

**The road from Europhilia to Europhobia:
A Populist Nationalist and Eurosceptic Turn in Hungary**

Written by Eszter Nagy

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Central European University

Supervisor: Professor László Csaba

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Abstract

Since Hungary's EU-accession we experienced a fundamental change in the political system of the country that used to be the front-runner of the transition and the EU-integration process, with unquestionable pro-Western orientation supported by the consensus of political parties. Mere 14 years after joining the EU, this "new" EU-member state finds itself in the middle of international criticism for recurring offenses of the European norms and value system and for regularly obstructing common EU-decisions. Hungary is by now a frequent topic on the front pages of international media outlets for its democratic backsliding and alarming authoritarian tendencies.

What exactly happened, why and how? In my thesis I will present an overview of the underlying causes of this U-turn and an assessment of the current situation focusing on the one hand on the populist perspective interconnected with Euroscepticism, the new trend in Hungarian foreign policy. On the other hand, I will analyze the changes leading to the establishment of a hybrid regime with a special focus on the aspects of foreign policy and its impacts on and future perspectives in the European Union. I will describe the relationship and interconnection between populist nationalism and Euroscepticism.

Through discourse analysis I will depict how this sharp turn happened and how populist nationalism became the mainstream political ideology spilling over to foreign policy inevitably leading to increasing Euroscepticism, transforming international relations and its institutional framework in an EU-member state that provides a so far unprecedented case.

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Introduction

How does populist nationalism change a country? How is it connected to Euroscepticism? The Hungarian case-study provides a unique example for democratic backsliding to the extent of becoming a hybrid regime while being an EU-member providing ground for the interest of scholarship to understand this phenomenon. Both populism and Euroscepticism are still debated labels but gaining legitimacy because of the growing number of related cases, and the increasing attention of academic scholarship in describing its mechanism and impacts. I would like to contribute to revealing the Hungarian case, the background processes and its current functioning. Discursive governance and its functioning has not been extensively researched yet, but the current populist wave attracts attention to this political tool that I will also analyze.

This case is unprecedented, because populist nationalism is not represented in Hungary by a marginal extremist political force, but by the governing party possessing qualified majority. This governing party with intensifying populist and Eurosceptic rhetoric is long-term in government without any signs of consolidation. Since 2010, this governance has changed the constitution, state institutions to cement his power by means of a qualified majority mandate severely restricting opportunities for opposition parties, remaining independent media outlets and critical civil organizations for checks and balances.

My interest is to uncover this unprecedented transformation, how it has been realized on the level of discourse, in terms of the institutional infrastructure, in foreign policy actions and decision-making processes. Hungary has already been defined a post-communist autocracy¹ putting to a stress-test the EU's institutional framework in trying to respond to such developments. The Hungarian example has also the potential to incite contagion, as the precedent presented by Orbán with cumbersome EU

¹ János Kornai (2014) "Threatening dangers", keynote lecture at the Transition in Perspective: 25 years after the Fall of Communism conference (Peterson Institute for International Relations and School of Public Policy, Central European University), Budapest, 6-7 May

responses combined might encourage politicians in other – even old member states – to follow his path.²

To identify the key processes of a Eurosceptic transformation and democratic U-turn combined could allow earlier recognition and more effective tackling of the problem on behalf of the EU. This latter has a threefold impact in connection with the Hungarian hybrid regime: the EU provide checks and legal protection in the field of basic human right, with the help of the European Court of Justice and the Court of Human Rights, it contributes to the maintenance of the regime with the financial transfers and the EU also legitimizes the Hungarian regime as an international organization with democracies as member-states.³ My hypothesis is that in addition to the above mentioned three main impacts, the EU also offers to the Hungarian leader a greater public space for exercising influence, as a charismatic populist leader continuously needs new opponents and new confrontations.

The Hungarian political system that reached the point of being called a mafia-state⁴ characterized by state capture with a populist nationalist leadership that could transform the political system to provide for the perpetuation of power. It means a fundamentally different situation than populists in opposition what is still more common in the established democracies of Western Europe. Orbán and his party practically eliminated domestic opposition parties and repressed civil organizations, thus enemy must be found outside the borders that is also required for maintaining the Manichean populist rhetoric. So, the vertical and horizontal oppositions can be combined, and outside actors can be targeted with the bellicose discourse, as the impersonator of the “corrupt elite”, and the populist government can still play the “underdog”. It is a logical and necessary move for the populist nationalist leader to maintain his legitimacy as a freedom fighter, the ultimate representant of the people’s interest.

² János Kornai (2015), “Hungary’s U-Turn” *Capitalism and Society*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 2, p. 14

³ Bozóki András, Hegedűs Dániel, “A kívülről korlátozott hibrid rendszer”, *Politikatudományi Szemle* XXVI/2, pp. 7-32, p.22-24

⁴ *Hungarian Polyp, The Post-Communist Mafia State* (Noran Libro, 2013)

Being an EU-member-state, the Union as an outside, but still interconnected actor is handed on a plate by the ideology of Euroscepticism. The governing institutions of the EU offer a sitting target, they are robust, multiplayer, slow-reacting organizations not used to manipulation, where a talented political strategist and “freedom fighter” can easily disorient, mislead and get by in general. So, pre-accession good behavior evaporates transforming cooperative pro-European foreign policy into full scale Euroscepticism. My hypothesis is that by now the populist nationalist leadership in Hungary is inseparably connected to Euroscepticism. Populist nationalism is complemented and legitimized domestically by the ideological background of Euroscepticism, whereas membership in the European Union legitimizes the Hungarian government externally as stated above.

Populist nationalism emerged from the strongly divided Hungarian political party system, from the opposition between nationalist-conservative-traditionalist orientation on the one side and the liberal-cosmopolitan-secular-pro-integration ideology on the other. Strong Euroscepticism is also part of the broader anti-globalization rhetoric, and it is more apparent because of Hungary’s embeddedness in the EU with frequent interactions present in most fields of economy and society. The populist nationalist narrative that has helped so far Fidesz to stay in power is fueled by Euroscepticism and anti-globalization ideology. My hypothesis is that for a small country with an open economy and dependent on international relations it is inevitably a dead-end strategic direction.

In the meantime, Euroscepticism is efficiently diffused by the toolset of populism domestically and Europe-wide, as well. It is especially efficient in a pyramid type governing system of interdependence resembling more and more to the polity of a one-party-state, where there is only one personalistic leader in the center of decision-making. Everything is decided in a top-down manner with the help of a state bureaucracy where key positions are filled with party officials or people with unquestionable loyalty to the party.

Being an EU-member there are no constraints any more to comply with the norms and values that were so closely scrutinized throughout the accession process of the aspiring countries. The socialization process in the international organizations are easily reversible especially if the domestic democratic institutions are not that stable as some post-communist EU-member states demonstrate. Their societal immune system remains weak due to unstable party systems and lack of long-term democratic traditions. The general conviction that overall linkage with and geographical closeness to the Western developed democracies would keep CEECs on the democratic path does not seem to work in the case of Hungary. This closeness can work in a different way: when a politician from a “new” member-state has some EU-related experience⁵ and a deeper understanding of the way of functioning and institutional deficiencies of the European Union, it can result in taking advantage of the institutional deficiencies. A Weberian political momentum, “Spiel durch die Kontingenz” becomes available, contingency used by the freedom of action in a bureaucratized environment.⁶ So, my hypothesis is that geographical closeness and interconnectedness is a double sided coin, on the one hand it can foster democratic transition and the building up of institutions, but on the other hand as the Hungarian case shows, it does not guarantee for its long term subsistence, and it can offer backstair opportunities for confidence game.

The controversial impacts of the EU development funds endanger the appreciation of the EU institutions. On the one side the population of the net contributor states are not assured any more that their money is spent in a transparent and efficient way, while on the other side, it has ambivalent effects in the population of the recipient countries besides the regime-supporting impact. The average citizens and SMEs are excluded from these funds as the government is in control of the distribution and has its own favored recipient companies. Numerous investigations by EU institutions prove that the beneficiaries are close to the oligarchy circle of the governing party, while these investigations do not

⁵ Viktor Orbán used to be the head of the EU Integration Committee (1994-98) before becoming prime minister

⁶ András Körösenyi, Gábor Illés, Rudolf Metz “Kontingencia és politikai cselekvés”, Politikatudományi Szemle XXVI/1. Pp. 7-28, p.12

lead to legal processes, as the Chief Prosecutor's Office has also been hijacked by a longtime loyal FIDESZ party member. Democratic backsliding and state capture together could reduce the confidence in democratic institutions in Hungary in general and in other CEE countries, that can result in the hollowing of democracy limiting the possibilities for political change and to the relaunching once again the democratization process. My hypothesis is that the EU can only contain this tendency with hard constraints and coherence with regards to the utilization of financial transfers providing leverage to scale back democratic backsliding.

The EU and leading Western governments have a decisive role in further developments in Hungary as domestic opposition and democratic institutions are neutralized and democratic exchange is unlikely in the new legal and institutional circumstances in the country.

Outline

In the first chapter, I will describe Hungarian populist nationalism and how Viktor Orbán, as a populist leader reached a qualified majority government position. Depicting the main processes, I will analyze basic root-causes and sociological factors in the Hungarian society. I will describe the democratic backsliding achieved by overwhelming centralization, and the establishment of a pyramidal dependency structure in public administration and institutions of check and balances. The expansion and transforming impact of this political strategy to the diplomacy and foreign policy structures was equally inevitable. It meant the introduction of "pragmatic" international relations that was hallmarked by the integration of foreign trade and tourism into the structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In the second chapter I will elaborate Hungary's role in the European Union and the government's policies that also have an impact on the EU level. These policies cannot be restricted to international relations, as domestic laws introducing major changes generated much attention on the EU-level. I will portray the institutional changes in handling EU affairs and in general the relationship between

the foreign ministry and the prime minister's office. From this aspect, it is interesting to explore the level of embeddedness: how Hungarian domestic events are perceived by the different EU institutions from the EU Commission, the European Parliament to OLAF.

The third chapter I named "Constructed Reality – Discourse Analysis", as discursive governance is the most important political talent of Viktor Orbán. His innovative political strategy takes use of conspiracy theories, government billboard campaign, national consultations and alternative truths have also been part of the governing toolset. In this chapter I will analyze Orbán's speeches, political statements and attitudes, also mentioning the special relationship that is unfolding between Russia and Hungary as an alternative to Western orientation.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The Hungarian case features on the top list of academic scholarship dealing with populism, Euroscepticism and political theories trying to define the current political system. There is common agreement that something so far unprecedented happened, an EU-state previously considered a stable consolidated democracy is experiencing democratic backsliding to the extent that most scholars would not call the Hungarian political system democracy any more, but an illiberal or a managed one.

By trying to describe the polity, we get closer to understanding its nature, some scholars depict it in a negative way saying what categories it does not belong to, others find this approach misleading. In my view the truth is somewhere in between, especially in the Hungarian case it is important to underline that the polity is not a democracy any more. Otherwise there are several meaningful labels for this system, all of them adding important aspects for its functioning whether they place it on the continuum between liberal democracy and dictatorship or not. I share the statement that this polity is a hybrid system that should have its own category, and I also agree that it should not be considered an intermediary status, but it can be a stable situation, as well.

Bozóki and Hegedűs underline the difficulty of describing the new political system, since it is a moving target under constant development. Rejecting the categories of democracy with an adjective, they define the current Hungarian political system as an externally controlled hybrid regime situated between liberal democracies and autocracies on a continuous scale. Hungary represents an unprecedented case so far among the hybrid regimes due to the paradoxes deriving from the EU-membership that is a community of democratic states where internal and external policies cannot be divided. Bozóki and Hegedűs highlight the multifold and ambiguous influences of the European Union in checking and supporting the maintenance of the regime at the same time while also providing legitimacy to the regime.⁷

The fundamental transformation that started in 2010 was called by János Kornai “Hungary’s U-turn” giving a precise all-encompassing inventory of the new Hungarian political system that has been established by Viktor Orbán after 2010. His account of post-communist transition countries, of which Hungary happened to be the first and so far, the only one to backslide into the autocracy category, provides a thoughtful insight and a serious warning sign concerning this phenomenon.⁸

Kim Lane Scheppele describes the basic legal transformations and constitutionalizing process that contributed largely to the cementing of the new regime, and in a commentary, she named the newly created regime the Frankenstate due to its seemingly legal elements that when combined lead to a mixture dangerous to the democracy and the rule of law. She criticizes the checklist-based approach for the evaluation of the status of the rule of law in any given country, explaining that the interaction of the separate elements represents an additional factor that might override the complete assessment of the different indicators separately.⁹

⁷ Bozóki, Hegedűs “A kívülről korlátozott hibrid rendszer”, p.7-8

⁸ Kornai (2015): “Hungary’s U-Turn”

⁹ Kim Lane Scheppele: “The rule of law and the Frankenstate: Why governance checklist do not work”, *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 26, No.4, October 2013 (pp. 559-562)

This vivid interest in depicting the nature of this phenomenon is quite understandable, as the country in question is an EU-member state, part of an international organization sharing liberal democratic values and norms and the conviction in cooperative problem-solving pragmatism. Nevertheless, the EU itself provides some ground for criticism. Péter Balázs draws the attention to the institutional problems arising from the growing size and the changing nature of the European Union that still have not been successfully addressed by the member states. Including the “well-known” problem of the direct presence of member states in all major EU institutions that creates cumbersome common decision-making. Adding to this there are some “hidden” problems, the lack of transparency and accountability of EU institutions and the insufficient representation of the citizens. The former EU-commissioner also highlights the inevitable consequences of simply the increased number of member-states resulting in internal groupings and cleavages emerging between different type of countries.¹⁰ The overrepresentation of small EU-countries – even if originally a noble idea – further complicates the decision-making processes and the overall functioning of the Union. Euroscepticism has thus a whole set of arguments to raise when criticizing the EU.

Kopeczky and Mudde redefined Euroscepticism¹¹ by distinguishing between diffuse and specific support of the European Union where the former means support for the general ideas of European integration, while the latter is described as support for the general practice of the European integration. By these two dimensions, they define four types of party positions¹²: Euroenthusiasts and Europragmatists in the EU-optimist category, and Eurosceptics and Eurorejects in the EU-pessimist category. The former in both categories respectively are Europhile and the latter two are qualified as Europhobe. This article was written in 2002, consequently the authors described an earlier set of party positions in Hungary. Just after the first Orbán government they depicted FIDESZ as a Euroenthusiast

¹⁰ Péter Balázs: *A European Union with 36 members? Perspectives and risks* Center for EU Enlargement Studies (2014)

¹¹ Petr Kopeczky, Cas Mudde ”The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe” *European Union Politics* 3/3 (September 2002): p.299

¹² Kopeczky, Mudde: “The Two Sides of Euroscepticism” p.303

party¹³, however mentioning that the Hungarian PM together with Czech leader Vaclav Klaus (ODS) were the only politicians who dared to criticize the EU at this stage and were castigated by the EU in return. They confirm that this time Orbán's main criticism towards the EU was about the too slow speed of the integration process.

The transformation of the FIDESZ party position, especially since 2010 can be described as a shift toward post-communist traditionalist/neo-conservative ideology¹⁴ by means of populist nationalism. This latter can be defined and analyzed by Rogers Brubaker's concept of populism that he characterizes as a discursive and stylistic repertoire.¹⁵ On the one hand Brubaker's definition confirms the legitimacy of the using of the term populism in scholarship, on the other hand he also provides the link between Euroscepticism and populism. He also focuses rather on the discursive and stylistic practices that provide an analytical toolset for empirical assessment. Brubaker underlines that it is the combination of the populist elements that characterizes populism, not their individual usage. The linkage with Euroscepticism is part of Brubaker's reasoning for the populist *Zeitgeist*: "But the institutional architecture of the European Union has provided a distinctive focus and an irresistible target for both economic and cultural forms of protectionist populism in Europe."¹⁶ Both core elements of populism are represented by the current Hungarian government and also in both possible ways, on the one hand claiming to speak and act as the representant of the voice of the people, and on the other hand as the defender of the people against outside threats and internally from the segments of the population on the margins.

Besides theories of populism and Euroscepticism, leadership frameworks are also necessary building bricks to understand the nature and functioning of the Hungarian political system.

¹³ Kopeczky, Mudde:308

¹⁴ Tamás Csillag, Iván Szelényi "Drifting from Liberal Democracy". *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1:18-48 p. 18

¹⁵ Rogers Brubaker, "Why populism?" *Theory and Society* November 2017, Volume 46, Issue 5, pp 357–385, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7>, p. 360

¹⁶ Brubaker: "Why populism?" p. 371

The concept of crisis exploitation is useful for analyzing the political impacts of framing contests.¹⁷ Further developing Boin's crisis exploitation theory Körösényi et Al develop a model describing the possible scenarios of political action in relation with contingencies. The four possible cases: "A", normal political situation, "B", Crisis as an exogenous shock, "C", redefined crisis situation and "D" endogenous generation of crisis, provide a useful analytical tool for describing the functioning of the Hungarian political system. The political activities of the Orbán government, as Körösényi et Al also cites its constitutionalizing process as empirical example for the category "D", are dominantly qualifying for the "C" and the "D" category of this analytical framework.¹⁸

Another explanatory framework for the Hungarian case is the application of the leadership theory of Stephen Skowronek¹⁹ by Illés et Al. in their article, Viktor Orbán as a reconstructive leader²⁰. They not only put into context the second – this time landslide – electoral victory of Orbán in 2010 but explain the systematical endeavors for the building up of a substantially new political system in Hungary. As independent variables they use the state of the incumbent system and the identity of the political leader that interact with each other. Politics of reconstruction becomes possible when the system is vulnerable, and the leader has a hostile attitude.

The reconstructive leadership framework can be well complemented with the theory of the Weberian plebiscite leader democracy explained by Körösényi. Criticizing hybrid regime theories that place the hybrid system somewhere in between democracy and autocracy on a continuum, he argues that the Weberian plebiscite leadership (WPL) is a sui generis ruling system that should be analyzed in a different dimension. WPL is also not an intermediary category as some above-mentioned scholars suggest, but it can be a long term political system. By Körösényi's reasoning democracy and autocracy

¹⁷ Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart, Allan McConnell: "Crisis exploitation: Political and Policy Impacts of Framing Contests", *Journal of European Public Policy* 16:1 Jan. 2009: 81-106, p.83

¹⁸ Körösényi, Illés, Metz p.14

¹⁹ Stephen Skowronek: *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and reappraisal*, Lawrence: University press of Kansas, 2011

²⁰ Illés Gábor, Körösényi András, Metz Rudolf: „Orbán Viktor mint rekonstruktív vezető” http://real.mtak.hu/73155/1/05trendek_illeskorosenyimetz.pdf

are not excluding each other in the Weberian plebiscite leadership, but organically connected, as it is formally a democracy, but in its substance an autocracy. This way the hybrid regime is of a charismatic leader that gains legitimacy in democratic elections for being an expert of political fight, claiming new visions for the political community. Körösenyi refers to Weber stating that democracy and demagoguery belong together in a mass democracy as political rhetors want above all to influence the emotions of the public in order to win elections, and if the charisma gets legitimized by the popular vote, the leaders will rule in a top-down manner. If we also consider the genesis of Weberian plebiscite leader democracy typically linked to a situation of crisis, when a heroic leader with extraordinary capabilities is “needed”, then we come close to the description of populist political strategy, as Körösenyi refers to John Uhr’s related comment.²¹

Methodology

To trace policy and ideological changes I will conduct discourse analysis with the speeches by Viktor Orbán in different contexts as most important primary sources. The discursive style of the governing party manifest itself also in the state propaganda, like billboard campaigns, government “information”, national consultations that have been dominating the Hungarian public space complementing and reinforcing the impact of the political narrative.

Adding to primary sources, I will also analyze European Union public opinion surveys, statistics and other documents, including debates and news article published on EU institutions’ website.

I will use as secondary sources academic literature describing the characteristics of the political system, crisis management and leadership theories.

The media play an integral part of the political landscape in Hungary because of its active use by the discursive governance, that is why I will use media sources to demonstrate the influencing mechanisms

²¹ András Körösenyi (2017): “Weber és az Orbán-rezsim: plebisciter vezérdemokrácia Magyarországon” Politikatudományi Szemle XXVI/4 pp.7-28 p.13

and for gathering actual information that cannot be found in academic literature. This way media outlet will be treated as primary and secondary sources.

I will analyze the last official foreign policy document, the Hungarian Foreign Policy after the EU presidency published in 2011 by the Foreign Ministry, it has not been updated since, so it should be still considered the basis of foreign policy strategy and actions.

To gain a better insight into governing methods, institutional changes and the alterations of the decision-making processes, I will make semi-structured interviews with present and former foreign ministry officials and with other experts of international relations, including professor Péter Balázs former minister of foreign affairs, EU commissioner and current head of the Center for European Neighborhood Studies and István Hegedűs, former founding member of Fidesz and now president of the Hungarian Europe Society.

Chapter 1: Populism in the Making

“We simply do not have anything like a theory of populism, and we seem to lack coherent criteria for deciding when political actors turn populist in some meaningful sense.”²²

There are extensive academic articles written about the political transition process between 1989-2010 in Hungary and even more international attention has been focused on the period starting in 2010, when the dramatic U-turn²³ has happened. In this chapter I plan to give a summary of some major background causes and to make an inventory of the main piers of the current political system that is situated somewhere between liberal democracy and autocracy, but since 2010 can no longer be considered a full-fledged democracy any more. At the same time, it is also the story of FIDESZ (an acronym for Young Democrats) the party of Viktor Orbán. The party was part of the Hungarian political system all the way through the democratic transition period, its internal structure and the functioning mechanism resemble to the party's present governing methods and partly explain its lasting political success.

Optimistic, but Ambivalent Incipience

Hungary, being a small open country, is largely dependent on its international environment, first and foremost on its systems of alliances. Its transition process itself from socialism to democracy was rather the result of international developments, than enforced by its population, an elite-driven change of system described by Elemér Hankiss as an incomplete regime change.

The democratic political and market economy institutions were fast established, but the transformation of the ownership of socio-economic and political power operating these institutions and its system of connections and functioning was delayed. “A peculiar, messy mix of ancien regime and nouveau

²² Jan-Werner Müller (2016): *What is populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press 2016, p.7

²³ Kornai, János (2015) “Hungary's U-Turn,” *Capitalism and Society*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 2. p.2

regime came about, which, on the one hand, made a peaceful transition possible, but, on the other, became a source of unhelpful disorders and conflicts.”²⁴

The legacy of goulash-communism left the people with attitudes reflected in the proverb “least said, soonest mended”²⁵. The relative welfare and better availability of provisions and consumer products in general compared to the other socialist countries put the measure high for the new democratic system in the 90s. The underlying nostalgia for the Kádár-era²⁶ has always been recurring ever since, especially in times of economic and/or political crisis. Hungarians have been used to top-down governance throughout socialist times and the elite-driven system change. Nevertheless, the democratization process brought optimism and high hopes, what later turned into disappointment and opened the way for anti-establishment political rhetoric.

The new political system in the period 1990-2010 was pluralistic but characterized by a deep and increasing division between left and right, mutually trying to delegitimize each other. The cleavage between the political elites of the two sides was so deep that Hungary was the only CEE country where no coalition happened across political camps since the system change.²⁷ Interestingly the main division line was not between communist and anticommunist ideology in Hungary, rather between Christian conservatism, represented by the leading force of the first democratically elected government, the Hungarian Democratic Forum on one side and liberal cosmopolitan dimensions represented by the Association of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) right after the system change. The former was more nationalistic, thus inclining toward soft Euroscepticism, the latter more secular with a consequent Europhile attitude.²⁸

²⁴ Elemér Hankiss, “Transition and Liminality: Possible interpretations of the transformation processes in Eastern Europe,” Eurozine, 2007 July 26, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-07-26-hankiss-hu.html>

²⁵ Ne szólj szám, nem fáj fejem! – Hungarian proverb

²⁶ Hungary’s socialist period was dominated and later named after János Kádár, leader of the country for over three decades

²⁷ András Körösenyi (2015): *A Magyar Politikai Rendszer – negyedszázad után*, p.72

²⁸ Agnes Batory “Euroscepticism in Hungarian Party System” in the book: *Opposing Europe?* Edited by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart Oxford University Press 2008 p.268-269

FIDESZ managed to win the elections the first time following a major ideological turn from a liberal youth movement to a catch-all conservative party in the mid-90s. The first Orbán government (1998-2002) in coalition with MDF (the Hungarian Democratic Forum) and FKGP (the Smallholders' party) had only simple majority, thus no opportunity for systemic change. By then Hungary was also an aspirant country for EU-membership what did not allow deviation amid full speed legal harmonization and being a frontrunner of the integration process. FIDESZ was at this time already the main party on the conservative right and Hungary moved from applicant to negotiator status, hard bargaining with Brussels became a central element in government rhetoric especially for the domestic electorate, while the speed and the success of the EU-negotiations proved that in practice they were ready to make compromises, like in the issue of gradual opening of Western labor markets to workers from the CEE countries.²⁹

Viktor Orbán after his electoral loss in 2002 launched the Civic Circle movement in order to build up the countrywide basis for conservative nationalist Right-wing hegemony while in opposition.³⁰ Questioning the legitimacy of the government and contesting the alleged left-liberal hegemony in the fields of media, culture and societal elites, he called his supporters for outside parliamentary actions and gatherings all over the country.

In this period FIDESZ-MPP (FIDESZ with the addition of Hungarian Civic Party) was a soft Eurosceptic party. Hard Euroscepticism was only present in the extreme parties especially in the ideology of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) and partly in the extreme left Workers Party. As Batory explains hard Euroscepticism remained in the political extreme in Hungary, but their

²⁹ Agnes Batory "Euroscepticism in Hungarian Party System" p.271

³⁰ Béla Greskovits: "Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Civil Organization and Contention: The Civic Circles Movement", EUI Working Paper RSCAS, 2017/37 p.9

argumentations emerged in mainstream political debates. Consequently, Eurosceptic ideology became more significant politically than the electoral support of MIÉP.³¹

In 2005 prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány condemned the attitudes not respecting the democratic institutions and warned that it is not the extreme left or the extreme right that is dangerous, but the “threatening terrible” coming from populism, calling it a “strange political convenience store” in his speech given at the assembly of ambassadors accredited to Hungary.³²

The beginning of the 2000s was characterized by reckless financial policies especially after 2002 in order to secure political support for the socialist-liberal coalition what eventually seemed insufficient to counterbalance the continuous attacks from FIDESZ in opposition and also backfired, as the state budget balance radically deteriorated leading to unavoidable austerity measures after the elections in 2006. The open political crisis was triggered by the leakage of a speech of Ferenc Gyurcsány – where he admitted in a closed party circle in Balatonöszöd in May 2006 that the Socialist Party leadership had been lying about economic situation to the people – offering a perfect momentum for FIDESZ to activate supporters to the extent of open street protests.³³ The street riots further contributed to the drastic fall of the support for the incumbent government and evaporated its political legitimacy that presented a perfect opportunity for purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric³⁴.

It also ended the era of slow consolidation process of the 1989-1990 “intermediary” Constitution with limited legitimacy, still the amended form of the 1949 Stalinist constitution, however almost completely rewritten. It provided continued legality and defined the political system in the democratization period, but there was underlying political support for real “system change” and for a

³¹ Agnes Batory “Euroscepticism in Hungarian Party System” in *Opposing Europe?* Edited by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart Oxford University Press 2008 p.265

³² “Túlságosan sok kárt okozott az országnak az elmúlt időszakban – innen kezdtem – a politikai és szociális gazdasági nagyotmondás, a demokratikus intézmények tiszteletben tartásának hiánya és itt van fenyegető rémként nem a bal, vagy jobboldali szélsőség, hanem ez a furcsa politikai vegyesbolt, a populizmus.” F. Gyurcsány (Sept. 6, 2005)

³³ Zsolt Enyedi: “Plebeians, Citoyens and Aristocrats or Where is the Bottom of Bottom-up? The Case of Hungary” in *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession* edited by Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis S. Pappas ECPR Press (2015)

³⁴ Boin, 't Hart, McConnel: p.83

new constitution.³⁵ It is worth noting here that FIDESZ in the campaign for the 2010 parliamentary elections did not declare openly its intentions to introduce a new constitution.

The 2008 financial crisis was rather facilitating than causing the 2010 overwhelming victory of FIDESZ, being part of the “perfect storm”. Evaluating the rise of Hungarian populism Zsolt Enyedi underlines the fact that the reason why it hit the country particularly hard was rooted in the government freefall of popularity and authority. Thus, the governing coalition was not able to manage financial difficulties emerging before the crisis because of proper erroneous economic policies and the related public discontent.³⁶

Consequently, it cannot be said that the Great Financial Crisis caused the populist rise in Hungary, as the circumstances were given anyway for the crisis narrative, so international circumstances “only” aggravated the situation for the incumbent government that eventually had to appeal for an IMF rescue package in 2008 and resort to change of prime minister in 2009 trying to save their position in government.

Viktor Orbán and Co. – Populists in Waiting

Orbán and his FIDESZ-founding friends circle, as Sárközy described are first class engineers of power, failure does not exist for them just temporarily lost fight, success must be put across the people. They always must attack, their infamous tactic borrowed from soccer is “attack on the whole track”. Their strategy of political marketing is to continuously initiate, always be ahead in setting the subject matter, not to debate but to state.³⁷

The FIDESZ core-group were ambitious first-generation intellectuals, who wanted to rise, to prevail at any price not too selective in methods already as students. They had a sense of mission that they

³⁵ András Körösenyi (2015) *A Magyar Politikai Rendszer Negyedszázad Után*, Osiris Kiadó, p. 91

³⁶ Enyedi (2015): “Plebeians, Citoyens and Aristocrats” p.237,243

³⁷ Tamás Sárközy: *Kétharmados túláskormányzás* Park Könyvkiadó (2014) p.61

would become the leaders of this country.³⁸ Viktor Orbán stood out from this group, throughout his long political career he has always been a heavy-handed charismatic leader. In FIDESZ he was the unquestionable chief independently from election results of the party, his position was never openly contested. The potential concurrence for leadership was always early enough eliminated. Consequently, the party structure of FIDESZ can be described as a centralized power-structure with chief-style leadership.

A main feature of the party core is that most of them studied law in the same year at ELTE Law Faculty in Budapest, some of them were room-mates throughout the studies, as they were mostly boys from the countryside and member of the Bibó István College for lawyers and political scientist. The alumni list of this college³⁹ includes not only Viktor Orbán and his wife Anikó Lévai, but the current president, János Áder and the current president of the Parliament, László Kövér, as well.

Their inclination for big visions combined the mastering of political marketing predestined FIDESZ for the real populist turn. Orbán and his party only had to wait for the golden opportunity to put all this into practice in government.

The Start of a New Era

The above stated political and economic circumstances combined with the societal support building process of the civic circle movement by means of a rather majoritarian election law presented FIDESZ the gift of the 2010 landslide victory. Time has come for Viktor Orbán, this time as a “regime-founder” reconstructive leader⁴⁰ to fundamentally transform the Hungarian society. A new paradigm took over based on the hegemonic conservative ideology diffused by the Civic Circles. As Greskovits highlights versatile nationalism was hallmarking this social movement, “local patriotism”, “Sacral-Medievalism”, “European Hungary”, and the nation of “fifteen million Hungarians” that tapped into

³⁸ Tamás Sárközy, p.59

³⁹ <http://bibo.elte.hu/volt-tagjaink/>

⁴⁰ Illés, Körösi, Metz: p.5

the underlying nationalist emotions and already defined the horizontal cleavages with the categories “us” and “them”.⁴¹ This ideology became the dominant mainstream, resulting in the shift of the governing right-wing party toward extremism and increasing Euroscepticism ever since.

Orbán called his qualified majority electoral victory in 2010 a “revolution at the voting booth”. No time wasted, he immediately started the new regime building process that was called a “constitutional coup” by Scheppele.⁴² With a still legally questionable move they cut out the four-fifth super super-majority rule for amending the constitution introduced self-limiting in 1995 by the socialist-liberal coalition in possession of a two-third majority. By abolishing the legal obstacles FIDESZ introduced a new one-party constitution written by a small circle of prominent party members in a few months. The FIDESZ-KDNP coalition government considered the winning of the elections with 52,7% of the votes⁴³ and the gaining of two-third majority of the seats in the Parliament due to the majoritarian election system a strong enough entitlement for the constitutional process, and they did neither involve opposition parties, nor any civil organization.⁴⁴

This process represents a perfect case-study that proves Jan-Werner Müller’s statement: “Those populists who have enough power will seek to establish a new populist constitution – in both the sense of a new sociopolitical settlement and a new set of rules for the political game.”⁴⁵ Opposition parties did not consider the constitutional process legitimate, but they had no means to validate their claim, they could not provide political counterbalance due to their much-weakened position.. This unilateral institutionalization also triggered strong international criticism, but the Orbán-government did not change course. Other actors, like the Constitutional Court and international organizations, the Venice

⁴¹ Greskovits: p.23

⁴² Kim Lane Scheppele: Constitutional Coups and Judicial Review: How Transnational Institutions Can Strengthen Peak Courts at Times of Crisis (With Special Reference to Hungary), 23 Transnat'l L. & Contemp. Probs. 51 (2014) p.60

⁴³ Agnes Batory (2016), “Populists in government? Hungary’s “system of national cooperation”, Democratization, 23:2, 283-303, p.287

⁴⁴ Kornai, Hungary’s U-turn, p.4, Scheppele, p.63,

⁴⁵ Jan-Werner Müller (2016): *What is populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press

Commission and the European Union expressed concerns more efficiently, but neither parties represented real constraints.

Evidences for the symbolic nature of the new constitution adopted by the Parliament in April 2011 are its new name, the Fundamental Law of Hungary, and the elimination of the word “republic” from the official name of the state. The new political regime introduced a fundamentally different legal approach, the new government put an end to the legal constitutionalism represented by the traditionally influential Constitutional Court. Politics prevailed. The Parliament introduced the unusual practice of constitutionalizing the laws deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. The extraordinary political period between 2010-2014 was also hallmarked by several amendments to the constitutions and the “cementing” of cardinal laws, including the new election law⁴⁶. It reduced the number of deputies from 389 to 199, the two turns to one turn in the elections and reshaped the electoral district in favor of the incumbent party coalition. This unilaterally introduced election system has secured the winning of elections for FIDESZ ever since through three consecutive cycles since 2010.⁴⁷ Not only winning against FIDESZ in parliamentary elections became much less possible, but the 32 “cardinal laws”, the constitutionalizing of public fields would tie the hands of any future government in the unlikely case of a victory against FIDESZ unless with a qualified majority.

Transformation of Public Administration – Institutional Restructuring

“First, populists tend to colonize or “occupy” the state.”⁴⁸

Right after the 2010 election a major restructuring of public administration took place toward overall centralization, creating giant vertically structured ministries and reallocating tasks to the Prime Minister’s Office with massive dismissals of longtime civil servants and appointing loyal apparatus.

⁴⁶ Electoral Law: CCIII/2011

⁴⁷ Körösnéyi (2015), p. 95-96

⁴⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. What Is Populism?, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. p.29

The centralization of task to the Prime Minister's Office reached the point of having 10 states secretaries, 18 deputy state secretaries and altogether 120 departments in 2018.⁴⁹ János Lázár the minister leading the Prime Minister's Office in his farewell video thanked the work of his 42.000 civil servants.⁵⁰ In 2015 the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office seceded from the Prime Minister's Office becoming a separate ministry with Antal Rogán, a Fidesz party soldier on top, colloquially called "propaganda minister".⁵¹ The expansion of directly subordinated fields served the centralized authority of the personalistic leadership.

The new Law on Public Officials⁵² accepted in 2011 relaxed dismissal conditions opening the way for changing the traditionally non-partisan public servants and for hiring new staff based on political loyalty. Another move into this direction was the foundation of the National University of Public Service⁵³ in 2011 "in service of the nation" with the purpose of training new "loyal" officials for public services supply.

Foreign Policy of the Orbán-governments

During the first Orbán-government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs resembled to an island of peace compared to the other ministries that were reshuffled, merged, but reorganized in any case following the changes in internal power relations of the coalition with the two smaller parties. János Martonyi, a well-known international lawyer served as Orbán's first foreign minister. The Foreign Ministry still had its consultative role in foreign policy decision making, its the expertise was needed for the EU-integration preparations.

⁴⁹ 444.hu "Éppen itt az ideje, hogy megismerkedjünk a minisztériumok gyönyörű szervezeti ábráival" <https://444.hu/2016/02/03/eppen-itt-az-ideje-hogy-megismerkedjunk-a-miniszteriumok-gyonyoru-szervezeti-abraival>

⁵⁰ The farewell video shared on the Facebook page of János Lázár: <https://www.facebook.com/lazarjanosfidesz/videos/222047965194004/?q=l%C3%A1z%C3%A1r%20j%C3%A1nos%20b%C3%BAcs%C3%BA>

⁵¹ Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister <http://www.kormany.hu/en/cabinet-office-of-the-prime-minister>

⁵² Legal online database: https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1100199.TV

⁵³ National Univesity of Public Service: <https://en.uni-nke.hu/>

Martonyi must have been a natural choice for foreign minister for the second Orbán-government. But the international context changed, EU-integration expertise had been curiously degraded since entering the EU. Martonyi's position as foreign minister became much less important, as ministry officials also confirmed the overall importance of the ministry was reduced. Nevertheless, the last foreign policy strategy document⁵⁴ was compiled and published in 2011 under Martonyi's leadership,

An example for the weakening is the infamous case of extraditing of the axed killer of Azerbaijan by Hungary in 2012. A ministry official from the Press Department on duty that week-end told that they had not received any previous information about the extradition, but learned about it from media sources, while journalists tried to ask them about its circumstances. The unexpected move triggered strong international criticism including a resolution of the European Parliament⁵⁵, Armenia's breaking of diplomatic relationships with Hungary and demonstrations in Hungary and in front of Hungarian embassies worldwide. Orbán later not only admitted that he personally decided about the extradition, but FIDESZ politicians confirmed that they did not really expect that the Azerbaijani killer would remain in prison in his homeland. There are also strong allegations and pieces of evidence that the Hungarian prime minister hoped for financial compensation in return.⁵⁶

The third Orbán government switched the foreign minister, and after a short half-year-long mandate of Tibor Navracsics preparing for becoming the Hungarian commissioner in Brussels, a professional politician close to Orbán became the minister for foreign affairs and trade. This changed the importance of the Ministry, however not so much its involvement in the decision-making process, rather as far as resources were concerned. Opening embassies or commercial representations in far away countries

⁵⁴ Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011

⁵⁵European Parliament resolution on Azerbaijan, notably the case of Ramil Safarov (2012/2785(RSP)) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+MOTION+B7-2012-0442+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=en>

⁵⁶ The Azerbaijani axed killer's extradition was Viktor Orbán's decision <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20120911-orban-viktor-dontese-volt-az-azeri-baltas-gyilkos-kiadatasa.html>

was not an issue any more, if in line with political directions, like the Eastern opening, and in countries with inclination for pragmatic economic relations without asking too many questions.

In the meantime, foreign affairs officials are not involved any more in the decision-making process. As ministry sources from different departments unanimously confirmed it is no longer required that they give an outline for the negotiations, only background materials, as it was explained to them that “the political leaders know what to say”. Even changes of background material must be each time documented, which are directly supervised by the minister’s cabinet. Previously the Ministry’s leadership trusted the bilateral departments and the desk officers, they were consulted, and they were responsible for compiling the negotiation dossiers. By now, the staff of the Cabinet Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has been increased from 4 to 25 employees, allowing its transformation into a “manual control” center of the other departments similarly to the centrally organized government structure.

The third Orbán government curiously brought another reshuffle in foreign policy structures, in some respect even more changes than four years before. Diplomatic communication became much more confrontative with Péter Szijjártó becoming minister of foreign affairs and trade. Considered rather a Fidesz party bulldog than a foreign minister, he introduced a new style that is described with the common phrase within the Ministry: the lack of knowledge compensated with aggressivity. He is the archetype of a foreign minister that a populist and Eurosceptic leader would need, not bound by professional experience and the unspoken rules of diplomatic behavior. As professor Balázs stated Szijjártó behaves rather as spokesperson of the prime minister than the head of diplomacy.

Martonyi was a person capable of explaining and “selling” contradictory domestic moves on the international scene, the nomination of Szijjártó signaled the final taking over of the control on foreign affair that the regime did not consider it important to show a nice face to the outside world, it meant increased opposition to norms and values and more overt Euroscepticism.

Chapter 2 – Hungary and the European Union

“By securing EU membership, the desire of many citizens in the region to “return to Europe” has been satisfied. Almost equally important, the fear of being left behind has disappeared. In terms of rational choice theory, this has led to a significant change in the costs and benefits of a Eurosceptic strategy for (more) mainstream political parties in the region.”⁵⁷

The Hungarian EU-membership can be divided into two distinct periods with fundamentally different governmental attitudes, the first cooperative, more technocratic pro-European approach between 2004-2010 and the second, the start and gaining place of hard(er) Euroscepticism⁵⁸ from 2010. In this chapter I will analyze this process highlighting the main elements, putting more emphasis on the second period that characterizes also the current situation.

Promising Beginnings

Hungary as a former frontrunner in democratic transition among the post-communist countries joined the European Union in 2004. The Western orientation of the Hungarian foreign policy throughout the EU-integration process had been unquestionable, and the general pro-European strategy was supported by a consensus of all major political parties and public opinion alike despite the largely divided political system.

Hungary throughout the accession negotiations chose the most adaptive strategy among the candidate countries of trying to be “the best pupil in class”, as a response to the Commission’s differentiating enlargement approach by means of formal and informal conditionality on behalf of the EU. The negotiation process had a “moving target”, on the one hand due to the ever-changing *acquis communautaire*, on the other hand the expectations of the Commission differed sometimes from DG to DG in the same issue or changed over time. The final decision in 2001 for the “Big Bang”

⁵⁷ Cas Mudde, “EU Accession and a New Populist Center-Periphery Cleavage in Central and Eastern Europe” Center for European Studies, Central and Eastern Europe, 2003, Working Paper No. 62.

⁵⁸ The Hungarian government never openly questioned EU-membership

enlargement was a disappointing development for Hungarian diplomacy, as it was expected that the best candidates would get accepted first. Arató also underlines the fact that even the EU itself was not prepared for the enlargement in such a big group, the financial perspective for the period 2002-2006 only calculated with 4-6 new member-state, and the old member states did not take efforts to change it, not to speak of the preparations for the functioning mechanism of an enlarged Union.⁵⁹

The ideology of FIDESZ took especially several turns, from a radical liberal youth movement first in the direction of social-liberalism, then by the end of the 90s they became a center right “catch-all” part. Consequently in 2000 they left the Liberal International and the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party (ELDR) and joined the center-right European People’s Party.

Enyedi states that EU-membership had a stronger impact on party systems in the post-communist member states including Hungary than in Western Europe due to the less crystallized party positions. He also adds that parties in opposition were more likely to take a Eurosceptic position, and in the beginning of the EU-membership of CEE countries a new type of criticism appeared about the democratic but authoritarian European Union. In Hungary FIDESZ introduced this new strand, they accepted EU integration, but criticizes it based on national interests, and looking with suspicion the dominant left-liberal norms prevailing in the EU.⁶⁰

The referendum on EU accession held in 2003 brought overwhelming support (83,8%), but with a relatively low turnout (45,6%). FIDESZ this time still in opposition even though generally supported EU-membership, like the other parties but in the meantime threatened also with the possibility of losing up to 100.000 workplaces, difficulties in implementing tough EU-regulations and harsh competition in some economic sectors.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Krisztina Arató, “Sobering after a “Grim Wedding” – a Realistic Evaluation of Hungary’s accession” in the book: *Euroscepticism and European Integration*, Political Science Research Center Zagreb, 2009 p.109

⁶⁰ Zsolt Enyedi, “Az európai integráció hatása a kelet-európai és a magyar pártstratégiákra” in the book: *A magyarok bemenetele: Tagállamként a bővülő Európai Unióban* (edited by: István Hegedűs) Demokrácia Kutatások Magyar Központja Közhasznú Alapítvány, Budapest Corvinus Egyetem Politikatudományi Intézet (2006) p. 156-158

⁶¹Nick Thorpe, “Hungarians lukewarm about the EU” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/14/eu.politics>

The Europhil socialist-liberal coalition government on their behalf maintained the technocratic approach, while on the right, FIDESZ with a newly acquired national conservative ideology pushed for more value-based politics, stronger representing national interest already when first time in government between 1998-2002. The Hungarian Certificate and the Status Law voted in 2001 offering benefits to the Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary hallmarks this new direction and already triggers criticism from neighboring countries and the EU however it didn't make the government change course.⁶² Orbán differentiated himself among Hungarian politicians in 1999 by saying that “there is life outside the EU”⁶³.

The Eurosceptic Turn

Right after the landslide election victory in 2010 foreign policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was overhauled however, János Martonyi becoming foreign minister already the second time represented a kind continuity. Nevertheless, even being an experienced foreign affairs professional and a successful international lawyer, he could not halt the decreasing influence of the ministry in foreign policy decision-making. The prime minister oversaw foreign policy, instead of international relations' pragmatism political considerations were dominating. Foreign policy became politicized with nationalist and Eurosceptic tendencies, but on peep at the beginning due to the upcoming EU-presidency premier of Hungary.

After 2010 the Fidesz-government could exercise its political power in the nominations of public officials, and especially in massive dismissals at the changes of government because of the above mentioned legislative changes. Consequently, the outcomes of the cumbersome process of EU-

⁶² David Cronin (European Voice): “Hungary’s ‘Status Law’ helping Orbán” <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungarys-status-law-helping-orban/>

⁶³ „Nem történik tragédia, ha nem valósul meg 2003-ban a csatlakozás. Most sem vagyunk az Unió tagjai, s mint látjuk, van élet az EU-n kívül is. De nem erre készülünk. Azért sürgetjük az integrációt, mert az újabb lökést adna a gazdasági fejlődésnek.” V. Orbán (Világgazdaság, 1999. december 17.)

socialization of the public administration could be easily diminished, by the endeavors of a reconstructive leader with the goal of complete institutional overhaul in public administration.

It justifies Mudde's prediction⁶⁴ about the higher chances of politicization of the topic of the EU in the new EU-member states since compared to the old member-states they were less involved in the integration process, when they joined, most things had already been decided upon and achieved. Because of the referendums about the EU-accessions the topic of the EU had already been relatively more politicized in the new member-states, and also because of what he describes with the words of Václav Klaus, that these countries joined the EU because they had no other option.

EU-Presidency and its Domestic Shadow Side

In the first half of 2011 Hungary held the EU-presidency together with Spain and Belgium as the last member of the presidential trio. In 2010 the new government did not show much interest in the event, FIDESZ leadership was more occupied with the transformation of the domestic political system. Despite emerging EU concerns about domestic political changes, the country managed to accomplish the EU-presidency that can be assessed retrospectively as the last still pro-European episode in Hungary, where the Foreign Ministry could still play an important role.

The Hungarian presidency happened close enough to the elections to have the ministry structure and staff concerned with the preparation mostly changed, but not too close to be exempt of international criticism due to the started legislation process. The new constitution and the Media Law already entered into force on January 1st, 2011 and triggered immediate ardent criticism both domestically and internationally due to its biased nature. As an independent media analyst institution⁶⁵ described it: "The adoption of the new media laws in 2010 not only laid the foundation for the complete overhaul of the Hungarian media system but at once represented one of the current administration's first

⁶⁴ Cas Mudde "EU Accession and a New Populist Center-Periphery Cleavage in Central and Eastern Europe" University of Antwerp, Center for European Studies Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper No. 62: 3

⁶⁵ Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, <http://mertek.eu/en/>



Figure 1: *In the Hungarian Steppe* – Oliver Schopf, *Der Standard*, 23.12.2010.
The horse-herder Orbán's flask: Paul Lendvai's book

measures to scale back constitutional democracy.”⁶⁶ On January 20, 2011, when Orbán presented the program of the Hungarian EU-presidency in the European Parliament, the debate was dominated by criticism over the new media legislation, for example Martin Schulz German Social Democrat MEP lectured Orbán in relation to the newly established government-controlled media council explaining that in the EU it is the media that scrutinizes the governments by European standards not the governments that scrutinize the media, as it has been introduced in Hungary.⁶⁷

However, the Media Law was not withdrawn. The postponing of the Eastern Partnership summit to the second half of the year to the Polish presidency left the Hungarian presidency without a high-level summit.⁶⁸

The Ultimate Strategic Tool: The Issue of Migration

“For a growing number of people, the idea of change signifies changing one’s country, not one’s government.”⁶⁹

The refugee flow in 2015 came in the best moment for FIDESZ, when their popular support started to decline, it provided a perfect narrative to focus public opinion on migration combined with

⁶⁶ Gábor Polyák, Krisztina Nagy: HUNGARIAN MEDIA LAW, Mérték Média Monitor, Mérték Booklets, Vol. 1. January 2015 http://mertek.eu/sites/default/files/reports/hungarian_media_law_0.pdf

⁶⁷ EURACTIV 2011. jan. 20. This excerpt from the debate Wednesday on the priorities for the Hungarian presidency of the European Union includes reactions from the leading representatives of the political groups, including UKIP MEP Nigel Farage, EPP group leader Joseph Daul, Greens-EFA leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit and ALDE president Guy Verhofstadt <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjSXix3BMN0>

⁶⁸ Newsportal index.hu, Elmarad a Gödöllőre tervezett uniós csúcs https://index.hu/belfold/2011/02/17/elmarad_a_godollore_tervezett_unios_csucs/

⁶⁹ Ivan Krastev (2017): *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press p.14

highlighting the failure of the EU to efficiently tackle this problem and to divert attention from everyday problems of the population.

Causal frames were set in two directions, on the one hand the German “Willkommenskultur” approach and Angela Merkel, as a main European leader was blamed for encouraging migration, on the other hand migrants were extensively accused for terrorist attacks in public media. Terrorism has been linked to migration independently from facts. Public media and the government-controlled internet media outlets ensure that terrorist attacks and the migration threats should be presented side by side in combination with criticism toward the EU and other international actors. Conspiracy theories and fake news provide the connections between them (see Figure 1 and 2 below).

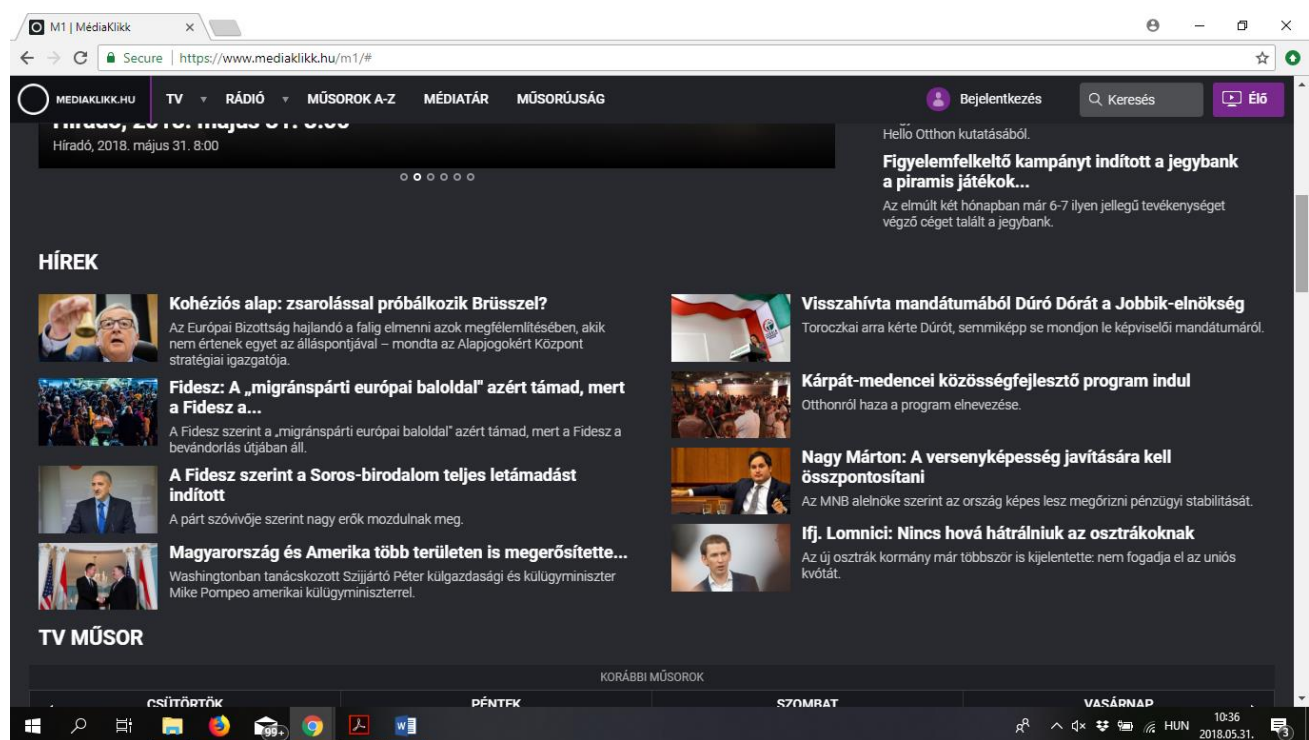


Figure 2: Leading news on the state media on May 31, 2018: Cohesion funds: Brussels tries blackmailing? Fidesz: The pro-migrant European left attacks because Fidesz stands in the way of migration, According to Fidesz the Soros empire launched a full scale attack

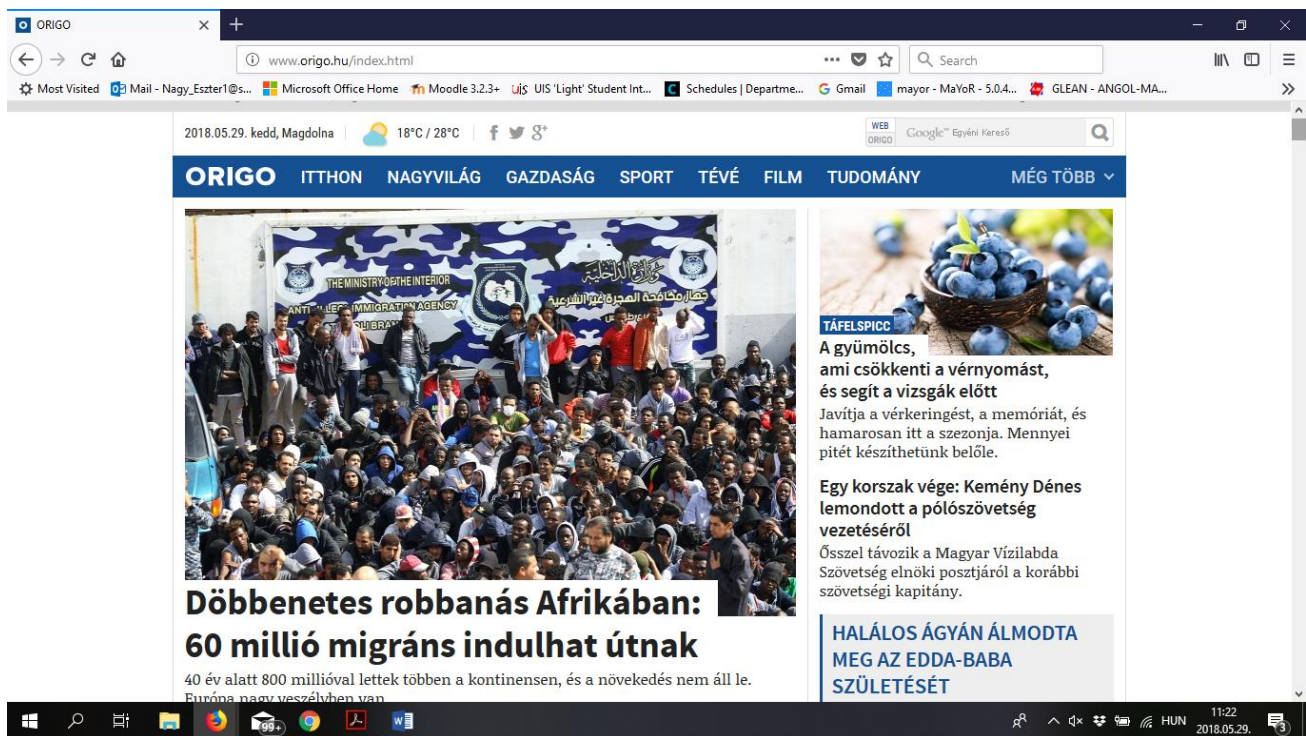


Figure 3: The starting page of origo.hu on May 28, 2018 with the headline: Incredible explosion in Africa: 60 million migrants could start their journey

By redefining the refugee crisis, Orbán considerably increased the contingency of the situation representing the category “C” of crisis reframing in the theory of possible scenarios of crisis management by Körösnéyi et Al.⁷⁰ Official discourse and government propaganda managed to create a salient public issue of inward migration in a country where there are practically no immigrants, or “migrants”, a word introduced for this purpose with negative connotations by the FIDESZ narrative.

It developed to such extent that during the last election campaign in April 2018 FIDESZ had no election program. Apparently, they did not need it for securing the winning of the elections. They designed a single-issue campaign focused entirely on the fight against migration. A salient example of



Figure 4: Campaign billboard before the parliamentary elections in 2018 using the same photo of refugees in Slovenia in 2015 used by UKIP in the Brexit campaign

⁷⁰ Körösnéyi-Illés-Metz: “Kontingencia és politikai cselekvés” p.14

campaign message was the recycling of the photo from the UKIP BREXIT campaign as a “government information” billboard.

The topic of migration is a goldmine for a populist nationalist politician self-appointed for the protection of the nation. What makes the Hungarian case special, is the missing “enemy”, but seemingly it renders the hate campaign even more efficient. It also provides evidence for the high efficiency of speech acts and government propaganda in influencing public opinion to be discussed below. How a quasi-non-existent problem can be transformed into an emotionally charged issue, to the extent of physical harassments happening in Hungary against people with a darker skin color regardless of the fact whether they are “migrants” or not.

Crisis is not a neutral category as Brubaker identifies: “As an interpretive frame and rhetorical form, “crisis” is not prior to and independent of populist politics; it is a central part of populist politics”.⁷¹ Extraordinary events justify extraordinary measures, and the leader of the framing contest defines what measures are necessary to defend the “people and the nation”. That is how the building up of a fence on the Southern border became an utmost priority, and later on referred to as the winning strategy of defending Europe. Orbán won the battle again by his standards, not only against migration, but in a way also by gradually taking over the lead in the related framing contest within Europe, as well.

Jan-Werner Müller also highlights that Orbán claims to know what the obvious policy choice is because it is simply “common sense”.⁷² There is no need for lengthy complicated consultations with different organizations or for open public debate, because he reifies the people, he knows what is best, it is common sense after all.

But, when making the “obvious” decision for the anti-migration rage, Orbán did not consider the real needs and interests of the people. The opinion poll of Republicon Institute showed in 2017 that the

⁷¹ Brubaker, “Why populism?” p.373

⁷² Jan-Werner Müller, *What is populism?* p.19

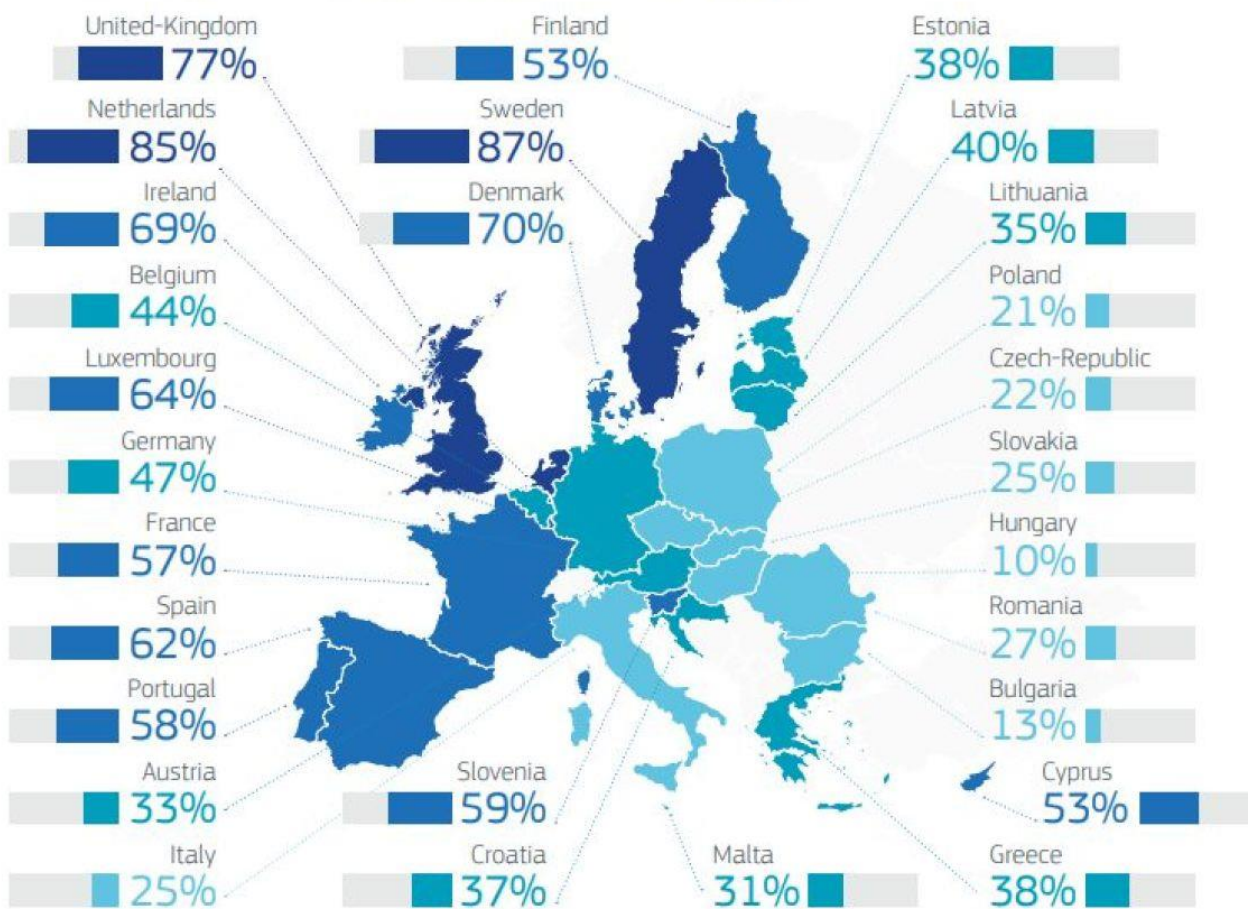
most important problem that Hungary faces is health care and social security in the opinion of 46% of the respondents. Immigration was only mentioned as the most important problem for 24%. What is even more interesting, when people were asked what the most important problems are that they are facing, the costs of living (inflation) came out on the first place and health care and social security on the second with 32% and 29% respectively. The effect of government propaganda can be captured in the differences by party preferences which is salient in the issue of migration, much more FIDESZ supporters (31%) considered it a very important problem, as opposed to left-liberal and even Jobbik-supporters, equally 4%.⁷³

Immigration is a practical campaign topic for an incumbent party in Hungary, where there is no visible appearance of the topic, and most people do not have personal experience with it, finally the EU can easily be blamed for the lack and/or delay in providing effective solution. It fits perfectly into the symbolic representation of the pure people, contrasting “us” versus “them”. To complete the populist toolset, the government directly linked migration with its anti-Soros campaign by means of the accusations for an alleged Soros-plan, the existence of which was never proven. Then Orbán rounded up the conspiracy theory by linking all opposition candidates and activists of civil organizations to the Soros “empire”. The picture suddenly becomes clear, black and white in a Manichean world view described by populist theorists: reifying the will of the “good people” the heroic leader fights the evil forces threatening with the apocalypses.

There are some side effects of this ardent populist nationalist rhetoric however. The sad results are depicted in the figure below: by now Hungary has become the most unfriendly nation to immigrants in the whole European Union.

⁷³ 24.hu news website, Richi Tóth, “Csinálhat bármit a Fidesz a menekültekkel, az egészségügy a legnagyobb bajunk” <https://24.hu/kozelet/2017/08/03/csinalhat-barmit-a-fidesz-a-menekultekkel-az-egeszsegugy-a-legnagyobb-bajunk/>

% TOTALLY COMFORTABLE HAVING AN IMMIGRANT AS A FRIEND



Source: Eurobarometer, Kantar Public Special FL469 "Integration of Immigrants in the European Union"

Figure 5: "Integration of Immigrants in the European Union" Public Opinion Survey of the EU Commission published in April 2018⁷⁴

Money Makes the (Populists') World Go 'Round

Hungary must be indeed the land of great opportunities, where a simple gas-fitter can raise up to becoming the richest man of the country for 2018. Lőrinc Mészáros, a friend of Viktor Orbán and the former mayor of Felcsút, the home-town of the head of government, by now possesses a wealth with a value of 300 billion HUF worth more than 1 billion USD, which is an extraordinary achievement compared to his possession of mere 100 million HUF (appr. 375.000, - USD) wealth in 2010.⁷⁵ One

⁷⁴European Union Public Opinion, Integration of immigrants in the European Union, Publication date: April 2018 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/special/surveyky/2169>

⁷⁵Városi Kurír, Már Mészáros Lőrinc a leggazdagabb magyar 2018-05-05 <https://varosikurir.hu/meszaros-lorinc-leggazdagabb-magyar/>

might wonder why so many Hungarians leave the country even so. As Mészáros said in an ad hoc interview – in general he is not so keen on meeting journalists from “partial”⁷⁶ media –, he does not even know how much money exactly he has, but he has good staff and he involves all the family members, as well, so everything is in good hands, and he jokingly refused the question about his relationship with the prime minister: “How could I be the strawman of Orbán, it is a bit funny!”⁷⁷

Since Hungary’s EU-accession over 36 Billion EUR has been the sum of net support in the period 2004-2016 to foster cohesion and to help the restructuring of the country. It is obvious from the table below that in the first five years of membership there was still a considerably lower level of financial support as opposed to the period starting from 2009 onwards. Consequently, the populist regime that settled in 2010 was already luckier in this respect and possessed over much more financial resources deriving from the EU. Adding up the yearly support for the period 2011-2016 we get 26 546,9 Million EUR, a considerably higher amount compared to the sum for the first seven years until 2010 (10 076 Million EUR).

These funds provide resources for the incumbent party, including the building up of mass clientelism, the elite offering material favors for political support, being able to maintain it permanently, as Jan-Werner Müller indicates, comparing the EU financial support to the oil revenues available for some Arab states.⁷⁸ As Bozóki and Hegedűs also cite the regime maintaining function of the EU is among the three major impacts in Hungary.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ He draw the example of Echo TV, his own TV-channel and Mediaworks belonging to his network of companies as independent media in this interview.

⁷⁷ 444.hu, Tamás Botos and Zsolt Sarkadi, “Mészáros Lőrnc nem is tudja pontosan mennyi pénze van” <https://444.hu/2017/11/27/meszaros-lorinc-nem-is-tudja-pontosan-mennyi-penze-van>

⁷⁸ J-W Müller: *What is populism?* p.29

⁷⁹ Bozóki, Hegedűs “A kívülről korlátozott hibrid rendszer”, p.7-8

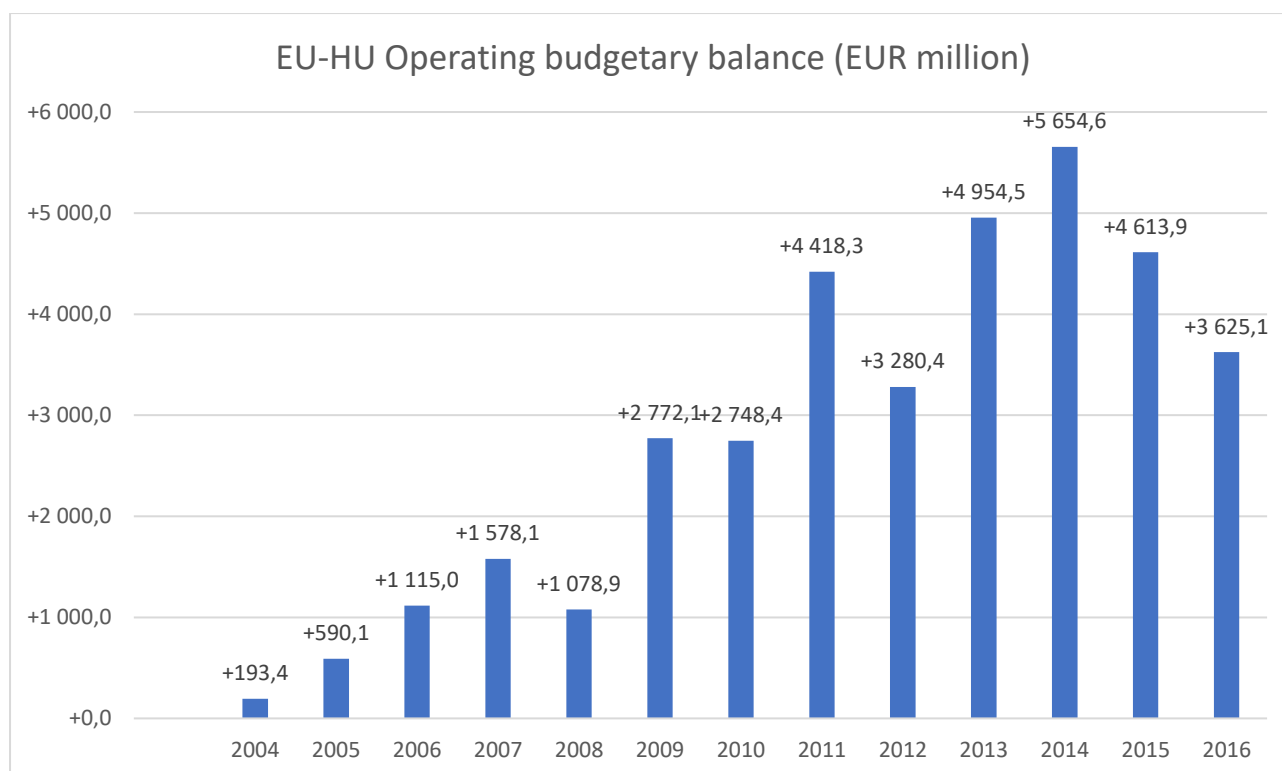


Figure 6: The yearly net EU-funding coming to Hungary in the period 2004-2016 ⁸⁰

The case of the gas repairman friend of the prime minister represents an outstanding example not to mention the OLAF report about ELIOS, the former company of the prime minister's son in law, and these are only the tip of the iceberg. It is common knowledge that almost exclusively FIDESZ-close companies are winning EU fund tenders.⁸¹ In Hungary, there is only one applicant in 30-35% of the EU-tenders, so it is also suspicious that they are targeted beneficiaries with befitted conditions entailing a tendency for overpricing, as well, due to the lack of competition.⁸²

Erin K. Jenne and Cas Mudde in their article about the Hungarian illiberal turn raise the question: Can outsiders help?⁸³, and they conclude with an undecided "not really". They thought in 2012 that the EU and the IMF together with local actors could bring change. As the above-mentioned cases confirm, the

⁸⁰ European Commission Budget, EU expenditure and revenue 2014-2020

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/figures/interactive/index_en.cfm

⁸¹ Jennifer Rankin, The Guardian, "How Hungarian PM's supporters profit from EU-backed projects"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/how-hungarian-pms-supporters-profit-from-eu-backed-projects>

⁸² <https://tldr.444.hu/2016/06/08/naponta-2-milliard-forint-joett-magyarorszag-a-elmult-12-evben-hol-van>

⁸³ Erin K. Jenne, Cas Mudde, "Can Outsiders Help?" Journal of Democracy, Vol. 23, No 3, July 2012, pp 147-155

EU instead of confining corruption and democratic backsliding in Hungary, unintentionally contributes to the strengthening of the illiberal regime by “allowing” the misuse of the financial aid.

As a grass-root initiative, Hungarians recently started to collect signatures for a petition for the joining of the EU prosecutor by the country, but no matter how many people will eventually sign, the government will never decide for it if there are no direct incentives for joining. It is elegant to say on behalf of the EU that they do not want to intervene into domestic issues of the member states that are supposed to have their own judiciary system. However, in the case of Hungary the reshuffling of the political system and the knocking-off of checks and balances systematically block the proper domestic investigation of the high scale corruption cases also related to EU funds, so there is not much political actors can internally do.

The problem is minimum twofold from the perspective of Euroscepticism: on the one hand Western taxpayers already regard with suspicion the spending of EU-funds in the new member states, thus the trust in EU institutions will further erode, if there is no efficient solution found. On the other hand, Euroscepticism can increase in the population of the recipient countries, as well, when average citizens face not only the exclusion from the benefits of EU funds, but they also see how a populist regime can consolidate its power by establishing its system of clientele, benefiting a FIDESZ-close group of national oligarchs with the help of the EU-funds that results in the expansion of the “National System of Cooperation”⁸⁴ to more and more fields of economy and society.

Just an example for how funds are then used by the national oligarchs, was in October 2016 the cessation from one day to another of Hungary’s former biggest daily newspaper, the leftish oriented

⁸⁴ Agnes Batory, “Populists in government? Hungary’s “system of national cooperation””, *Democratization*, 2016, 23:2, 283-303, p.289

government critical Népszabadság, when the owner company, Mediaworks was taken over by the above mentioned Lőrinc Mészáros.⁸⁵

The “Savior” of Hungarians

The EU indeed takes a pragmatic approach when trying to deal with the manifestations of democratic backsliding in Hungary. This attitude seems in general working so far with other member states and it worked also with Hungary until 2010. Since then, it does not work anymore. There is a kind of political strategist who could not care less about the face value in the European circles and international media, rather enjoys, sometimes even seeks confrontation that he can take use for his own political benefit.

The heroic nature of the Weberian plebiscite leader corresponds well with the populist leader’s bellicose rhetoric. Orbán did a revolution in the voting booth, constantly fights strong powers to save Hungarians from the migrants. In his visionary paradigm he is the only trustee of Hungary’s freedom and sovereignty against evil international powers and the supranationalism of the European Union with Brussels referred to as a center of an empire.

We saw that migration proved and proves to be a trump-card in Hungary. Even though the EU is regularly linked with it in conspiracy theories and fake news in government propaganda (see Fig. 2) there is a puzzle, people do not buy it apparently. In the latest Eurobarometer survey⁸⁶, the majority of Hungarians (58%) were optimist about the future of the EU that meant a 9-percentage point increase from spring to autumn 2017. Also 49% tend to trust the EU with a 3-percentage point increase for the same period. Further sociological research would be required to analyze why the “decline of the West” and the “crisis of the EU” narrative of Fidesz is not efficient, as opposed to the anti-migration discourse.

⁸⁵ Sándor Joób, index.hu “Súlyos logikai buktatók a Népszabadság megszüntetése körül” https://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/09/sulyos_logikai_buktatok_a_nepszabadsag_megszuntetese_korul/

⁸⁶European Commission Public Opinion, Standard Eurobarometer 88, publication date: December 2017 http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/survey_Ky/2143

QA8a.14 I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

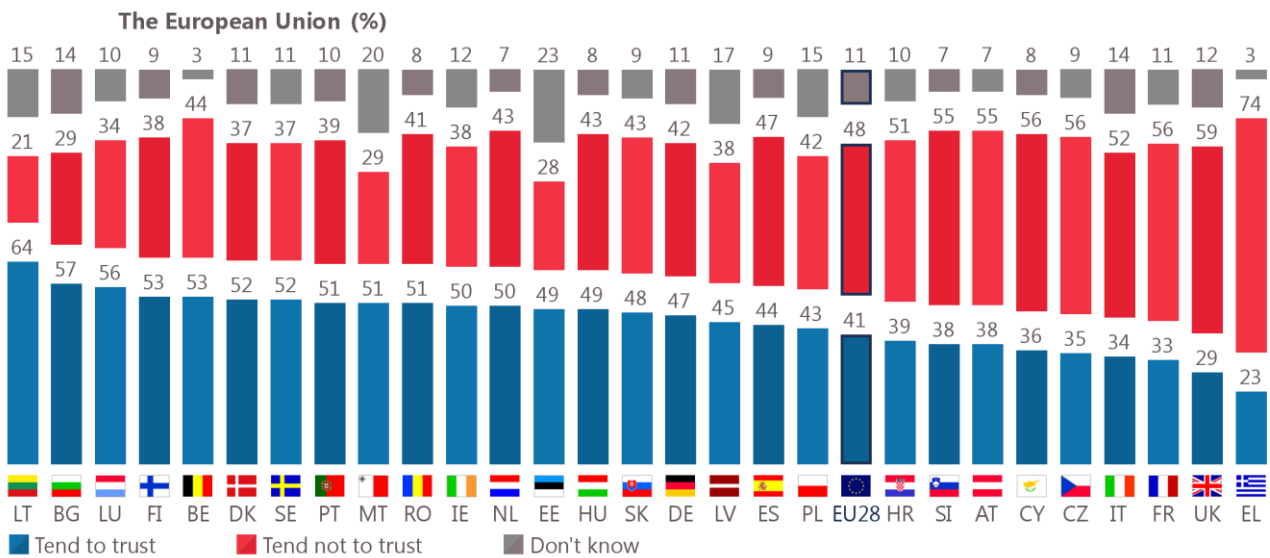


Figure 7: Standard Eurobarometer 88, December 2017, Answers to the question about trust in the European Union

QA19 Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU?

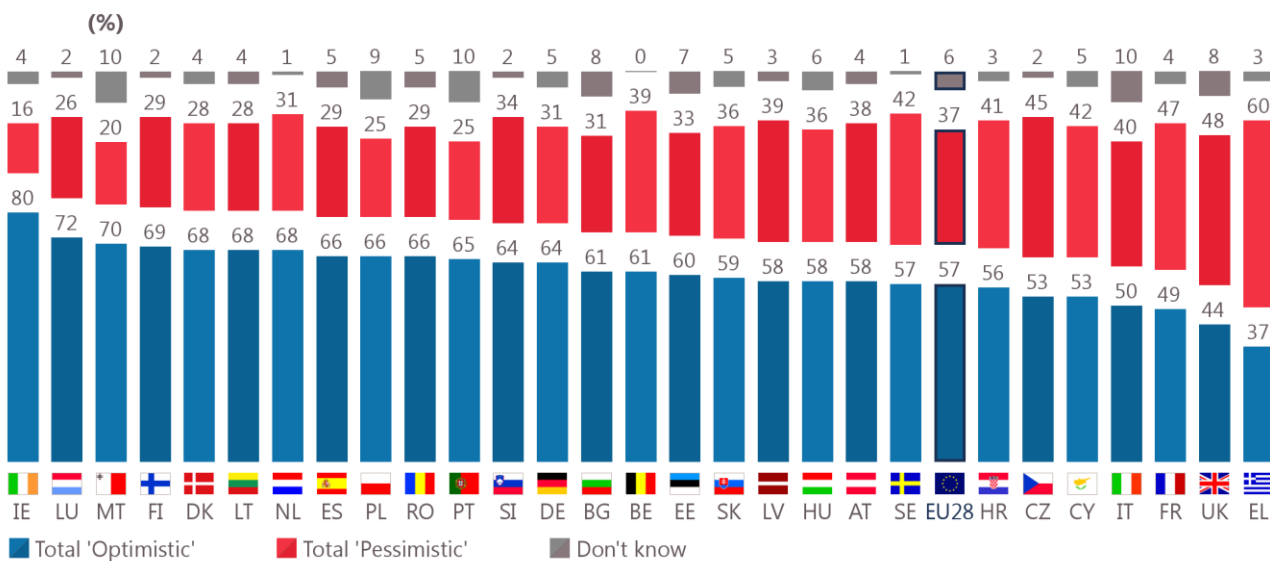


Figure 8: Standard Eurobarometer 88, December 2017, Answers to the question about optimism about the future of the European Union

“Peacock Dance”: Tactics of a Political Leader

“If we wanted to implement the (crisis management) steps suggested by Brussels bureaucrats then – I think - we would cause harm to our homeland, so in a complex course of action, in which we have to mix the elements of compliance, agreement, refusal and resistance in a very complicated tactical strategy. We must continue firmly going on our own way, and we must resist those pressures that would force us to implement measures harmful to Hungary. In the world there is a dancing order, in

the diplomacy. This dance, this peacock dance, this refusing peacock dance we must perform, as if we wanted to make friends, these are actions belonging to the art of politics. Out of seven proposals, we agree to two or three that we have already implemented previously, they just have not noticed, and the other two proposals we refuse so that actually we accepted most of the proposals.”⁸⁷

With his speech from 2012, the Hungarian prime minister could apply with good chances for the title of the “Machiavelli of our times”, only by now the “Prince” has to imitate the moves of a bird with vibrant colorful feathers able to convince its audience. Orbán throughout his long political career of trial and error ideological changes eventually figured out the winning strategy as a front-runner – this time – of the current populist Zeitgeist.



Figure 9: Illustration in the article of index.hu about the changes of the Stop Soros bill

An actual example for the peacock dance is the Stop Soros bill. After the criticism and condemnation of the EU and the meeting with the European People’s Party Fidesz quietly modified the bill taking out the two most condemned paragraphs, but they still go on with the process. Orbán never admitted that he would have

withdrawn anything under pressure, his spokesperson even denied that this criticism was on the agenda in the meeting with the EPP.

Euroscepticism in this form might be rather simply called cynicism. In the evaluation of former foreign minister Péter Balázs⁸⁸ it is hard to define the exact matching label of Euroscepticism for Fidesz, because of the often-contradictory statements. According to Balázs, Fidesz can be rather placed in a larger category that of anti-globalization sovereignty-centered attitude, which is conform with

⁸⁷ Viktor Orbán (May 31, 2012) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s5gzvb87ZY>

⁸⁸ Interview in person at the Central European University on 31.05.2018

Euroscepticism, as well. The EU is not the only international organization on the list, the IMF and the UN also belong here in the Fidesz rhetoric. Consequently, one cannot expect cooperative attitude from them on the level of multilateral international cooperation.

The Worst Pupil in Class

The former “best pupil in the class” during the accession negotiations has gone by now to the other extreme as a member-state.

In April the draft report on Hungary of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament has been published by the rapporteur, Judith Sargentini “on a proposal calling on the Council to determine, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded”⁸⁹. The report lists issues of concern from the functioning of the constitutional system through corruption to the breaching of numerous individual and community right, concerning minorities and refugees, just to name a few. In May the European Parliament adopted the resolution calling for launching the Article 7 procedure against Hungary.⁹⁰

In the meantime, the Hungarian Prime Minister does not seem to acknowledge any of these accusations: “The past two government terms have seen Hungary complete a successful constitutional transformation, a successful transformation in policy on Hungarian communities abroad, a successful economic transformation, and a successful family policy transformation.” – said Orbán in a speech on May 16, 2018 at the induction ceremony of the Chief of Staff of the Hungarian Defense Forces. In his perception everything goes as planned completely disregarding the EU’s criticism. What he can also do in a speech where nobody asks any questions. He conducts a specific discursive politics to be

⁸⁹ European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs 2017/2131(INL) 11.4.2018 DRAFT REPORT on a proposal calling on the Council to determine, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded (2017/2131(INL))

⁹⁰ European Parliament News, “Fundamental rights in Hungary: MEPs call for triggering Article 7” <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170511IPR74350/fundamental-rights-in-hungary-meps-call-for-triggering-article-7>

described more in details in the next chapter, where he consciously selects the circumstances of encounters with the media.

On his first trip abroad in the new term in Poland, he talked only about the Polish-Hungarian common position concerning financial transfers: “The first is that we want to protect the interests of our farmers; and so, we don’t agree with a reduction in the agricultural budget. And in principle we also agreed that while we are not opposed to setting up new funds, because new responsibilities emerge all the time, the setting up of new funds cannot be an argument for reducing old, well-functioning funds. So those must be protected.”⁹¹

From the perspective of Euroscepticism, it means that Orbán is not interested in becoming a Euroreject politician refusing the EU membership, he rather wants to transform the Union to match his vision: “...I can say that we both want a strong Europe, and we want to take part in the reforms and debates that seek to improve and strengthen Europe. We both want peaceful development, and both the Poles and Hungarians want a strong Central Europe, because we’re convinced that this serves our best interests. It also coincides with the European Union’s core goal of a European continent comprising strong regions; and a strong Central European region can make a major contribution to the strength of the entire European continent.”⁹² Adding to it that the most important issue for Hungarians is migration.

⁹¹ Viktor Orbán’s press statement after his talks with Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki, 14 May 2018, Warsaw

⁹² Viktor Orbán’s press statement, 14 May 2018, Warsaw

Chapter 3 – Constructed Reality – Discourse Analysis

*“Then again discourse is one form of political action, one possible tool of innovation.”*⁹³

Discourse being a dynamic element not only reflects ideas, but it is also capable of transforming them offering a key role for actors in public policy changes resulting in discursive governance. Its most important level includes philosophical ideologies creating political languages that are in service of discursive political strategies. These political languages have their own patterns, like assumptions, stylistic characteristics, rhetoric, but they are also dynamic. They have normative power, they limit the speakers, but in the same time provide them tools to reach their strategic goals.⁹⁴

Viktor Orbán also appeared in the ring of politics with a memorable speech in June 1989 at the reburial of Imre Nagy, the late martyr prime minister.⁹⁵ It is commonplace knowledge that he is a talented speaker, a capability that he uses extensively. The analysis of his speeches provides a deeper understanding of his political tactics, and transformations to be discussed in this chapter.

The Pro-European and Pragmatic Viktor Orbán

As a result of his search for the winning ideology, shifting toward the political right in 1995 FIDESZ changed its name to FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Party. In 1998 Orbán could obtain his first election victory becoming the main party on the conservative Right. FIDESZ formed a coalition government with simple majority amidst imminent NATO-accession and preparations EU-integration.

As a beginner head of government, during his first term in May 1999 Viktor Orbán hosted a delegation of the Council of Europe in Budapest. The prime minister in his welcoming address underlined that in spite of our difference we have a common European cultural heritage that could provide basis for the

⁹³ Gábor Illés, András Körösnéyi “Ortodoxia, heterodoxia és cselekvés: Bajnai Gordon és Orbán Viktor válságkezelése, 2009-2014 in book: *Viharban kormányozni* edited by András Körösnéyi MTATKPTI (2017) p.139

⁹⁴ Illés, Körösnéyi “Ortodoxia, heterodoxia és cselekvés: Bajnai Gordon és Orbán Viktor válságkezelése, 2009-2014” p.144-145

⁹⁵ The speech of Viktor Orbán at the reburial of Imre Nagy on 16.06.1989
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YybJROUMu0>

building up of common knowledge, common consciousness and common values.⁹⁶ This time in the immediate neighborhood of Hungary in Serbia there were still ongoing fights for Kosovo. Hungary had a large inflow of refugees of different cultural and even religious background from the Balkans. Orbán in his speech highlighted that Hungary is open and ready to offer help to those who are running for their lives. He referred to the 25.000 refugees residing in Hungary, while declaring that in spite of the war in Serbia there is peace and quiet in Hungary. He also confirmed that Hungary is fulfilling its obligations in offering all kind of humanitarian assistance to help these refugees as long as they cannot decide between applying for refugee status or returning home. He also refers to the previous Balkan wars, when Hungary successfully accommodated around 70.000 refugees in the early 90s.⁹⁷

These statements are highly cooperative, reinforcing Hungary's belonging to the Western value-system, and proof of a helpful ally government. On a side note, this attitude differs fundamentally from what he is saying today, actively forging the above-mentioned over-politicization of the migration process that started in 2015. In Hungary the debate was recently about whether to accept 1300 (!) refugees, or at least whether to process their refugee claims. Of course, circumstances were fundamentally different, Hungary was still an aspirant country for EU-membership, thus it was important to show our cooperative attitude and respect for the European values.

The Populist Winds of Change

Brubaker defines populism as a “discursive and stylistic repertoire” that matches perfectly with the capabilities and political talents of Viktor Orbán, as discussed above. The lost election in 2002

⁹⁶ “Úgy látom, hogy 50 esztendő után levonhatjuk azt a következtetést, hogy az Európa Tanács a jelen és a jövő intézménye egyaránt. A jövőé is, mert a fennálló, és ne legyen illúziónk, még jó ideig fennmaradó különbségek ellenére közös kulturális, közös európai kulturális örökségünkre építve keretet adhat a közös tudásnak, a közös lelkiismeretnek és a közös értékeknek.” V. Orbán (May 6, 1999)

⁹⁷ “Magyarország nevében azt tudom mondani önöknek, hogy mi ma is nyitottak vagyunk azok előtt, akik üldözöik elől menekülnek, akik az életükért futnak, és akik bennünk látják biztonságuk zálogát. Magyarország ma épp úgy készen áll a szükséges segítség nyújtására, mint ahogy készen állt a 90-es évek derekán, az előző délszláv válság idején, amikor mindösszesen 70 ezer menekült talált Magyarországon biztonságot. Ma is 25 ezer olyan ember tartózkodik Magyarországon, aki Jugoszlávia területéről érkezett, és várja, hogy merre fordul a sorsa. Menekültté válik-e Magyarországon, vagy visszatérhet. A ránk háruló kötelezettségek teljesítésében a délszláv válságból ránk háruló humanitárius segítség teljesítése ügyében önök számíthatnak Magyarországra.” V. Orbán (May 6, 1999)

represented another turning point in Orbán's discourse, on the one hand in opposition his hands were not bound any more by the expected political correctness of a head of government of a country aspiring for EU-membership, on the other hand he must have felt the need for ideological change in order to get back to power.

In the early 2000s he already stepped up as a charismatic leader capable of mobilizing people. Between the two turns of the elections in 2002, he was almost capable of turning the close election results with his personal campaign travelling around in the flying-pinion districts.⁹⁸ When he gave the first speech in opposition several hundred thousand people gathered to listen to his infamous slogan: "the homeland cannot be in opposition".⁹⁹

Another example of his discursive politics was the introduction of the yearly "state of the union" speech following the US example that Orbán started as prime minister, and this tradition he also followed afterwards in opposition still amidst much expectations from the public and media attention. This series of speeches also provided him – being a talented speaker – the opportunity to transmit his ambitious political visions detached from everyday party politics, and to take a lead in the framing contest and he hardly ever fell short of expectations. Orbán also managed to stay in the limelight as a result, even as the leader of the opposition.¹⁰⁰

The annual evaluation speech in 2003 hallmarks a move toward soft Euroscepticism, Orbán complains about the accession conditions and talks about the multitude of unacceptable measures limiting state sovereignty that is imposed by the overcentralized order of the Union. Nevertheless, he concludes the topic by acknowledging that the arguments for the EU-accession outnumber the ones against it.¹⁰¹ In

⁹⁸ Körösnéyi: Weber és az Orbán-rezsim p.15

⁹⁹ Orbán's speech evaluating the election results, May 2002

¹⁰⁰ http://www.politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=949

¹⁰¹ "Lassan azt is megtanuljuk mindannyian Magyarországon, hogy a belépés után nem a jól megérdemelt pihenés, hanem további küzdelmek, egy, a mainál is erősebb verseny vár ránk. Nincs mit csodálkozni azon, ha egyre több az aggódó hang. A polgári körök világában egyébként nagy tekintélynek örvendő értelmiségiek és jogtudósok még azt is megkockáztatták, most idézem őket: Elfogadhatatlannak tartjuk az állami önrendelkezést korlátozó intézkedések sokaságát, amit az uniós jelenlegi túlközpontosított rendje kényszerít ránk." V. Orbán (February, 2003)

the speech the first populist and nationalist thoughts make appearance, as well, as he tries to oppose the whole society against the government in his criticism. Orbán proclaims that the “people of his kind” should only govern for great national goal, at which point he mentions that the civic government had to fight multiple powers, international monetary institutions, multinational companies, international organizations to achieve the national goal.¹⁰²

The influence of Orbán’s speeches and his charisma as the leader of the opposition is reflected in the reactions from the government, the socialist-liberal coalition was in stand-by mode waiting for the speech and prepared for possible declarations in case of being attacked by Orbán.¹⁰³ This supports the Weberian thesis that powerful discourse of a charismatic leader can indeed have a strong political impact.

“Let’s Stop Brussels”¹⁰⁴

“In 2010, when we stood up on our feet, we revolted and started our fight in Brussels for the Hungarians...”¹⁰⁵ summarized V. Orbán his modern “freedom fight” in his speech on the national holiday remembering the Hungarian revolution in 2018.

The Orbán governments throughout the second and the third terms in office started to involve the EU in the domestic political scene depicting it as a scapegoat using the context of the migration crisis. By presenting himself as the guardian of the Christian Europe, Orbán has gradually drifted into more and more extremism in his statements about migration and terrorism, especially by directly linking these two phenomena, and criticizing the role of the EU in these fields. The government by its anti-EU (and

¹⁰² “Az elmúlt négy év tanulsága talán az lehet, hogy a magunkfajtáknak csak nagy célok, ne féljünk a szavaktól, csak nagy nemzeti célok érdekében szabad vállalni a kormányzás felelősségét.... Éppen ezért céljaink elérése érdekében 1998 és 2002 között, mert ilyen volt a megelőző nyolc esztendő, az akkori kormánynak, a polgári kormánynak számos hatalmassággal, óvatosan fogalmazok, nemzetközi pénzintézettel, vállalatbirodalommal, és nemzetközi szervezettel szemben kellett megvédeni a magyar álláspontokat.” V. Orbán (February, 2003)

¹⁰³ http://www.politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=1162

¹⁰⁴ “Állítsuk meg Brüsszelt!” – the slogan of a national consultation and simultaneous billboard campaign conducted by the Hungarian government in April 2017

¹⁰⁵ “2010-ben, amikor talpra álltunk, felláztunk, és harcolni kezdtünk a magyarokért Brüsszelben...” V. Orbán’s speech on the national holiday celebration on March 15, 2018

lately even anti-UN) billboard campaigns politicizes international cooperation, fueling nationalistic emotions in a country where the EU-membership is – by miracle – still supported by most of the population.

The narrative of continuously defending the Hungarians, or often simply Hungary against Brussels that is compared to Moscow occasionally is a perfect example for the using of a two-dimensional social space, the horizontal and vertical oppositions, when speaking in the name of the “people” defined by Brubaker as a basic feature of populist discourse.¹⁰⁶ It is a perfect combination of Euroscepticism and populist discourse. However, the extent of the “Let’s stop Brussels!” campaign in Hungary is unexemplified so far in the European Union.

The national consultations have been introduced by the FIDESZ government after 2010, as an institutionalized political questionnaire to provide legitimacy for high priority government actions.

However, the questionnaires contain one sided directed questions with the possibility of yes-or-no answer.



Figure 10: "Let's stop Brussels" government billboard campaign simultaneously to the related national consultation

Ágnes Bátorý in her article about Hungary's system of national cooperation also underlines the importance of the EU as external enemy referring to Orbán's speech on the national holiday remembering the 1848 revolution in 2011.¹⁰⁷ Brussels is often depicted as a “center of an empire” by Orbán compared to Vienna in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy or Moscow in the Soviet times, just to set the relevant bellicose context, like when he refers to the “empire” of George Soros, who has an alleged masterplan¹⁰⁸ to let the migrants invade Hungary and Europe and take away at minimum our

¹⁰⁶ Brubaker: Why populism?" p.6

¹⁰⁷ Agnes Batory (2016), Populists in government? Hungary's "system of national cooperation", Democratization, 23:2, 283-3003, p.289

¹⁰⁸ The existence of the Soros-plan was never proved by the Hungarian government despite the related STOP SOROS legislation proposal prepared by FIDESZ early 2018.

home land, culture and religion altogether. To actualize and refresh the all-encompassing migrant boogeymen, in this quasi campaign speech a few weeks before the 2018 parliamentary elections, he combines further and “informs” the crowd that all the opposition candidates are in fact the representants of Soros, and they would realize the “Plan” if getting into power.¹⁰⁹ This might seem a surreal conspiracy theory – like it really is one – for an outsider, but it has a receptive audience in Hungary, as a political discourse reaching its aim of raising irrational fears and political support at the same time.

Discursive Governance – General Assessment

Viktor Orbán being a charismatic leader has an outstanding rhetoric talent as earlier discussed, and he also takes every occasion in “friendly” environment to speak publicly. In this respect quantity turns into quality, as well. Adding up to it, the populist nationalist ideology and the matching well-developed political language also contributes to maintaining the lead in dominating the public discourse.

Orbán introduced the annual evaluation speech as discussed above that also provided him occasions to regularly frame political discourse even when in opposition. His political opponents followed his example, but they have never managed to imitate his charisma and popularity with their yearly speeches.

Throughout the past eight years in government, Orbán increased his public appearances considerably, in 2011, the first full year as prime minister he gave 57 speeches, in 2017 already at 101 occasions. The peak was in the 2014 election year, when he gave 130 speeches over the year based on officially published data.¹¹⁰ The Hungarian prime minister also chooses carefully the context where and with

¹⁰⁹ “Mi sohasem gyűlöltünk, és nem is fogunk gyűlölni senkit. Épp ellenkezőleg: mi továbbra is hiszünk a szeretet és az összefogás erejében, de harcolni fogunk az ellen, amit Soros György birodalma Magyarországgal tesz és tenni akar. Ez a mi hazánk, ez a mi életünk, nincs nekünk másík, ezért küzdeni fogunk érte a végsőig, és nem adjuk fel soha. Tudjuk, hogy végül minden választókerületben ők állnak majd szemben a mi jelöltjeinkkel. Nekik az a feladatuk, hogy hatalomra kerülve végrehajtsák a nagy tervet. A nagy tervet, hogy a bevándorlók útjában álló Magyarországot megtörjék, és először bevándorlók ezreit, aztán tíz- és tízezreit telepítsék be néhány év alatt Magyarországra.” V. Orbán’s speech on the national holiday celebration on March 15, 2018

¹¹⁰ <http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk>
http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/#beszedek_container

whom he speaks. He engaged in a prime minister candidate debate the last time in 2006 where he came out as a loser. Since then he was never willing to debate before any parliamentary elections. In the 2018 campaign Orbán's spokesperson answered to the related question from a news portal that "The prime minister has debated several times in the Parliament with the opposition candidates. Debate time is up, it is now time for the voters to decide."¹¹¹

Orbán also carefully chooses the media outlets where he is willing to appear, he is extensively present in public media, every Friday morning has a one-hour interview, or rather a kind of moderated speech with a microphone stand type journalist in a state radio (Kossuth Radio)

The political language of FIDESZ resembles to a wave of neologism because of the amount of "created" words that pen in public discourse to the FIDESZ narrative. The word "migráns" (migrant converted into Hungarian) was a rather specific term rarely used before 2015, and by now because of its extensive usage by the media and public discourse, it has become a swearword used even by schoolchildren. It has even a verbal form, "migránsozás" used to depict the phenomenon of extensive usage of the word migrant with negative connotations. The terms "Soros zsoldos" (Soros mercenary), "centrális erőter" (central arena of power), "nemzeti együttműködés rendszere" (system of national cooperation) have been invented to describe the new paradigm of political discourse.

In relation to the European Union there are also recurring expressions with negative connotations, like "brüsszeli bürokraták" (Brussels bureaucrats), "euróválság" (euro crisis), "karvalytőke" (sparrowhawk capital), "pénzügyi spekulánsok" (financial speculators) that support the general critical tone in relation to the EU and "Brussels" and other international organizations (IMF, UN) and even multinational companies.

An example for reframing is Orbán's statement about the last election results in April 2018, when he interpreted the outcome at his first international press conference that "the people voted for sovereignty

¹¹¹ https://index.hu/belfold/2018/valasztas/2018/03/04/amikor_a_fidesznek_erdeke_volt_a_miniszterelnok-jelolti_vita/

meaning a strong Europe consisting of strong member-states, not a United States of Europe”.¹¹² While obviously the election was not about this question.

Conspiracy theories also take an integral party in the discursive governance of FIDESZ, which are diffused by media outlets controlled by FIDESZ including public media and occasionally by means of national consultations and related billboard campaign conducted by the Hungarian government. The



Figure 11: Illustration of the article about the reply of Michael Vachon, counsellor of George Soros to the anti-Soros government billboard campaign in the weekly newspaper 168 óra on July 11, 2017

most salient example was the anti-Soros billboard and television campaign in 2017. As Michael Vachon reacted to it in an open letter: “The Hungarian regime’s xenophobia and demonization of refugees are anti-European. The claim that Soros is promoting a scheme to import a million illegal immigrants

into Europe is Victor Orban’s (sic) fantasy.”¹¹³ Nevertheless, in Hungary fantasy can become reality nowadays. The anti-Soros campaign evolved into the Stop Soros omnibus anti-migration legislation package¹¹⁴ draft aiming to sanction civil organizations helping migrant with the goal of avoiding that Hungary becomes an immigrant country. What is even more troubling is that on the government website they explicitly write: “We know that great forces are against this bill. Those organizations will attack it the most ardently that receive their funds from abroad, and who would admit immigration. They would dismantle the fence and start the settlement programs.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² “From the election I can also conclude that the Hungarian people stood up for Hungarian sovereignty – meaning that we are a European nation which wants a strong Europe, comprising strong Member States. In my view the electorate also decided that the Hungarian government must stand up for a Europe of nations, and not a United States of Europe.” V. Orbán (April 10, 2018)

¹¹³ <http://168ora.hu/itthon/europa-legsotetebb-orait-idezik-levelben-teszi-helyre-soros-jobbkeze-az-orban-kormanyt-5397>

¹¹⁴ <https://stopsoros.kormany.hu/>

¹¹⁵ “Tisztában vagyunk vele, hogy nagy erők mozdulnak majd meg a törvényjavaslat ellen. Azok a szervezetek támadják majd leghevesebben, akik külföldről kapják forrásaikat, és akik teret engednének a bevándorlásnak. Lebontanák a határzárakat és megindítanák a betelepítési programokat.” <https://stopsoros.kormany.hu/>



Figure 12: Title in English: That's why we need Stop Soros: That's how migrants are being smuggled by the lawyers of Soros

The belief in conspiracy theories and support for populism are correlating with each other, as researches in different countries (US and Hungary) proved.¹¹⁶ With the widespread usage of social media nowadays, it becomes especially easy to spread conspiracy theories, but the most effective is still – as the example of Hungary also shows – when political actors in power in possession of state resources appeal to them.

The 2017 Freedom House report confirm that in Hungary the media outlets friendly to Fidesz, dominate the media market.¹¹⁷ As the above figures show they transmit without criticism government propaganda messages, while there is no media availability for domestic opposition to express different opinion. That is how pluralism is effectively eliminated, and the unified “voice of the people” is omnipresent with a self-reinforcing impact.

¹¹⁶ Péter Krekó: Tömegparanoia: Az összeesküvéselméletek és álhírek szociálpszichológiája, Atheneum 2018, p.112

¹¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/hungary>

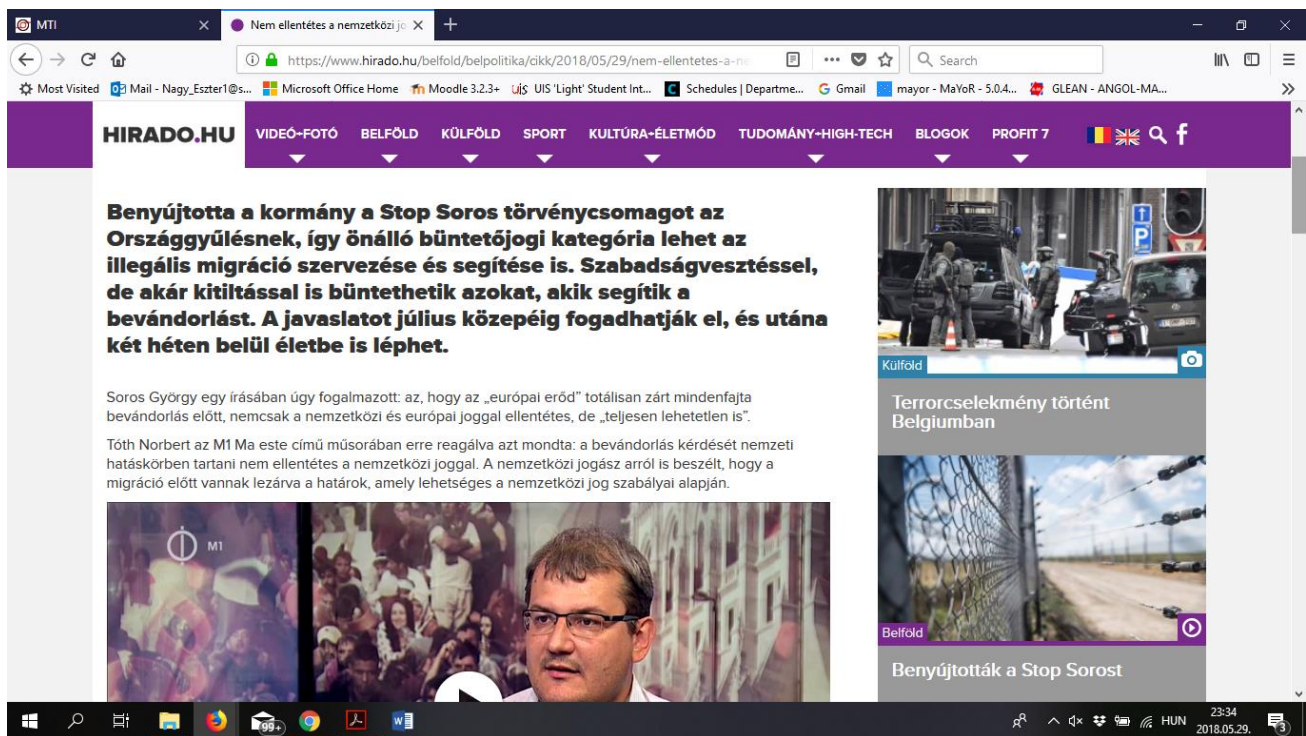


Figure 13: Hungarian News Agency – also controlled by the government – informs on the front page about the Stop Soros legislation package complemented by the “obligatory” terror attack as foreign news

In modern dictatorships conspiracy theories belong to the everyday toolset the incumbent party, the stronger the suppression is the more the leadership in power need the fight against inside/outside enemies to legitimize its repression.¹¹⁸ Here, I do not state that Hungary is a dictatorship, only that the tendencies of using conspiracy theories in the government’s rhetoric is increasingly similar to autocratic leaderships.

A Special Friendship

“Similis simili gaudet.”¹¹⁹

Hungary’s U-turn consists of another dimension, namely the substantial turn in Russian-Hungarian relationships that also triggers increased Euroscepticism. It is mutually beneficial for the two leaders.

¹¹⁸ Krekó Péter p.121

¹¹⁹ Latin phrase: Like rejoices in like.

Russia has vested interests in supporting Eurosceptic parties in Europe that is realized by various



Figure 14: Orbán with Putin in 2017, Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

means and favors mainly the penetration of extreme right parties into mainstream political leadership. While in the Western part of Europe Moscow tries to influence election results with cyber war strategies, the CEE countries are more vulnerable, “the East has a multitude of local mainstream

political, economic and disinformation actors in the pockets of the Kremlin”, as states the related report of Political Capital.¹²⁰

While Russia is becoming the number one security threat for Germany¹²¹ and the European Union as a whole and puts into question post-cold-war settlement, the Hungarian government is opening the doors wide with the closest economic and political ties with Russia since the system change on while not admitting the threats from the Russian ties on the policy level. Quite the contrary, Orbán in a speech in 2014 openly states Russia as a model country among other states: “...today the hit topic in thought is to understand those systems that are not Western, not liberal, maybe not even democracies, but make nations successful, they are the stars of international analysis nowadays”.¹²² According to this the policies of FIDESZ look exactly like straight from Russia’s playbook, especially considering the anti-NGO legislation, the media-capture or the recurrent anti-EU and Western criticism.¹²³

The Euroscepticism of FIDESZ in government is a clear policy choice completely in line with Russian interests. Orbán has reached the point to be called the “Putin of the Puszta” colloquially in caricatures.

¹²⁰ Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, Jakub Janda, Bernhard Weidinger: Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections? A study by Political Capital, European Values Think-tank in cooperation with DöW, 2017

¹²¹ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation/EN/index.htm>

¹²² “...ma a slágertéma a gondolkodásban azoknak a rendszereknek a megértése, amelyek nem nyugatiak, nem liberálisok, nem liberális demokráciák, talán még demokráciák sem, és mégis sikeressé tesznek nemzeteket. Ma a sztárok a nemzetközi elemzésekben Szingapúr, Kína, India, Oroszország, Törökország.” V. Orbán (July 2014)

¹²³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/06/europe/hungary-elections-russia-orban-intl/index.html>

“Mr. Orbán seems to imagine himself a pocket-sized version of Russia’s President Vladimir Putin.” states also Philip Stephens in an opinion article in the Financial Times.¹²⁴

Since 2010 Vladimir Putin visited Hungary altogether seven times, four times after the annexation of the Crimea, in 2017 alone twice within a year.

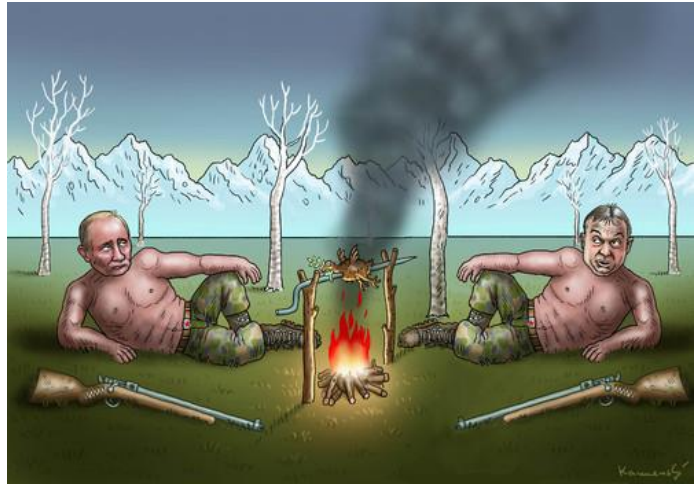


Figure 15: Orbán and Putin on a caricature

What is also worrisome that here are no clear explanations behind the fast change in the Russian-Hungarian foreign policy orientations that means a U-turn in the traditional anti-Soviet/anti-Russian attitude of Fidesz that happened after 2010. It became obvious in January 2014 when Orbán unexpectedly and without any previous coordination signed the Paks2 deal with Putin in Moscow. This contract was made without open tender and without any preceding coordination with domestic actors, civil organizations and the general public. In spite of the fact that the Paks2 deal signifies a long-term engagement with Russia due to the related government loan and energy security considerations. The 10 Billion EUR credit agreement with Russia for Paks2 was approved post factum by the Hungarian Parliament in February 2014 without knowing the exact conditions that have not been made public ever since.¹²⁵

The European Commission started an investigation because of the lack of open tender in the case of the Paks2 decision and the related state subvention, but finally in February 2017 the project got the approval of the institution.

¹²⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/2032f1c2-66e5-11e7-8526-7b38dcaef614>

¹²⁵ Source: K-monitor

Conclusions

There is much discussion in political economic scholarship about the effects on politics of economic crisis, unemployment, inequality, etc., however, Orbán's example shows that it is not necessary for a politician to deal with and solve real problems of the population to get elected and to stay in power. With a good choice of issue reframing and active crisis generating a leader can maintain popularity and support of much of the population.

The politicization of economic and social issues by populist nationalists does not allow for coordination and pragmatic considerations for the best possible solution for the problems. Populists are also not interested in this strategy, emotional politics offers much more political benefits at least on the short and mid-term, as we could see in the Hungarian case. While Hungary is already lagging because of the procrastination of much needed reform, the populist political leadership by means of state propaganda can reframe the difficulties and find scapegoats that can be blamed. Perception overrides reality.

Viktor Orbán had inclinations for authoritarian populist tendencies from the early starts of his political carrier, he has always been the unquestionable leader of his party that had an increasingly centralized structure with personalistic leadership style. The strong division of the Hungarian political system was used and further deepened by Orbán, who managed to dominate political discourse and the framing contest within already in opposition.

As we could see from the Hungarian case Populism and Euroscepticism combined with anti-globalism in general are closely connected and mutually reinforcing ideologies with implications to all the fields of society. Some warning signs were already present during the integration process, but they stayed under the radar and were not considered alarming tendencies. The two phenomena combined started to unfold at full scale only after getting into the EU and the populist nationalist leader achieved qualified majority in Hungary.

The post-communist countries are more in danger due to the lack of democratic traditions, unstable political system, and the “transition schizophrenia”¹²⁶ of the population. Consequently, the mere building up of democratic institutions, market economy and the initial establishment of the rule of law, does not render the democratizing process irreversible. In a post-communist context, a talented authoritarian style political strategist can use democratic institution to get into power and then alter the whole political system to his liking and political interests.

The Western style modernization process ended both economically and politically in Hungary in 2010 with the qualified majority of Fidesz, when the country was already an EU-member. Hungary is tailing off in development even from the other post-communist member states. The populist regime is cemented by the one-party constitution, the law-factory¹²⁷ and the constant reshuffle of public administration, making democratic alteration quasi impossible. Hungary cannot be considered a full-fledged democracy any more, some scholars say not even a democracy, but it is still hard to assess being a moving target. At present, it can be labelled as a highly centralized Weberian plebiscite leadership with autocratic tendencies that are still unfolding after the renewed qualified majority mandate in 2018. Consolidation cannot be expected under the current leadership because of the nature of populist nationalist ideology and political strategy.

Despite the high level of economic and political EU-integration, there are no real constraints on domestic and foreign policies of the member-states after the EU accession. Orbán with his “crisis of the EU” narrative himself escalates the crisis. By the effect of contagion, Hungary has a relatively high influence in fueling Euroscepticism in general and anti-migrant emotions in particular throughout the whole European Union under the pretext of protecting national sovereignty and Christianity. However, Orbán is not especially welcome by mainstream political leaders of the EU, he is referred to mostly by extreme right leaders. The current period heading toward the EP elections in 2019 will be decisive for

¹²⁶ Tamás Sárközy (2014): *Kétharmados Tűlzáskormányzás*, Park Könyvkiadó Budapest p.97

¹²⁷ Kornai: “Hungary’s U-Turn” p.4

containing the populist nationalist upsurge in the EU influencing further development of the integration.

An important consequence of populism in Hungarian foreign policy is the growing isolation that is damaging for a small country with an open economy. We can experience it in the scarcity and “exotic reorientation”¹²⁸ of high level meetings, the plummeted frequency of high level visits of European leaders to Hungary. In the meantime, the Russian president is a regular visitor to Hungary. Orbán’s balancing strategy between “East and West” is dangerous for a small country and holds high risks in the longer run.

¹²⁸ By this I mean that especially in the framework of the Eastern opening high level visits are initiated and realized with the states from the global south with whom Hungary has had so far marginal relations, and often involving (semi-) authoritarian leaders.

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