and Irish presidents</i>  |
| <b>9</b> 10.06.2022- Romania<br><i>Meeting with the President of Romania</i>  | <b>21</b> 10.09.2022 - Croatia<br><i>Meeting with the President of the Republic of Croatia</i>   | <b>33</b> 05.10.2022 - Malta<br><i>Participation in the meeting of the heads of state of the Arraiolos Group</i>  |
| <b>10</b> 19.06.2022- Latvia<br><i>Representation of Hungary at the Three Seas Summit</i>                           | <b>22</b> 13.09.2022 - Kosovo<br><i>Meeting with the President of Kosovo</i>   | <b>34</b> 11.10.2022 - Slovakia<br><i>Participation in the V4 Heads of State meeting</i>  |
| <b>11</b> 09.07.2022- Brazil<br><i>Meeting with the Brazilian president</i>   | <b>23</b> 18.09.2022 - United Kingdom<br><i>Attend the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II</i>   | <b>35</b> 11.10.2022 - Austria<br><i>Meeting with the Austrian president</i>  |
| <b>12</b> 14.07.2022- Slovenia<br><i>Meeting with the President of Slovenia</i>                                     | <b>24</b> 21.09.2022 - United States<br><i>Speech at the UN meeting of world women heads of state and government</i>   | <b>36</b> 01.11.2022 - Canada<br><i>Meeting with the Prime Minister of Toronto</i>  |
|   |  | <b>37</b> 10.11.2022 - France<br><i>Arrival at the world peace forum at the invitation of the French president</i>  |

## 2.2. A president close to the people

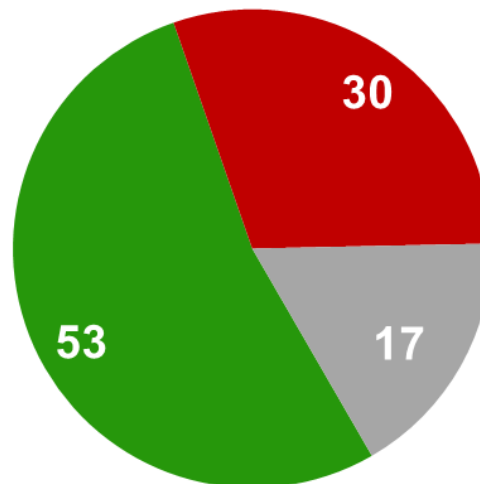
Katalin Novák is characterised by her directness, which is reflected in her active use of online communication channels, regular coverage of public events, family-related events and regular participation in community activities such as promoting wall climbing, visiting exhibitions with college students, visiting melon growers, wineries and bakeries, cheering on sports competitions and joining the National Blue Trail. The directness shown was more than just a clever political product. She has remained self-identical after six months, maintaining the image of both a family mother active in community programmes and a politician representing families, in addition to her online persona, which may also be the source of her high popularity.

In her inaugural speech, she said that "I want to be an ear, a heart and a mouth for those who are now little heard, seen and understood, so that we feel that we belong together." Her directness has made her a tradition-maker in herself, but she has also created a new genre of statesmanship in understanding people and empathy: the "stool meetings". This also meant the fulfilment of a candidate's promise, as she already indicated in her inaugural speech that those Hungarians who live in places invisible to the majority and in poor circumstances could also count on her: "I will be there among them, I will sit on the stool, I will listen to them and represent them." The gesture was given a special personal touch by the fact that Katalin Novák made the stool herself as a guest of a family in Szentlőrinc.

However, this particular directness was evident not only in the everyday situations and encounters with ordinary people, but also in the political representation of the everyday challenges of families. For example, her presidential programme included support for women's freedom to fulfil their potential. She has also addressed a meeting of world women heads of state and government at the UN, where she stressed the importance of reconciling career and family. Equally important to her has been her support for the underprivileged, for example by appearing in person on a Ukrainian channel's fundraising programme or visiting sick children in hospital on Children's Day. Everyday difficulties also include helping young talent to flourish, an example for her related support was the STIPI scholarship programme or her visit to the filming of the *Virtuosos V4+* talent show.

Not surprisingly, Katalin Novák's directness is reflected in the opinions of the majority of Hungarians familiar with the President, with 53 percent of them saying that she understands the problems of ordinary people.

■ rather characteristic ■ rather not characteristic ■ DK/NA



*QUESTION: Do you think that the following qualities are rather characteristic or not of President of Hungary Katalin Novák? - She understands the problems of ordinary people.  
Base: those familiar with the president*

### 2.3. Autonomous role concept

Although Katalin Novák is a tried and tested player in the world of politics, her presidency is not defined by the need to satisfy political interests, but by an autonomous position. As a directly elected president, she does not contest elections, so her popularity is not driven by political competition but by a sincere commitment to her personal convictions. She has defined herself as an autonomous political actor, basing her decisions on her own judgement, based on her "personal Hungarian worldview" and conservative values. In her inaugural speech, she also predicted that "as President of the Republic, I will strengthen Hungarians in what is my personal conviction. In a set of values based on Christianity, in encouraging the transmission of life, the upbringing of children in love, the protection of human life and the family, respect for one another, and support for the weak." A key part of her own commitment to her values was the public expression and practice of her faith, for example, her inauguration began with a church service, the first time that Catholics, members of the Reformed Church, Evangelicals and members of the Jewish community joined together to ask God's blessing on the President.

Another cornerstone of her autonomous concept of her role, in addition to her self-identity, is her critical view of political intentions that differ from her own and her ability to make decisions free from political influence. Over the past six months, Ms. Novák has successfully risen above factional



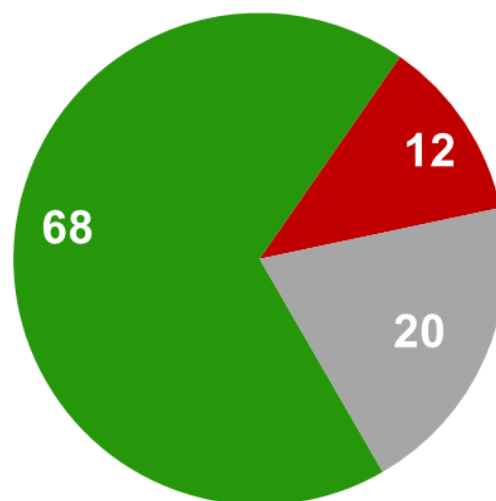
debates, and her leadership has not been influenced by pressure from opposition parties or the media, nor has she been unaffected by the decisions of the governing majority.

The majority of Hungarians see that Katalin Novák is doing her job as President of Hungary with strong values. This is evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of Hungarians who are familiar with the President, 68 percent, think that Katalin Novák stands up for what she believes in, and only 12% think otherwise.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF KATALIN NOVÁK: SHE STANDS UP FOR WHAT SHE BELIEVES IN



■ rather characteristic ■ rather not characteristic ■ DK/NA



*QUESTION: Do you think that the following qualities are rather characteristic or not of President of Hungary Katalin Novák? - She stands up for what she believes in.  
Base: those familiar with the president*

A practical example of this is her critical view on the way the kata (Itemized Tax Liability of Small Taxpayers) law was amended, saying that "it would have been better if the amendments had been decided after a meaningful consultation. Even in the case of rapid changes, the Government should be expected to provide adequate assistance to those affected."<sup>12</sup> However, she found no fault with the constitutionality of the law or the legislative intent, only with the way in which it was enacted. She therefore decided not to block the amendment politically, in the absence of a legal argument, but to consult with the government, and was promised that the detailed rules would be drafted with reassuring answers to legitimate questions, which is what happened.

She also voiced her opposition to the 11th Amendment to the Fundamental Law, as she saw no compelling justification for the constitutional amendment.<sup>13</sup> Commenting on her decision, she said

that the Fundamental Law "can only fully fulfil its role as a measure of values if it is not subject to constant changes." However, in the case of a Fundamental Law amendment, the president has no possibility to send it back to Parliament, and the Constitutional Court can only be addressed in case of procedural errors. By signing the amendment, he fulfilled his constitutional obligation and did not use her obstructionist powers on political grounds, despite pressure from the opposition press.

She also voiced her critical views during the October teachers' strike, after meeting Péter Horváth, President of the National Teachers' Chamber. She called for a quick and calm solution to ensure teachers' financial security.<sup>14</sup> However, she rose above the politicised debate by expressing her position without taking sides with either the government or the protesters, while at the same time expressing her agreement on the issue of wage settlements, which was considered important by both sides.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://nezopont.hu/az-ujyszeru-es-hagyomanyisztelo-allamfo-novak-katalin-elso-100-napja/> (Download date:08.11.2022.)

<sup>2</sup> manuscript closed: 10 November 2022.

<sup>3</sup> The Nézőpont Institute's opinion poll was conducted between 7 and 9 November 2022, with 1,000 people interviewed by telephone. For all surveys, the sample is representative of the population aged 18 and over; the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.16$  percent. The percentages reported in the analysis are based on the number of respondents who are familiar with the President, who correctly answered the question "Please name the current President of the Republic of Hungary". In the survey, 537 people were able to name Katalin Novák.

<sup>4</sup> Katalin Novák's speech as a candidate for the President of the Republic of Hungary on 10.03.2022. <https://www.parlament.hu/documents/10181/1569934/ny220310-ossze.pdf/465b5145-97cf-01ab-55a1-3b37e1ac12e3?t=1647589426407> (Download date: 09.11.2022.)

<sup>5</sup> Inaugural speech of Katalin Novák on 14. 05. 2022. <https://manila.mfa.gov.hu/news/novak-katalin-koetzarsasagi-elnoek-beiktatasi-beszede> (Download date:08.11.2022.)

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Katalin Novák at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly on 23 September 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/videos/1385394335288162/> ((Download date: 09.11.2022.)

<sup>7</sup> Inaugural speech of Katalin Novák on 14.05.2022

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[https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid0FH2YBUx6U5Fp7JxgSNQHfoWr8PemsMogXhFVgq4QdxTo6vocHXwoUMK2n1ecNEo3l?\\_cft\\_\[0\]=AZUwSix7T3r4JdC9FNLdnywuPVImgsx9EHV5ccvvNh-IVFbd38-QaS7pLakD6IC-CdPHzcaaVt1avbuElJKoz1AhD078Q5E15kd-DfrtpzDNBrQt2wklGyREF7YmmeOuG0P4YI\\_i7225zGgG-Ldl733jPReRN1An\\_8czUH8tEfu50A&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid0FH2YBUx6U5Fp7JxgSNQHfoWr8PemsMogXhFVgq4QdxTo6vocHXwoUMK2n1ecNEo3l?_cft_[0]=AZUwSix7T3r4JdC9FNLdnywuPVImgsx9EHV5ccvvNh-IVFbd38-QaS7pLakD6IC-CdPHzcaaVt1avbuElJKoz1AhD078Q5E15kd-DfrtpzDNBrQt2wklGyREF7YmmeOuG0P4YI_i7225zGgG-Ldl733jPReRN1An_8czUH8tEfu50A&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R) (Download date: 10.11.2022.)

<sup>9</sup> [https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20220517\\_novak\\_katalin\\_andrzej\\_duda\\_varso\\_talalkozo\\_lengyel\\_magyar\\_kapcsolatok](https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20220517_novak_katalin_andrzej_duda_varso_talalkozo_lengyel_magyar_kapcsolatok)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/625576975596555/> (Download date: 09.11.2022.)

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<https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid02Ekc8pykMTJ8dq9Z35hFvcWcL7pJCBgkw3csfB7QG1T3VtCbrZqe2jBZ8WJf3S6kr1> (Download date: 09.11.2022.)

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[https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid0u6zvhnjDkrTeTNDZpd453Nf8aNYHwVEv9ht9Pv7QCS8Uf9psfHomvFKXoHoFqajW1?\\_cft\\_\[0\]=AZWRcXXnkUhiJLeDrMbxqOMMYCqm0kozhhlX6jRFU4a9\\_mksDvJxRNh8xTXL5oc89HwLZX5OLwVeqFVOwWtModmiSgWXXuLPDZnv4zhp3im\\_01K-zfGVrmI-rDsGBLe9dM&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid0u6zvhnjDkrTeTNDZpd453Nf8aNYHwVEv9ht9Pv7QCS8Uf9psfHomvFKXoHoFqajW1?_cft_[0]=AZWRcXXnkUhiJLeDrMbxqOMMYCqm0kozhhlX6jRFU4a9_mksDvJxRNh8xTXL5oc89HwLZX5OLwVeqFVOwWtModmiSgWXXuLPDZnv4zhp3im_01K-zfGVrmI-rDsGBLe9dM&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R) ((Download date: 09.11.2022.)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid023FPqyTDDeiUErfqm1bozteoBmeP4JvcX68ajZa3gYsPqaVwswxLGNMfE3oggg4n3l> (Download date: 09.11.2022.)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbid0ZVU3QPQhrquzYmXUsrEb2AJ1syKRp4DNndkDErciTrA8PKm2pT6yq4ATHCcQ435cl> ((Download date: 09.11.2022.)