



The Coverage of Israel and Israel-related Events in Hungarian Media (MIMC Organization Report Regarding the 2020 October Borsod By-Election)

This paper analyses the levels of objectivity and professionalism in the covering of Israel and Israel-related events in Hungarian online media during the 2020 October Borsod¹ by-election campaign.

Analyzed here are four admittedly liberal or left-wing news portals chosen by the large size of their readership (24.hu, 444.hu), previous occurrences of anti-Israel sentiments (merce.hu) and their general focus on Jewish subjects (szombat.org).

Our research question was whether these news portals offered comprehensive and balanced news on the by-election and whether their readers could learn of opposition candidate László Bíró's numerous antisemitic and anti-Israel comments (for details see the Jewish Telegraphic Agency's report)² solely by reading these portals.

MIMC Organization has employed a tag-based search for the name "László Bíró" and the expression "antisemitism". Analyzed here are articles that appeared between Magyar Nemzet's first report on Bíró's antisemitic past (19th August)³ and the day of the by-election.

24.hu

On 19th August 24.hu reported on comments made by Roma activist Jenő Setét in which he called Bíró a "racist candidate". This article is not based, however, on Magyar Nemzet's original piece, but on different, anti-Roma comments that Bíró had made in the past.⁴

¹ Borsod is a region in Eastern Hungary while Szerencs is a town of 10,000 souls the parliamentary representative of which the October 2020 election decided.

² <https://www.jta.org/2020/10/16/global/in-hungary-the-left-and-the-far-right-have-united-to-defeat-viktor-orban-he-says-jewish-groups-are-giving-them-a-pass-on-anti-semitism> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

³ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/antiszemita-hangado-a-baloldal-szerencsi-jeloltje-8540772/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

⁴ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/08/19/ellenzek-jelolt-rasszista/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

24.hu's next article appeared in the evening of the same day, titled "Szerencs opposition candidate apologizes for unacceptable comments".⁵ 24.hu did not quote Bíró's anti-Semitic comments word by word, but did offer a link to Magyar Nemzet's report. The emphasis of the article was on the fact that Bíró apologized.

The news portal later published various opinion pieces from left-wing and liberal intellectuals which debated whether it was acceptable for left-wing parties to support an anti-Semitic candidate or not.⁶

24.hu does not seem to have reported Bíró's awkward excuse for his anti-Semitism, namely that he was "lethargic" during the period when he wrote his racist Facebook comments.

444.hu

444.hu reported on Bíró's anti-Semitic remarks on 19th August, quoting his anti-Semitic comments in full. The title of the article, however, was "Jobbik [politician] László Bíró apologizes for anti-Semitic comments".⁷

On 25th September, 444.hu published an article titled "Borsod opposition candidate says he made anti-Semitic remarks as he needed support because of the two-thirds [parliamentary majority] of Fidesz".⁸ The article reported on Bíró's excuses quoted above.

Merce.hu

Merce.hu, which has previously been named by the Hungarian-Jewish anti-Semitism watchdog group Action and Protection Foundation as the "most anti-Israel [Hungarian news portal]",⁹ did not report on Bíró László's anti-Semitic comments during the campaign.

Our searches for the words "László Bíró" and "antisemitism" did not produce a single result from between 19th August and 11th October. Only one article¹⁰ by Orsi Pósfai published on 10th October (less than 24 hours before the election) offered a passing remark on Bíró having apologized for certain anti-Semitic comments, but the link directed the readers to an article by 444.hu, not by Merce.hu. The remarks were not quoted.

⁵ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/08/19/hiro-laszlo-jobbik-rasszista-bocsanakeres-szerencs/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

⁶ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/08/29/somogyi-zoltan-tiszaujvaros-idokoti-valasztas-biro-laszlo-rasszizmus/>; <https://24.hu/kozelet/2020/09/14/elek-istvan-tiszaujvaros-valasztas-baz-6-biro-laszlo/>; <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/10/05/tgm-szerencs-rasszizmus-idokozi-valasztas/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

⁷ <https://444.hu/2020/08/19/a-jobbikos-biro-laszlo-bocsanatot-ker-az-antiszemita-kommentjei-miatt> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

⁸ <https://444.hu/2020/09/25/az-ellenzek-borsodi-jeloltje-azt-mondja-azert-tett-antiszemita-kijelenteseket-mert-kapaszkodokat-keresett-a-fidesz-ketharmad-miatt> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

⁹ <https://tev.hu/tovabb-erosodo-izrael-ellenes-sztereotipiak-a-hazai-progressziv-sajtoban/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

¹⁰ <https://merce.hu/2020/10/10/kormanyparti-kampanyolas-borsodban-akkor-folytatodnak-a-fejlesztések-ha-a-fideszes-jelolt-nyer/> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).

Szombat.org

Jewish website Szombat.org published its first article on Bíró on 20th August, titled “Szerencs opposition candidate apologizes for unacceptable comments”.¹¹ The article did not quote verbatim Bíró’s remarks, the emphasis was on Bíró’s apology.

Szombat did not report on Bíró’s excuse that his remarks were made because of his “lethargic state”.

Summary

Of the four news portals analyzed here, only 444.hu quoted Bíró’s racist remarks in full, and only the same news portal quoted Bíró’s contradictory apology in which he blamed his anti-Semitic comments on lethargy and the government.

Not even one of the news portals analyzed here published a separate article on Bíró’s anti-Semitism, the very first articles always emphasized Bíró’s apology in their titles.

Merce.hu stands as an exception as the left-wing news portal did not report on Bíró’s anti-Semitism at all until the last 24 hours of the campaign.

Magyar nyelvű összefoglaló

Az itt elemzett négy hírportál közül egyedül a 444.hu idézte teljes egészében Bíró rasszista megjegyzéseit, és csak ugyanez a hírportál idézte Bíró ellentmondásos bocsánatkérését, melyben antiszemita megjegyzéseit a letargiára és a kormányra kente.

Egyetlen itt elemzett portál sem szentelt külön cikket Bíró antiszemitizmusának, az első cikkek mindig Bíró elnézést kérését hangsúlyozták címeikben.

A Merce.hu kivételt képez, mivel a baloldali portál egyáltalán nem írt Bíró antiszemitizmusáról, egészen a kampány utolsó napjáig.

סיכום

מתוך ארבעת פורטלי החדשות שנבדקו כאן רק 444 ציטטו את ההערות הגזעניות של חבר יוביק, לאסלו בירו, במלואן

רק 444 ציטטו את ההתנצלות המשונה של בירו, בה הוא תולה את ההערות האנטישמיות שלו בדיכאון ומאשים את ממשלת פידס

אף לא אחד, מפורטלי החדשות שנבדקו כאן, פרסמו מאמר שלם נפרד על האנטישמיות של בירו. המאמרים הראשונים תמיד הדגישו את ההתנצלות של בירו בכותרת

מרצה הוא יוצא מן הכלל כפורטל חדשות שמאלני שלא דיווח על האנטישמיות של בירו כלל, עד פחות מ 24 שעות לסיום הקמפיין

¹¹ <https://szombat.org/hirek-lapszemle/bocsanatot-ker-vallalhatatlan-kijelenteseiert-az-ellenzek-szerencsi-jeloltje> (Last accessed: 24th October 2020.).