

# POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

*The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association*

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from a Hungarian Perspective  
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***Co-editors:***

Ladislav Cabada & Šárka Waisová  
E-mail: ladislav.cabada@mup.cz; sarka.waisova@mup.cz

***Executive Assistant to the editors:***

Hana N. Hlaváčková  
E-mail: hana.hlavackova@mup.cz

***English language editing:***

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# ESSAYS



# The Uncertain Revival of Central Europe – Central European Thought from a Hungarian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

ANDREA SCHMIDT



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**Abstract:** *The recent crisis that, the European Union has had to face certainly raises questions about the current state of Europe. The question about the legacy of regional integration; the debate between the standpoints about the vision on the European Union with the necessity of strong nations or on the contrary, the opportunity of deepening the cohesion that could lead to the united states of europe; in other words, political integration, the deepest step of regional integration. the paper deals with the problem of the concept on central europe from the standpoint of various concepts; the question of mapping, the meaning of borders, the ways of identification appear in this paper. the difference between the concept of mittel europe and central europe also appear in the paper. analysing the question of central europe it is also inevitable to examine the meaning of central europe from historical context. after the end of the cold war and as the consequence of the euro-atlantic integration, the concept of central europe changed a bit. while during the bipolar system this phenomenon served as a differentiation of the groups of countries being located in the soviet sphere of interest. being central european meant something that was much more engaged with progressive approach in democratization, transformation rather than a sign of nostalgia towards the historical past.*

**Keywords:** *political map, regional integration, buffer zone, nation*

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<sup>1</sup> This research project was supported by the European Union. EFOP-3.6.3-VEKOP-16-2017-00007 – Young researchers from talented students – Fostering scientific careers in higher education.

*“We have the chance to transfer Central Europe from a phenomenon that has so far been historical and spiritual into a political phenomenon. We have the chance to take a string of European countries that, until recently, were colonised by the Soviet Union, which would be founded on equal rights and transform them into a definite special body which would approach Western Europe not as a poor dissident or a helpless, searching amnestied prisoner but as someone who has something to offer.” (Havel)<sup>2</sup>*

The recent crisis that the European Union has had to face certainly raises questions about the current state of Europe. The question about the legacy of regional integration; the debate between the standpoints about the vision of Scruton’s theory on the European Union with the necessity of strong nations<sup>3</sup> which is shared by many of his conservative, or even radical followers, or on the contrary, the opportunity of deepening the cohesion that could lead to the United States of Europe<sup>4</sup>; in other words, political integration, the deepest step of regional integration.

Considering the perceptions about Central Europe, the region can be compared with a dying and rising deity (Majoros 2009) in such a perspective that, from time to time, the region remains in the focus of attention of the great powers while between two so-called active periods, the entire region is neglected. When acknowledging the existence of the internal cleavages within Europe it is worth examining the justification of this particular region. Our investigation focuses on the changing concept of Central Europe and the identification of this specific region, in addition to its rather questionable position being located between the East and West and finally, the attempts of bordering the region itself.

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2 Havel, Vaclav: Allocution prononcée devant la Diète et le Sénat polonais. Varsovie, le 25 janvier, 1990. In: *L’angoisse de la Liberté*. Paris, Éditions de l’aube. 68–78 In: Denni, Karen (2009): Central Europe as a Transition Zone between East and West, *Traditiones*, 38/2 : 59–71

3 “Europe is, and in my view has ever been, a civilisation of nation states, founded on a specific kind of pre-political allegiance, which is the allegiance that puts territory and custom first and religion and dynasty second in the order of government.” Available at: <https://www.roger-scruton.com/articles/276-the-need-for-nations> (10 December 2019).

4 A famous Hungarian politician, Jászi Oszkár, composed his vision on the possibility of deeper integration that could lead to the United States of Europe while, having experience about the consequences of the two World Wars, Winston Churchill also composed his idea regarding the strengthening of cooperation among the states of Europe. In: Bóka, Éva: Hungarian Thinkers in Search of Democratic European Identity, Available at: [http://www.grotius.hu/doc/pub/DJUNCB/eva\\_boka\\_hungarian\\_thinkers\\_eu\\_identity.pdf](http://www.grotius.hu/doc/pub/DJUNCB/eva_boka_hungarian_thinkers_eu_identity.pdf) and Churchill, Winston: United States of Europe, Available at: <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/united-states-of-europe/>

## Mapping the region

‘Europe’ can be identified as a concept as well as a continent and the borders of both oscillate wildly (Jacobs 2012).<sup>5</sup> A relatively recent and generally unaccepted theory sees Europe spanning half the globe, from Iceland to the Bering Strait, nearly touching Alaska. During the cold war, however, the opposite tendency triumphed more often: all of the Soviet Union, including Vilnius, Riga and other cities that today lie within the European Union, were excluded from Europe entirely. At times even the Soviet satellite states in the Warsaw Pact were left out, as well, so much had “Europe” come to be synonymous with “the West” and its associated political values ‘Europe’ became virtually synonymous with Christendom in the Middle Ages. In the past centuries, the unity was internationalised and less formalised or theorised. Religious ambitions or cultural projects united the Europeans because Europe was more a spiritual ideation (Maci 2011. According to Jacobs’s interpretation, in the Middle Ages, ‘Europe’ became virtually synonymous with Christendom.

Borders are good examples of otherness that was constructed by separate trajectories and incompatible developments.<sup>6</sup> Borders formulated the mental maps of Central Europe as they were functioning as the borders of the Empire of Charlemagne, which separated Christian Europe from the Slavs in the East and the borders drawn by the reformation and counter-reformation of the sixteenth century. Moreover, the borders between the Latin West and Orthodoxian East, or between Christendom and Islam, have to be considered. The old borders influenced the social, cultural and political life of the peoples living between them and were a marker of difference. The impact of these invisible borders can be seen even in our time and provides arguments for excluding those from Central Europe that are considered as *Others*, such as the Balkans (Denni 2009). Denni’s argumentation corresponds with Sorin’s remarks regarding the problem of a mental map of Europe. (Sorin 1996) Sorin argues that even for the generations after 1945, the mental map of Europe can be identified with the continuation of the perceptions about the more developed and backward parts of Europe. Since the age of enlightenment, there was a general perception that the progress of development obviously could approach from the West, however, until the Great Discoveries and the first roots of Capitalism, the South represented civilisation (see ancient Greece and the Roman Empire) while the North

5 Available at: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/09/where-is-europe/> (10 December 2019).

6 It is very popular to deal with the division of Europe. The core and periphery theory by Wallerstein is based on the same ideology that was also described by the Hungarian historian Szűcs Jenő in his work: *Vázlat Európa három történelmi régiójáról* in the early 1980s. Szűcs Jenő (1981): *Vázlat Európa három történelmi régiójáról*. In. *Történelmi Szemle*, 1981/3. Pp. 313–359 The importance of this essay – apart from the intention to write a synthesis comparing the different regions of Europe – was its delicate timing. The essay was published in the early 1980s and claimed that there was no homogeneous Eastern Europe.

was identified with barbarism. From the 18th century, the symbolical existence of north and south made a turn and the contradiction between barbarism and civilisation could be drawn as an East-West axis. The Ottoman invasion and occupation of the Bohemian Kingdom, as well as the end of sovereignty for both Poland and Hungary, also deepened the East-West division.

Border as a phenomenon got its importance with the birth of the nation states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and kept it through several ages. After the First World War, with the collapse of the great empires in Central and Eastern Europe, state borders strengthened their separating role. Establishing borders was always a great challenge in the Central and Eastern European region. As for many decades, three great powers shared their influential zones over territories, it is rather difficult to speak about a common decision based on the interests of the local people. Decisions about borders are initiated for various reasons: borders can be created from above, by the state that naturally does not necessarily reflect the interests of the local population. Borders can be drawn from outside, too. Usually, that happens after the end of wars and in the majority of examples from past peace treaties, more often than not, only the winners have the chance to express their motivation. It is visible through several examples that such decisions seemed to serve only as temporary solutions and in many cases, they served as roots of further conflicts and lack of cooperation among negatively impacted partners.<sup>7</sup> Borders can also be established from inside as a consequence of national claims; however, that is a rather risky solution from the ruling partner. Giving autonomous status or even supporting attempts towards independence can have dual consequences. In Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic and political borders did not coincide in the past two centuries and instead of homogeneous structures, multi-ethnic states were in the dominant position.

Border plays a rather socio-spatial role for the individual living close to it since it is/was part of daily spatial practice, while for someone living far from it, the border is/was more of a social construct of statehood. The visibility of historical borders sometimes reflects the electoral maps and demonstrates how historical territorial limits of a state become visible regardless of the fundamental escalating processes that have occurred in these states during the last 150 years (von Lowis 2015).

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7 From the inter-war history of Poland, the conflict between Poland and Lithuania was a very good example of a lack of cooperation. The consequences of the Trianon treaty and the loss of the majority of its territory of Hungary after 1920, also determined the frames of the government's foreign policy. Everything was subordinated to the idea of territorial revision and that was the reason for mutual suspicion between Hungary and the neighboring successor states.

## Central Europe versus Mittel Europa

The terminology itself can refer to a ‘middle’ position and the region can be characterised from the historical or cultural perception as a “child of the West who later married the East” (Berend 2013). The region was characterised as the territory of German influence, or the frontier between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East, or in other words: the area where the East and the West meet. The name ‘Central Europe’ should be distinguished from the German name, Mitteleuropa, as the first name reflects a more geographical or cultural, historical entity, while the latter expresses more the importance of the region in the eyes of German ambitions towards this region; or, as Hanák mentions, one can speak about the resurrection of Central Europe and how it can be referred to as the absurd appearance of German imperialism” (Hanák 2018). However, the mapping of Central Europe can be a question of debate, even for scientists, artists and politicians living in this territory. It can be identified with the Habsburg Monarchy, accepting the fact that it is a constantly moving region, emphasising a lack of immutability (Romsics 2016). The mapping of the region is rather troublesome, as Central Europe can include and exclude the Czech lands, Austria and Germany; it can incorporate the Carpathian Mountains and can be a bridge to the Balkans or is understood as a sign of German imperialism.

The concept of Mitteleuropa is thus closely related to German nation-building and identity construction (Strath 2008). The concept of these uncertain frames of the European continent, however, goes back to the end of the Thirty-Year War, the roots of the Westphalian system. The balance of power in Europe was based on the expansion of sea powers like the British and French colonial empires, while the central part of Europe was characterised by the status quo of the German states, without a unified Germany and the presence of the empress belonging to land powers (Kiss 2010). The Holy Roman Empire ended in 1806 and the various political groups could not agree on what had to be included in a new second Reich. This conflict affected relations between Austrian and Prussia, or the Habsburg and the Hohelnzollern, or the *Kleindeutsche* and *Grossdeutsche* proposals of what should be in and what should be out. German visions got an additional impulse by the liberal economist, Friedrich List, with the idea of a *mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftszone* and Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Bruck, the Austrian politician, with the idea of the German Zollverein. Both concepts were focusing on the question of how to modernise the region and how to shape them into becoming equal competitors of the West. List emphasised his standpoint that, “a strong nation required a strong economy and vice versa. The nation-state’s task was to protect the economy and through the economy, the national interest” (Strath 2008). His idea was extended with the suggestion that external protectionism and internal free trade, through a customs union, among the German states, were seen as crucial instruments in promoting the

idea of a German nation-state, including Austria. In his later draft, as Strath remarks, he extended the proposed customs union to include Central Europe. He advocated the whole of Central Europe as a free trade zone that should be established as the first steps towards eventual political cooperation.

The Spring of Nations, the revolutions in 1848, added a new layer to the concept of economic cooperation. The discourse was extended with new ideas such as democracy, socialism, nationalism finally mixed up in the one discourse of liberty and progress. In the new vision of Mitteleuropa, led by a unified Germany, Austria's Germans would provide a bridge between the German core territories and the South-East European peoples. The year of 1849 became a turning point in the future of the Central European nations. After the unsuccessful end of the Spring of Nations, in the groups of disenfranchised and stateless groups of immigrants, a new idealistic utopia of the Danube confederation was being planned simultaneously with the idea of the federalist transformation of Central Europe, initiated by Adam Czartoryski in exile (Trencsényi 2016).

While the German Mitteleuropa concept in the mid-1800s was more identified in pure geopolitical, economic and military terms, Bismarck's vision two decades later focused on the new European balance of power focusing on Mitteleuropa from the scope of Prussia. He described a Mitteleuropa based on the reconciliation between Prussia and Austria and having it stretch from the North Sea and the Baltic to the Adriatic and Black Sea under German hegemony. With his dismissal, his limited ambitions on a limited Central Europe changed into a colonial and imperial vision of Mitteleuropa based on economic cooperation but already with German dominance. A strong Mitteleuropa under German hegemony, as Strach mentions, was perceived as a precondition for overseas colonial expansion. Although German overseas expansion created tensions with France and Britain, the continental expansion created tensions with Russia.

The idea of *Middle Europe* was also strongly connected with the post-Napoleonic French initiatives regarding control over the narrow belt between imperial Russia (later the Soviet Union) and the increasing unified German state referring to the 'Eastern Question', the declining Habsburg Monarchy and the more and more determining national question. The concept itself was however supported by the Austrian government, too. Metternich was the first Austrian politician who used the word Mitteleuropa. This construction focused on the role of the Habsburg Empire and described a more geographical than political unity.

The so-called Mitteleuropa concept received an extra impulse in the first years of the First World War when Friedrich Naumann composed his vision and the role of German participation in this construction. The German-led Mitteleuropa concept was popular until the Axis powers were in a winning position. Their defeat and the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy into successor nation states, however, redefined this concept. The Mitteleuropa vision counted on economic

integration between Austria and Germany that naturally put Hungary into a subordinated position. Although Naumann emphasised a more economic cooperation that could surely lead to a stronger political cooperation, the Hungarian government of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was as pessimistic in 1918 regarding the Hungarian (and Austrian) position in such a construction as the Hungarian media.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: Dimensions of Mitteleuropa**

	Dimension	Forms of integration
1.	Economic	List: Zollverein
		Naumann: Mitteleuropa's Plan
2.	Political	Common interest, empire building strategy: against France in the West, against Russia in the East
3.	Geopolitical	Germany's 'middle' position, double edges, Ostpolitik, or neighbourhood policy

Source: author

After losing the war and the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, these German claims obviously had to be reduced and the structure of the new independent small states got a new name, *Zwischeneuropa* (Miletics – Pál 1998). This concept was the extension of Haushofer's theory regarding *Mitteleuropa*. He described this region, the chain of the states of the Little Entente, as the buffer zone created by France, emphasising the French claims towards control over this region. With the collapse of the two empires, these successor nation states composed a power vacuum being located between two dubious great powers Germany was far weaker than before entering the war, while the Eastern neighbour had to struggle with the construction works of a new empire, called the Soviet Union. The new successor states also found themselves in an ambiguous position (Hamerli 2018). The Hungarian views from the interwar period, however, emphasised more the federalist views with the exclusion of the Germans and

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://www.eleveltar.hu/kereso-portlet/displayimagepopup?type=file&id=f0daabb3-a714-4f08-bb4f-58b48b4a6904> (10 December 2019) and Lengyel, Géza: *Mitteleuropa*, In: Nyugat, 1916. 8.



neglecting German efforts. According to the Hungarian vision, the Danube basin served as the core of the reorganisation of a fragmented Central Europe. Several concepts crystallised, from the federative concept to the revisionist solution. Oszkár Jászi, already in exile, expressed the necessity of peaceful federative cooperation between the new small successor states, while József Csetényi underlined the importance of revisionism as a natural and necessary consequence of the decision that disintegrated the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2: Definition of Central Europe**

<b>Topographical position</b>	Hard to find the frames, frequently changeable
<b>Physical</b>	A region that is based on one or more criteria or doubts
<b>Historical or political concept</b>	Mainly German, or German speaking culture, Germany Plus, Ostsiedlung
<b>Geographical region</b>	Equipped with physical and human elements

Source: author

Discourse on Central Europe usually focused on various elements, for example, the geopolitical perspective Central Europe served as a buffer zone between great powers which was characterised by the presence of small states, instead of great power status in the interwar period. This status limited the opportunity to get involved with the experience of independent states as this region served several times as a playground for the two neighbouring great powers: Germany and the Soviet Union. The Second World War resulted in the reshaping of the states of the European continent and so the integration process became more emphasised. In Western Europe, as a sign of losing the colonies, the process of integration became appreciated, while in the East, the influence of the Communist Soviet Union almost entirely covered the instable group of independent successor states from the interwar period (Snyder 2019).

9 We want to recreate such a Hungary that is not any more a toy of any great power, that can declare about its aims by itself; a Hungarian state that has great importance in the reorganisation of the Danube valley, a concept which is acclaimed by the world and to which the aims of Transylvania, Croatia and Upper Hungary (the territory of Slovakia) can also be included, first of all because their aims are similar. Available at: [http://mtdportal.extra.hu/books/csetenyi\\_jozsef\\_revizio.pdf](http://mtdportal.extra.hu/books/csetenyi_jozsef_revizio.pdf) (10 December 2019).



Central Europe is usually defined as a zone or 'cleavage' between the East and the West, or it can also be understood as a conflict zone that was affected by two tendencies in its historical past; the idea of unity that implies a homogeneous region and resistance to these efforts and the struggle for autonomy of the people living in Central Europe (Denni 2009). Thus, it appears its in-between position gives the opportunity to adopt Western values while keeping Eastern traditions at the same time. One can doubt if this position is treated as an advantage or as a position that hampers orientation towards the West.

This Central European region can also be identified as a melting pot of several ethnic groups and religions which lived among peaceful conditions, despite the fact that, from time to time, different attacks reached the region from different directions. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, stopped the peaceful coexistence of different groups as nationalistic ambitions determined the future of the local population. The late 19th Century was the era of the linguistic nationalism that was widespread in the three historical states; in the Polish, Czech and Hungarian communities. Each nation was in a discrepant position not having independence and being part of multi-ethnic empires (Bibó 1986). According to Bibó, the roots of nation states appeared much earlier than the first steps of the modern state. One of these features is the use of language, or at least its own dialect. Monolingualism, as Bibó remarks, was a natural consequence of the political, cultural or religious hegemony of the predominance of stronger monarchies. Obviously, several European language borders preserve the memory of the late political borders.<sup>10</sup>

The First World War made this situation even more complicated as in these confusing times, different nations wanted to reach a new step in their demands: an independent nation state. The reign of linguistic nationalism finally led to the plasticity of the borders in the Central European region. In Western and Northern European cases, historical status quo assisted in the maintaining of the importance in nation building and the old borders in Central Europe either became lost (in the Balkans) or weakened and led to the desperate disputes about new borders. The final decisions were finally made violently by great powers, however, until the final decision/fatal events happened everywhere. Speaking about another critical zone, Appelbaum remarks that these national demands could develop into armed conflicts quite easily (Appelbaum 2016).

## Central Europe – an experiment

Central Europe can also be explained as an experimental region of the ambiguous approach towards modernity. One of the most visible differences between

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<sup>10</sup> Bibó, István: Az európai egyensúlyról és a békéről, In: Bibó, István: Válogatott tanulmányok 1935-1944 I/ pp. 318–319

the Eastern and Western European approach can be observed in the direction of social integration. This division can also be explained as a consequence of the belated embourgeoisement (Hanák 2018). Hanák points out that this missing social class was replaced by the nobility instead of the French traditions sodden by the principles of the Enlightenment; romantic German visions became well accepted. That corresponds with Rupnik's statement, who emphasises that the nations of Central Europe "were built on the ruins of multi-national empires (Habsburg, Ottoman, Russian); they began as nation-states that were nothing of the kind".

Hanák calls it the position of a ferry adopting the phenomenon from the famous Hungarian poet and representative of the Hungarian political journalist, Endre Ady. Returning back from Paris and getting influenced by Western political ideology, Ady, in his work, compared Hungary to the ferry that was lurching between the two banks of the river and which was not able to calm down. The metaphor about Hungary as the ferryboat between the East and West, however, became a determining element of Hungarian political culture.<sup>11</sup> It can refer to instability towards modernism that can develop into a general social crisis in Central Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The region, that is not defined entirely, can also be referred to as an experiment that belongs to an imagined reality. T.G. Ash also argues that, unlike North America, Central Europe is not a geographical unit but rather a spiritual or mental entity. Central Europe exists in an imagined construction, a mental approach in order to distinguish people from this region from the Orthodoxian, less developed, Eastern neighbour. It connotes perspectives with a desire to construct, to approach something. It can be a cultural community or a pure desire for economic cooperation that can lead to economic, or in the future, political integration.

Central Europe as an uncertain entity has got different descriptions. One of the bizarre names was the "invisible snail shell."<sup>13</sup> With this remark, Szilágyi-Gál emphasises the experience that, since 1989, through the process of European integration, the opening of the borders, the free movement of the population, as well as the free flow of information, old experiences and perception

11 „Kompország, Kompország, Kompország: legképebbesébb álmaiban is csak mászkált két part között: Kelettől Nyugatig, de szívesebben vissza.” (Ady) The metaphor of "ferry country" (found in the first part of 'Ismeretlen Korvin-kódex margójára') not only presents a choice between the 'barbarian' East and the 'civilised' West, Asia or Europe, it is also a rewriting of the East/West opposition (a central topic of the area's intellectual history) and the Hungarian national character from a more provocative and tragic standpoint. <http://hungarologia.net/wp-content/uploads/Teslar-Akos-rezume-hu.pdf>

12 However, this approach was extended with a new narrative from the Hungarian politicians. Being the part of Central Europe Hungary was mentioned as a defence and civilisation metaphor in Hungarian and European public discourse (Gled – Pap 2016).

13 Szilágyi-Gál, Mihály: A fal közöttünk In: Közép Európa, felejtjük el? Available at: <http://ketezer.hu/2015/02/kozep-europa-felejtjuk-el-3/> (10 December 2019).

remained recognisable, in particular, in the case of cultural and livelihood obstacles, namely the financial gap between the East and West. There are other perceptions that focused on the question of Central Europe as a “sign of revolt against the decision of great powers, the revolt against the Yalta system”. However, this revolt was focusing simultaneously on the relationship with the West and the special ties with history.<sup>14</sup> The relation to Central Europe can be different from the point of view of the investigators. The Serbian standpoint, for instance, was rather controversial towards the division of Europe and the territorial frames of Yugoslavia. From the Serbian point of view, Central Europe was identified with regional imperialism conducted by Croatia and Slovenia.<sup>15</sup> The idea for Central Europe from the Serbian perspective was usually a debate on inclusion and exclusion. It was also pervaded with the idea of superiority in civilisation and attempts for internal colonialisation. That process was in accordance with the metaphor of the Balkans that, in the historical past and in most recent years, it was equivalent with backwardness. As the Balkans meant something underdeveloped, of second-class quality, nobody wanted to belong to them. Eastern Europe was also such a phrase that was better to avoid mentioning. The definition of Central Europe was also uncertain as the phrase Eastern Europe also had some kind of negative connotation. That corresponds with Romsics’s argumentation that quotes the Hungarian ambassador in the 1930s in Berlin, Döme Sztójay, who became the Hungarian Prime Minister in 1944. Participating in a meeting with German partners, he exclaimed, arguing that identifying Hungary with the Balkans could be defined as hurtful to Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Maybe that was the reason why the US administration ordered, in the 1990s, in the case of those states that were already in negotiation of the Euro-Atlantic integration, to be referred to as Central Europe in order not to hurt them by defining them as parts of Eastern Europe.

Common cultural values such as the appearance of different styles in architecture and in the arts also serve as reference points. Hanák found the Baroque style as an organising power and a connecting element that was present in music, opera, ballet, palaces and the comprehensive modern urban landscape from Munich to Salzburg and from Prague to the smallest Hungarian villages.

14 Horváth, Sándor: Kell nekünk Közép-Európa (is) Available at: <http://ketezer.hu/2015/02/kozep-europa-felejsuk-el-3/> (10 December 2019).

15 Losonc, Alpár: Velük elkezdődhetne In: Közép-Európa – felejsük el? Available at: <http://ketezer.hu/2015/02/kozep-europa-felejsuk-el-5/> (10 December 2019).

16 Ne beszéljenek Magyarországról mindig úgy, mintha az a délkelet-európai térséghez vagy Délkelet-Európához tartozna. Magyarország nem számítja magát a Balkán-népekhez, és sértésnek érzi, hogy mindig egy kalap alá számítják. (Don’t speak about Hungary as being part of the Southeastern region, or South-eastern Europe. Hungary does not treat itself as part of the Balkan region and takes it as hurtful being evaluated as equal to them.) In: Romsics, Ignác: Közép- és/vagy Kelet-Európa – egy definíciós vita és ami mögötte van, In: *Korunk História*, 2016/7 Available at: [http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00549/pdf/EPA00458\\_korunk\\_2016\\_07\\_074-089.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00549/pdf/EPA00458_korunk_2016_07_074-089.pdf) (10 December 2019).

This Central European universalism got its first push in the early 19th Century with the influence of nationalism. Although the Habsburg Monarchy could be defined as an outstanding example of multiculturalism, the heterogeneity of different languages and religions, with the German language as the main element of cohesion and the influence of the Jewish population as one of the most 'cosmopolitan' groups. The strolling players, musicians and painters and the Jewish population were more mobile in contrast with the rural population before the capitalist era. While on one hand, the cultural and territorial self-awareness became the ruling ideology, in the royal court, ever newer plans started to focus on the accentuation of the plurality of the region (Hanák 2018).

A similar standpoint appears with Czesław Miłosz. For the Lithuanian-born Pole, Central Europe encompassed a whole swathe of territory that ran from 'Baroque Vilnius' in the north to 'medieval Renaissance Dubrovnik' in the south, encompassing pretty much everything that lay to the east of Germany but which was predominantly Catholic and Jewish in heritage.<sup>17</sup> The most spectacular elements of this heritage can be observed through loanwords and the family names which demonstrate a long-lasting community from the historical past.

Multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity were interrupted by the decisions of the new territorial structure of the region. Paradoxically, despite the almost one-hundred-year distance since the collapse of the great empires and the birth of the successor states, these signs of multicultural structure and heterogeneity are still visible, in particular, at the two parts of the state borders. The Habsburg Monarchy itself was a total contradiction of values. On one hand, there existed an old-fashioned bureaucratic, centralised governance which stood on one side and a more liberal, economic policy with a freedom for the flow of ideas, persons and goods on the other, together with an idealistic common currency, a lack of censorship and the natural multilingual atmosphere among the urban population. In his essay, *The Deformation of Political Culture in Central and Eastern Europe*, Bibó remarks, "as a result, the ending of the social role of a unified European aristocracy elicited a much greater shock in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West, where a developed social structure no longer or less typically based on birth privileges was by that time ready to take over the aristocracy's role... All the threads point towards some kind of political hysteria and in dismissing political hysterics, the first task is to disclose the historical shocks disturbing the development and balance of these countries. We should be suspicious of two things: the premature, explosion-like character of their democracy and the resulting difficulties in the formation of national frameworks" (Bibó 1986). As he further remarks, "the ultimate tipping of the inner political balance was, however, due to the painful and difficult process of nation formation." He further added that "the nations living here lacked

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17 Available at: <https://www.eurozine.com/growing-up-in-kunderas-central-europe/> (10 December 2019).

what the Western European nations possessed in a self-evident and tangible way, both in reality and in the communal consciousness: the actual existence of their own state and national framework, a capital, the harmonious functioning of politics and economy, a unified social elite, etc.” A lack of democratic values and the uncertainty of their material status also led to an instability of political culture and a controversial approach towards democracy. As Bibó underlines, the approach to democracy was also a weak point in this region. Democracy was a gift that was probably spread too early as social transformation was still in a more backward, unstable position. Adapting democratic values was not the result of internal social development and as it was recognisable in various parts of Central Europe, nationalism won over democracy. Bibó linked together the acceptance of democratic values and the fear of uncertainty. The lack of stability, the reality of the frames of own nationality, the missing state, capital city, well-functioning economic and social communities, steady elite – these factors all assisted in the raising of the Western countries.

The 19th Century and the idea of nation states determined and predetermined the ethnic conflicts in the future. It was the general aim of the nationalist parties and philosophers to accept the ‘one culture – one nation – one state’ theory, which was later modified in practice with the reconstruction of the new borders and nation states of Central Europe after the First World War. The new successor states assisted in destroying Central Europe by the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 that – according to Hanák – was still by far the most stable construction in the region. In 1918, all dynastic constructions collapsed in Central Europe and the partition of the Habsburg Monarchy was the most convenient scenario. The idea of emphasising the language borders and the possibility of self-determination was an adequate solution. The catastrophe and the roots of further conflicts, as Bibó remarks, are based on the inadequate implementation of the ideas by refusing ethnic unifications and neglecting historical claims towards given territories. On the other hand, geographical, economic, strategic and infrastructural claims were taken into account that sometimes overwrote the natural claims of the local population; the newly created borders sometimes managed to recall further debates, in particular if a given ethnic group became cut off from the historical hinterland by becoming part of such a state or community with which they had no or limited connection in the historical past, or any cultural ties. These debates are sometimes influenced by the fear and uncertainty of their citizens and the statistical data on ethnic composition served several times as a reference point in order to strengthen their claims.<sup>18</sup>

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18 The entire Hungarian foreign policy was determined by irredentism. The German assistance in territorial claims was a good excuse of the support of the Nazi Germany. Within the territorial extension with the German and Italian diplomacy in the late 1930s early 1940s Hungary managed to get back the majority

## The Rebirth of the Central European Concept

The Central European vision remained an idea after 1945. It was in a dead stage until the 1980s. As the whole Central and Eastern European region belonged to the sphere of interest of the Soviet Union, it was hardly possible to discuss any kind of cultural, ethnic or even religious gaps. The deepening process of integration in the West and the birth of the opposition movements in the Soviet Bloc assisted in the popularity of ideas about integration. The years between 1984 and 1989 were the peak of discourses on Central Europe. There was a common agreement that Central Europe coincides in the content of the works dealing with the region, namely that the society of Central Europe is closer to the West in culture but closer to the East in political culture and system and obviously, they are also different from the Russians. This new wave of debate was based basically on two texts: Milan Kundera's *"The Tragedy of Central Europe"*, from 1983, and Konrád György's text *"The Dream of Central Europe"*, published in 1984.<sup>19</sup> There existed, however, a third one. Jenő Szűcs, a Hungarian historian, breaking with the previous, more Soviet-friendly or Marxist ideology-friendly Hungarian standpoint, introduced a triple-divided concept with Central Europe as a hybrid region (Romsics 2016). Analysing Central Europe as a separate entity questioned the legacy of the bipolar division of Europe.<sup>20</sup> Szűcs developed an extended model to reflect internal cleavages within the European continent, arguing that the gap between the more developed West and the (eastern) periphery could be explained by several historical and economic factors (Schmidt 2016). The novelty of Szűcs's theory, based on the fact that he distinguished a separate region between East and West while discrediting the previously existing Western standpoints regarding how everything lays beyond Leitha, or Austria, is identical with the East but it was also a critical argument against the Soviet Union with the statement that there is a separate 'middle' region. Working in Budapest and writing in Hungarian, Szűcs's theory never achieved such a great influence in the Western world as Konrád's or Kundera's works, as they both published their essays abroad, but his essay did provoke a general debate in Hungary in the 1980s. What Konrád emphasised in his later published works

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of those lands that were within the ethnic, language borders however at the end of the Second World War there was no supporter of the Hungarian claims.

19 The original version was read by Konrád as an essay that was his acceptance speech he told in 1984 after receiving Herder prize at the ceremony in Vienna in the Schwarzenberg Palace.

20 In the 1960s and 1970s, Halecki's division of Europe he worked out in exile was accepted with much controversy among Hungarian historians. Speaking or writing about triple division with a separate Central European region that was distinct from the Soviet Union expressed a denial of a homogeneous Socialist bloc. The acceptance of this structure was ambiguous, even from the US audience. In Hungary, it was treated as a harmful influence of the Western emigrant (and definitely suspicious), or at least a subversive view.



on Central Europe was the importance of the Central part as “the way from West to East leads via Central Europe.

As Kaczorowski remarks (Kaczorowski 2017), Kundera managed to ensure at the same time several independent Central European circles, both in exile and in their home country. The reasons and the influence of these debates led to various consequences. Central Europe as a phenomenon was also functioning as a tool for the opposition groups of the socialist bloc states to separate themselves from the values of the Soviet Union by demonstrating the otherness and the acceptance of Western principles, as was recognisable in the early 1990s. Among the consequences of the revolutions of Europe in 1989 was a profound reordering of the spatial imaginary of Europe. The collapse of both the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc called for the creation of new geographical stories and new spatial representation that could capture and codify the cartographic chaos of the former Eastern European space (Bialasiewicz 2003). As Ash points out, in the first half of the twentieth century, the debate about who did or did not belong to Central Europe had real political significance, much like it does today. Being ‘Central European’ in contemporary political usage means to be civilised, democratic, cooperative – and therefore to have a better chance of joining NATO and the EU. In fact, the argument threatens to become circular: NATO and the EU welcome ‘Central Europeans’ so ‘Central Europeans’ are those welcomed by NATO and the EU.

Central Europe was a historical and geopolitical challenge whether these states were capable of being ready to establish their regional cooperation models such as the Visegrad group or the Central European Initiative (previously *Pentagonale* and with the inclusion of Poland in 1991, the *Hexagonale*), pointing to the practice that, from the late 1980s early 1990s, Central Europe was also understood as a geopolitical concept determined for cooperation with neighbouring countries representing a political and economic vacuum by not belonging to the Soviet bloc anymore and still waiting for an invitation to the European Community. This unrepeatable moment was a challenge for the region; they had to make a great effort to break up with deep-seated norms and habits and focus on peaceful and effective cooperation. Although the followers of the idea of regional integration were satisfied with any attempt of contribution among the post-Soviet bloc member states, each type of contribution could stagnate at a certain point. The Visegrad Group could serve as good practice for Central Europe, however, as he remarks, it is a challenging issue on how to find common interests between a Poland that is preparing for the position of the ‘regional leader’, while for Hungary, the frames of orientation are still the no longer existing boundaries of the Carpathian basin and it is still fighting for its position from a separated perspective, while Austria transformed into a ‘German suburb. The position of the Central European region is rather ambiguous regarding the question of common interest. Regarding the pieces of

the great Central European as an entity instead of a convergence, a moderate but intensifying disintegration and uncertainty is visible. As is proven from time to time, post-Communist countries competing with each other are moving apart from the desired and emphasised Western values, demonstrating a kind of common relation with the values engaged with the South European region. Poland, as Neumann also remarks, is building a “Nordic secondary power”, while “almost Austrian” Slovenia, the “best pupil” from this polychrome class, is in crisis, Hungary is fighting for its position against the West and opening its doors to the East; Germany and Austria are not really willing to share a common interest with this region and Russia from the East is getting more and more involved with it.<sup>21</sup>

As in the 1990s, Central Europe could be understood as a sign of demonstration; nowadays, it can be called more like a ‘lab for paradigm’, where such processes took part in the past that got global importance for the present – among others, the treatment of differences, otherness and strangeness.<sup>22</sup>

The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War revoke the old discussion about the symbolic geography of the Central European region. The reality of the Iron Curtain legitimised the East-West division of Europe by creating a political, cultural and even civilisation cleavage structure of the continent by creating two blocks: the more developed Western and the Soviet-orientated Eastern bloc. The questionable point was the location of the divided two Germanys which, according to the classical, historical division, for several centuries was considered part of Mitteleuropa, while within this division and under the influence of Western powers, West Germany underwent a rapid Westernisation while the East German state remained a stable part of the Soviet Bloc, together with the remaining Central European states – except Austria (Majoros 2009). This concept survived the two World Wars and the main ideologist of this ideology was Kundera and his famous work, “The Tragedy of Central Europe”.<sup>23</sup> “As a result, three fundamental situations developed in Europe after the war: that of Western Europe, that of Eastern Europe and, most complicated of all, that of the part of Europe situated geographically in the centre-culturally in the West.”<sup>24</sup>

21 Neumann, Ivor: Available at: <http://ketezer.hu/2015/02/kozep-europa-felejsuk-el-3/> (10 December 2019).

22 Csaky: Op.cit.

23 In fact, what does Europe mean to a Hungarian, a Czech, a Pole? For a thousand years, their nations have belonged to the part of Europe rooted in Roman Christianity. They have participated in every period of its history. For them, the word “Europe” does not represent a phenomenon of geography but a spiritual notion synonymous with the word “West.” The moment Hungary is no longer European – that is, no longer Western – it is driven from its own destiny, beyond its own history: it loses the essence of its identity. “Geographic Europe” (extending from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains) was always divided into two halves which evolved separately: one tied to ancient Rome and the Catholic Church, the other anchored in Byzantium and the Orthodox Church.

24 Kundera: The Tragedy of Central Europe Available at: [http://www.kx.hu/kepek/ises/anyagok/Kundera\\_tragedy\\_of\\_Central\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.kx.hu/kepek/ises/anyagok/Kundera_tragedy_of_Central_Europe.pdf) (10 December 2019).



Not only did it argue that Central Europe constituted a “kidnapped West” abducted by an alien, Byzantine-Bolshevik civilisation but it also claimed that the rest of the continent was in too deep a state of decadence to be fully aware of what it had lost. Kundera believed that Central European nations had reportedly tried to join Europe; they even managed to harbour vestiges of European culture under the oppression of Soviets while in the West, so Europe changed dramatically. As she points out, when dissidents and émigrés entered the West, they were already disappointed that the “Europe itself... was no longer experienced as a value.”<sup>25</sup>

That remark corresponds with Lengyel’s opinion arguing that this general crisis of European values is embedded in the consequences of the two world wars. Facing the historical past immediately requires the problems of the actions the given states did or did not do in the past centuries or decades while it is one of the values in accordance with the problem of sovereignty. The predominance of historical past, the reference points chosen by, in particular, the populist or nationalist politicians can even hamper necessary cooperation (Lengyel 2016). While Kundera believes in Central Europe, the heir of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, that is a territory of small nations pained by a profound feeling of uncertainty over their existence, they may disappear any time just like Poland and Czechoslovakia did repeatedly, or their borders and population may vary – as was the case of Hungary.<sup>26</sup> This argument corresponds with the phenomenon because of what Hungarian politicians and historians are reportedly criticised for. The reference point for Hungarians regarding the perspectives of Central Europe in the future is still a nostalgia towards the Habsburg Monarchy and with the borders of historical Hungary. The misunderstanding of the problems of the Central European region from the Western perspective can be explained because of a lack of information about the geopolitical and historical facts of this region and because of the fact that the subordinated position of this region did not give the possibility of distinct states to be more or less adaptive towards the policy of the Soviet Union. The entire region was subjugated by Moscow and the only difference was the ability of integrating them according to the principles of Eastness.

## **The raison d’être of Central Europe**

Thirty years on, most of the countries in Kundera’s Central Europe have been integrated into the European Union and NATO and the very term “Central Europe” is no longer necessary, neither as an anti-Soviet rallying cry nor

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25 Kepplová, Zuzana: Could the Real Tragedy of Central Europe Please Stand up? Available at: <https://visegradinsight.eu/recycled-rhetoric/> (10 December 2019).

26 Keppova, Op.cit.

a badge of cultural belonging. However, the cultural concerns addressed by Kundera have not necessarily gone away simply because the context has changed. Europe is still sandwiched between two superpowers with differing worldviews, and small nations can still be the bearers of important truths.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1990s, two tendencies developed: the slower than expected wave of integration and the renaissance of the nation states. The latter was common, in particular in the Eastern region. As a result of transition, the post-socialist world experienced the rebirth of nation-states on the map of Europe on one side and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia on the other. The project carried out in Europe by what we call the European Union, with its centre located in Brussels, gives an identity with which we can find ourselves – an identity we can assume (Maci 2011)? The problems of the East-West dimension could be embraced in the discussion about EU membership, or EU scepticism. In the shadow of the referendum on Brexit, Scruton's critical argument regarding the dilemma between stronger nation states or deeper integration is still a current issue. As he says, the EU tries to demolish the territorial legal authorities such as national faith, all the elements that have been the bases of European legitimacy since the era of enlightenment (Scruton 2005).

EU membership can thus be characterised as a final proof that the transformation is over; however, it resulted in new problems that ask for solutions. Among others, the following issues can be mentioned: dangerous nationalism, xenophobia, 'delocalisation', the problem of immigration and competition for cheap labour, 'social dumping', etc. (Schmidt 2010).

Looking at the position of Central Europe in the 20th century, these changing waves of the influence of the great powers can be recognised from the years of the First World War. During the war, the region was standing in the focus of Germany, while in the interwar period, Germany was replaced by France, whereas from the 1930s, German interest also intensified. The years between 1945 and 1947 can be characterised as an uncertain attempt from the great powers towards the region but this action was interrupted by the Soviet Union based on the decision accepted in Yalta and Potsdam. Right before the transformation, the French enquiry intensified in accordance with increasing German attempts. These countries are, economically and politically, the most closely tied to Germany, which was the main driver for their integration into the EU.

According to his standpoint, interest towards the Central European region becomes more visible in cases where any ambitious state from the region attempts to take on the role of actor responsible for the region, whereas if any great power tries to rule the region, it usually manages to maintain in-

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27 Available at: <https://www.eurozine.com/growing-up-in-kunderas-central-europe/> (10 December 2019).

terest towards cohesion. That was visible in the functioning of the Habsburg Monarchy, in the German orientation in the interwar period and the position of the Soviet Union after 1945. But what happens if a great power loses its strength? Well, according to Majoros, then comes the time for nostalgia, the discussion about orientation and Westernisation, as happened last time during Gorbachev's regime.

The biggest problem according to Majoros is based on the contradiction between expectation and reality. He quotes György Schöpflin, member of the European Parliament and the Hungarian-born-English political scientist, who stated that at the European integration in 2004, the Central European states joined an imagined Europe and the core of the disappointment, the negative experience, the frustration, is all based on this contradiction.

## Conclusion

The idea of Central Europe assumes some common approach to the past; common cultural values and experience that is in contradiction with the problems of its multi-ethnic structure. Although the turn of the 1980s and 1990s was overwhelmed with nostalgia which was reinforced by the support of trans-Atlantic orientation and the core of the Central European region justified their Western orientation with NATO and the European Union's membership, after the first years of euphoria, more detailed, even critical arguments were composed in connection with the rationality of the Central Europe concept.

"The U.S. State Department decided that Eastern Europe no longer exists. Its embassies worldwide are being instructed »that the words Eastern Europe will be banished from the lexicon« of the agency, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke told Congress. He said the region will be referred to as Central Europe, as it was before 1939. Despite Europe's politically directional designations after World War II, he said, »the people of the region themselves do not consider themselves Eastern Europeans«."<sup>28</sup>

Looking back over the centuries, Central and Eastern Europe was always a playground for the great powers and the survival of these states was strongly influenced by their ability to cooperate. The euphoria of sovereignty and independence has sometimes hampered and continues to obstruct acceptance of the EU's operating institutional framework; instead of conforming, these states have shown a tendency to propose new norms that may inevitably shock older member states and their diplomats. (Schmidt 2016) As there was a general preconception that there existed the East, the West and a region between East and West which politically showed more common elements with the East

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28 Romiscs, Available at: [http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00549/pdf/EPA00458\\_korunk\\_2016\\_07\\_074-089.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00549/pdf/EPA00458_korunk_2016_07_074-089.pdf) (10 December 2019).

but which was part of the Western culture, nowadays, after Euro-Atlantic integration, demonstrates just the opposite. Politically, they are still members of the European Union, however, they are demonstrating many more common values with the East. Speaking about the actual problems of the East-West division nowadays, the Central European issue appears as a crucial problem in the European Union. As Pacella remarks, the most questionable issue is not about heritage or identity but the problems of democracy.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas western Europe witnessed a liberal model of multi-ethnic societies being established over nearly half a century, with some variants, eastern Europe experienced closed societies prior to 1989 and has not experienced migrations from the South since, at least not up until now. These nations had been colonised and did not share the West's postcolonial complex. And, most importantly, there is a very widespread perception in the east of Europe that the western multicultural model is now an abhorrent failure.

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<sup>29</sup> This time, it is nothing to do with heritages, history or common culture. It is only about how the states of Central Europe face current problems and issues... If, before, the cause of increasing Europe's East-West divide was a need to achieve Western democracy, today, it is a lack of democratic values which divides the West from the East.

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**Andrea Schmidt**, PhD is a political scientist and an Associate Professor at the University of Pecs, Hungary, Department of Political Sciences, and International Studies and former Visiting Lecturer and the Josai Institute for Central European Studies Josai International University, Tokyo, Japan, and Visiting Lecturer at Ivan Franko National University in L'viv, Ukraine. She studied at the University of Pecs, the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest and at the Central European University where she participated at Modern History programme focusing on Central and Eastern Europe. She also studied at the Jagiellonian University at the Faculty of History and at the Polonia Research Institute in Cracow, Poland. She specializes in International Political Economy and Comparative Political Studies of the Central and Eastern European region. She did her habilitation on International Relations focusing on Geo-economics. She is the author of several articles and book chapters related to Central and Eastern European and post-Soviet region.

# The Populist phenomena and the reasons for their success in Hungary<sup>1</sup>

VIKTOR GLIED



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**Abstract:** *After the parliamentary elections in 2014, the weakened legitimacy of the Hungarian government could be re-established through activism in migration issues. Fidesz-KDNP that won elections twice already highlighted migration as the main theme of governance from 2014 to 2018, suppressing every other topic on the political agenda. The position that was established for purposes of the Hungarian domestic situation and politics initially faced intense rejections all over Europe, but then garnered some supporters as well, mostly in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, and to a smaller extent among the right-wing and populist parties of Western Europe. The anti-refugee and populist approach caused significant success in the communication field to the subscribing parties and governments, and also legitimised Hungarian government's efforts that could mean it met the majority of the Hungarian society's expectations. The most essential question is that how can political science reshape its terms and thoughts on populism to understand this phenomenon better, moreover what are the reasons of populism and why is the populist propaganda such successful in Hungary and Eastern Europe.*

**Keywords:** *Hungary, populism, history, migration, manipulation*

## Introduction

The long-lasting economic recession following the global financial crisis of 2008; the 'revival' of Russia's claims to being a global power; the so-called "soft

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power” applied to enforce economic and political intervention; the EU’s answer to the Greek crisis; Brexit and the migration crisis after 2015 have all shaken up Central-European party systems, as well as the political/ideological directions they take. Europe can hardly recover from the shock of a crisis before it is hit by the next one and meanwhile, it continues to gradually lose its global significance, as well as its economic and political influence. The crisis phenomena piling up and increasing each other’s impact has led to a vicious circle of political responses failing to solve problems and identify the root causes thereof, promising short-term, cursory, although efficient, treatment. Instead of providing valid explanations for the crises, they curtail, distort reality and show an assumed or false image thereof. Because of the aforementioned complex factors, a general right-wing turn, the shift of the mid-left and mid-right political sides, as well as the rise of an anti-elitist, anti-establishment and populist paradigm can be observed. The governing parties of Central and Eastern Europe (also including Austria and the Czech Republic), as well as Southeast Europe and/or the parties which seized power as a consequence of all this, have all successfully jumped on the Eurosceptic and anti-immigration bandwagon shouting populist slogans. At the same time, radical parties have gained ground in almost every European country, with the Donald Trump phenomenon also bringing along an entirely new era in the US, as Evo Morales and others in Latin-America (Deák 2019: 56).

Almost three decades after the transition to the market economy and the democratic multi-party system, the Hungarian public dominantly feels indifference, disillusionment and the necessity of heated and radical reforms. With the catastrophic defeat of left-leaning liberal parties in 2010, the governing Fidesz-KDNP (Alliance of the Young Democrats and the Christian Democratic People’s Party) have triumphed at parliamentary elections three times. This period can be divided into two major parts: (1) The period from the 2009 European Parliamentary election to late 2014, and (2) the period dominated by the migration crisis and a new public discourse from 2015 to 2018. This paper examines the reasons of populism and the reasons for the success of populist propaganda in Hungary and Eastern Europe.

## **The ‘reinterpretation’ of populism**

Populism has become one of the most common and trending terms of political science in the 21st Century. It is starting to become the new ‘climate change’ in the sense that it can be applied to everything; it can be blamed for any unfavourable occurrence and can be used to explain anything. Tax cuts? Attending sport events? A meal eaten in public? A First Lady in fashionable garments? Openly inciting hate? Are these all for nothing but pure populism and is this necessarily something evil in all cases? Many complicated questions make it clear why the definition of populism is not easy to give. Of course, we know



and recognise the phenomenon, talk about it and describe it in detail but the concepts are so complex, diverse, abstract and take elements from all aspects of social sciences. Although it has some specific characteristics and identifiable common features, its nature is ever-changing (Van Reybrouck 2010), both in time and space. Permissively, populism can be called an ideology-free ideology, with the single component of representing the will of the people (considered to be homogeneous), in both the positive and negative sense. Thus, it can be left-wing or right-wing as well, since both sides can claim to be “standing by the people, against the (former) elites”. Gábor Győri agrees with this in his expressing the following definition (after examining the phenomenon from multiple aspects): *“the concept of populism covers tools and means based on popular fears [...] and suggests a true representation of the people [...] emphatically against the political elit.”* (Győri 2008: 16). With a slightly sceptical approach, it can be called a paradigm generated, supported and reinforced by populist politics, overwhelming the political agenda and thus also the discourse but it can also be considered a creatively Machiavellian set of objectives which seem like a political programme but only serve mechanisms of power technique (Kovács 2011: 260). In a simplified manner, it can be called a political strategy narrowed down to a consequential series of tactical steps which degrade the interactions of the political community to a game of political communication and has no other purpose than creating a parallel reality as the alternative to mainstream politics which gives a voice to disillusioned, lost, offended, angry, frustrated and vengeful people (Müller 2018: 9). And frustrated, cynical people who have lost faith are open to blaming others for their fate and for how things are going. This is supported by a statement by Pope Francis from 2017 in which he blends populism with the xenophobic sentiment increasing due to the migrant crisis after 2015 and the acts of terrorism committed all over Europe: *“When I was told of populism here, I didn’t understand much of it, I was lost, until I realised that it has different meanings depending on the location. Obviously, crisis leads to fear and panic.”*<sup>2</sup> It is very likely that with the political reality of the 21st century, we have to say that populism encompasses all these but with a sharp statement, it is nothing else but a bunch of reactions to actual or putative events, articulated in a simple and instinctive way, without any actual substance, aiming to polarise the public and gain political advantage (Canovan 1999).

But why is this whole issue so complex despite just getting the clear answers? Because we do not yet know all the impacts and characteristics of this phenomenon in detail. Populist politics and the reactions thereto keep changing constantly. Our current knowledge is only enough to understand, rather than describe it. In addition to being an effective means of obtaining and keeping power, as well as

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2 Interview with Pope Francis in the Spanish daily El País. <http://www.magyarkurir.hu/hirek/ferenc-papa-interjuja-az-el-pais-spanyol-napilapnak> (25 January 2017).

a manifestation of the desire for popularity, populism may also designate a legitimacy principle in which self-justification overpowers any other pragmatic and rational action and argument, or merely provide a sympathetic alternative for a lack thereof. All this, coupled with an exclusive identity policy (the establishment and use of the groups of *Us* and *Them*) provide a complex approach to the world in which populists are the people and the nation and everyone else with different opinions is simply not part of the group, part of the corrupt political elite or (more sharply) an *alien* and a traitor (Bayer 2008: 42; Hamerli 2019). In this sense, Pierre-André Taguieff (1995) distinguishes between “identity-national” populism and protest populism. In the former case, the people’s national image “under threat by aliens” is emphasised, while in the latter case, critical and radical anti-elitist sentiment appears and sometimes these are mixed.

In case one of the characteristics of populism is exiting the framework of political correctness and using rhetoric previously only used by far-right and far-left regimes in politics, social science cannot escape from facing the challenge honestly. If we responsibly try to think outside the box of the “on the one hand... on the other hand” approach (aiming to paint a scientific picture), we are faced with the definition given by David Van Reybrouck: “*populism is a style of making politics on the one hand, when someone is not afraid of catching the attention of masses with simplifications, meaningless buzzwords and programme objectives narrowed down to single sentences*” (Van Reybrouck 2010: 13). Based on the above, populism is a rhetoric means of reaching the widest possible audience, with the simplest possible tools and communication formats. Contrary to the above approaches, Ernesto Laclau has a different (and probably obsolete) perspective to grasp the concept. In his opinion, “*populism is not a type of movement, [...] but a type of political logic*” (Laclau 2011: 138). Conflicting my view, he does not consider populism a rhetoric method but practically a kind of logic that is an unavoidable part of any social change. In my opinion, in the present, these two processes operate in a symbiotic way as two phenomena inseparable from each other. Gustave Le Bon (2002) – a source considered a classic – at the end of the 19th Century, obviously did not use the term but in his work discussing the behaviour of the masses, he emphasised that with the appropriate rhetoric, a statesman could depict the most hated measures as acceptable. This argument also supports the view that this term mostly applies to political rhetoric, which was used later, with regard to mass propaganda in the 20th Century. These are supported by the fact that populist leaders are typically charismatic leaders; personalities with identifiable traits. They apply novelty, innovative political means and campaign techniques, pursue a divisive political strategy, transform and tame the institutions, change the political system, step over conventions and also encourage their supporters to do so. Populist politicians are proactive and actively acting participants of the events. Their aim in doing so is merely to show the direction and to stay one step ahead of their foes. In many cases, they

generate the need to make decisions without a single correct answer, merely in order to show the discrepancy between ethical, or apparently national- and loyalty-related dilemmas and material financial decisions affecting everyone. The populist politician shall be the single bearer of the truth: “*One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them*”. In order to prove his own anti-elitism, he takes efforts to be in direct contact with the people. He blends with the crowd, inaugurates developments, shows human weaknesses, worries and keeps being funny (Mair 2002: 88–90).

Political science in the 21st Century faces numerous unanswered questions which have an impact on people every single day, no matter where they live. Do politics and politicians even exist without elements of populism? Successful politicians probably do not. It is assumed that someone becomes a politician because they want to fight for the common good or because they have ambition for power, or possibly they are discontent, a little exhibitionist and want to enjoy personal fulfilment through taking public political roles but a common trait each politician has is in thinking that they satisfy the will of the people. While political science relates, compares, deliberates and searches for patterns, trying to explain events of the past as reflected in the present or the future, populist politicians proclaim and claim that they speak the truth “based on the facts”. Populism cannot allow dilemmas or dissent; there are no grey areas or hesitation. Populist politicians usually see the world in black and white.

In practice, this means that they cover actual issues with a ‘larger’ challenge, ranking higher in the hierarchy of interests. This is typically an international conflict, the action of another country, people or group, their ‘attack’ or malice, or the appearance of a group different from the culture or religion of the specific community; the *alien*. We know and understand where this kind of scapegoating and scaremongering against newly created enemies has led throughout history, although these had also clearly been important factors in strengthening the identities and potential actions of the people, a community or a group, as well as in mobilising them. We also know what happened when radical, nationalist/chauvinist/racist political forces obtained power and used the entire state machinery to reach their goals. Still, from time to time, we step into the same river and watch as a ‘light-minded populist talk’ leads to hate speech and incitement. Prejudice, stigmatisation and xenophobia have accompanied our history and are still present in an increasing number of places. Who is it up to decide who is an alien and what makes them one? A different skin colour, religion, name or sexual orientation? Pronouncing someone an alien is an internal process which separates certain communities, groups, or even nations and civilisations based on cultural, religious and linguistic differences, in an inward-looking manner. While tolerance against aliens exists, the peaceful co-existence between ‘us’ and ‘them’ works but different types of crises – as history clearly shows – can bring certain forms of xenophobia to the surface, determined by the cultural

traditions and historical experiences of society and these leave a mark on the political thinking of the community. If the government pursues an efficient integration (and assimilation) policy, then possible differences can blur and then resurface and be questioned again from time to time, but a serious social crisis may be averted. In places where those in power intend to keep their position and maintain a grip on power by inciting xenophobia, along with the anger of certain social groups against each other, this can lead to serious distortions and even violence, in extreme cases (Nyíri 2003). When examining the relationship of economic crisis and scapegoating, the significance of psychological factors is highlighted because a significant proportion of a disillusioned society may be willing to receive the over-simplified messages. This encourages researchers to interpret the results of populism and xenophobia in relation to political rhetoric and psychological factors. Populism *“can impact anyone if they are afraid, angry or discontent”* (Van Reybrouck 2010: 16).

In the populist framework, emotional approaches and instinctive reactions override equity and reason in all cases. Their objective is not to uncover the truth and elements of reality but to transform, hide, bend and also change the rhetorical and ideological arena, thus creating a special context for political discourse, dominated by a single logical set of power objectives. First of all, it takes effort to dominate the political agenda and on the other hand, by using fake news, fake events, half-truth and lies, fictional stories and conspiracy theories, it aligns artificially created reality with factors triggering political action (Harari 2018: 205). This is still just self-justification, thus providing an alternative world-view which provides a simple, flexibly changeable point of alignment for a normless, indifferent society choking on unnecessary information in which human values and *people* themselves are merely reference points. In this system, causal relationships form no actual logical chain; they are degraded to become tools of political communication. But what is reality? Nowadays, anything can be questionable. Isn't this so?

We can ask the question: if we know so much about populism, how can it still be so successful as a political view? In order to answer this, we only need to understand history. In the period following the World War II, the key challenge to political science (in its own interpretation) was providing a system for politicians that is democratic, protects the rule of law and can also avoid the creation of totalitarian dictatorships. The West found consensus in pronouncing liberal democracy as the only possible way of avoiding crises and wars, at the same time also ensuring liberties and the constant growth of the economy. The student protests in 1968 which targeted a lack of facing the past and solving social injustice, as well as the post-materialist movements from the 1970s and 1980s, did not question the fundamentals of the viability of liberal democracy; they only wanted to adjust, rather than change global processes. The rapid technological changes in the 2000s, the global financial and economic crisis from 2008, the Arab Spring and the migration crisis after 2015 fundamentally

changed the existing world, creating an opportunity for populist forces to rise. Liberal democracy leaves many issues for people face-open because it cannot answer them without losing its credibility. Examples include disputes over data privacy and personal rights vs. security and controlling society; the lack of countering financial anomalies; or religious freedom vs. wearing traditional religious and political symbols. As democracy has started to weaken in the 21st Century, people have become mistrustful towards traditional political institutions, while populism can provide (albeit skin-deep) solutions to millions (Antal 2017). We have to understand that populism is not an antidemocratic phenomenon because it typically grows in the soil of democratic systems as a reaction to existing problems. It seemingly respects the democratic rules and also keeps the related institutions but at the same time, it creates a structure in which democracy and the rule of law are only a façade in front of pure political rationale.

## **Background of the rise of populism in Hungary**

In the late 20th century, democracy has also prevailed over the oppressive dictatorships (communist systems in this case) in Eastern Europe. The opportunity for democratic consolidation was open during the political and economic transition but the permanent failure of liberal democracy, surrounded by empty promises, led to the repeated and radical reappearance of populism. During a brief century, the society of Hungary has undergone eight revolutions and regime changes. Each of these have also involved an obligatory change of ideology, meaning that the reigning government tried to reshape society according to its own ideals. This could not be successful due to ever newer regime and system changes meaning deeply rooted social and political conflicts could not be resolved. Traumas of 20th Century Hungarian history hit society hard. All these were further increased by traditional grievance politics which is rooted in the 19th Century. It is known for demonising political opponents and causing political paranoia which has hindered (and still hinders today) agreeing on national minimums in certain issues (1).

The radical change of 1988–1990 in the form of the regime change brought about major shifts in the life of Hungarian society, from a Communist system rapidly into fully-fledged capitalism and a market economy. From one day to the next, one and a half million people experienced the end of ‘full employment’ and lost their jobs, while income inequality increased, suddenly the value of the income of lower and middle classes shrank. Uncertainty and fear for the future, as well as extreme poverty resurfaced, thus increasing the experience of ‘being a loser’ in vast groups of society. Meanwhile, the government could only encourage people by giving them messages like, “we only have to suffer a little more” and “we will soon catch up with the Austrian standard of living”. Without long-term strategies, the governing forces rapidly changed courses multiple times,



kept spending to win over votes and then applied austerity measures to resolve budget deficit. As a result, the former leader of the class, Hungary, began to lose its competitive advantage in the 1990s and gradually started to fall behind in the areas of economic development as well as managing social injustices. The anti-communist rhetoric of the transition to democracy was later reframed into the rural-traditional vs. urban-cosmopolitan dispute, with anti-Semitic, anti-Gypsy formats and ways of conspiracy theories, as much in politics as in public discourse. The tone gradually radicalised, exceeding the threshold and tolerance of the people, giving way to the forgotten extreme ideologies. Nostalgia for the Socialist system and Kadarism<sup>3</sup>, however, is still prevalent in a significant part of Hungarian society; the terms “good leader”, “one of the people” and ‘pandering non-verbal agreement’ are known to every Hungarian (2) (Schmidt 2018: 75). As a consequence of uneven territorial opportunities, the development of urban and rural areas parted ways. The paternalistic attitude prevailed and the customs of looking for shortcuts when looking for administrative solutions became a typical means of problem-solving. A significant share of Hungarian society is still committed to believing that public procurements are decided based on the internal deals of the elite and corruption is par for the course in politics.

It is safe to say, therefore, that softer elements of the social climate favourable to extremists were already present in society after the regime change. Indeed, these changes can clearly facilitate the increasing popularity of parties communicating strong messages in which they urge radical solutions. Anti-Semitism, invoking the rhetoric and symbols of the interbellum period, re-surfaced in the country, while xenophobia and racism (antiziganism, anti-Roma sentiment) also gained ground. The sense of threat and existential vulnerability caused by “strangers” has mainly been prominent among the groups adversely affected by the regime change and anti-Roma attitudes are also more typical for them (Csepeli – Örkény 1996).

After the transition to democracy, the liberals who had used radical anti-Communist rhetoric beforehand, established their own political movement in 1991 under the name “Democratic Charta”. Their main objective was to highlight that the nationalist/conservative cabinet from 1990 drifted toward restoring the authoritarian right-wing populist politics of the interbellum period. This rhetoric kept changing between moderate and radical forms but they claimed the danger of the returning fascism (Gyurácz 2017). Hungarian history after the regime change has seen this brand of fascism returning many times because the left applied this claim to mobilise its voters against a far-right danger on numerous occasions. The atomised and mostly apolitical Hungarian society – with a common fate in the Pannonian Basin – failed to agree on a joint perspective and approach to its past (especially its darker periods) and therefore it cannot

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3 The Communist system in Hungary from 1957 to 1989 lead by general secretary János Kádár.

be expected to interpret the anomalies arising in explaining the servile support provided to extreme (fascist and communist) regimes. Who, how and to what extent are responsible for the tempestuous 20th Century history of Hungary? The prevailing and too deeply-rooted sentiments and attitudes identify historical traumas such as defeat in both world wars, the catastrophe of the Hungarian Second Army, the Holocaust, failed revolutions or the atmosphere of the 1950s dominated by Communist terror as neutral events of the past, instead of historical experience to learn from. Since we are unable and not really willing to comprehend it, we rather try to reframe or reinterpret it, if our interests so dictate, and if not, we tend to put these behind us and forget about them. Anyway, the lack of historical clarity and the over-politicised nature of history has created parallel perspectives, primarily regarding ancient Hungarian history and relations with other peoples and nations, as well as our origins and past religion. Populist politics tend to put forward some of the key issues from time to time, which often lead to emotions running high. Such decoys include issues such as:

- who is Hungarian and what is Hungarian;
- who is responsible for negative tendencies;
- doublespeak and masked racism/anti-Semitism (with “you know who” being responsible);
- groups or persons too vulnerable or unable to strike back;
- the ‘playing off certain social groups against other groups’ card.

When we discuss political culture in Hungary, or the lack of it, which is intertwined with public thinking, the ideas of political scientist István Bibó (2002) cannot be avoided. According to him, the failed freedom fights, the cul-de-sac of Hungarian history always seeking the favours of a major power, led to a distorted national character which created its approach to the world as a mosaic of fiction, presumptions, claims and desires and which does not want to accept reality. Blaming others, the traditional grievance politics of Hungarian history, endless complaints, passing on responsibility, turning a blind eye and being extremely cynical are all parts of the Hungarian way of life and thus these patterns also appear in populist behaviour (3). This leads to some extremely radical expressions, such as the outburst of writer Ákos Kertész in 2011, saying the following about Hungarians: “*Magyars are genetically underlings. [...] Magyars never feel even a hint of remorse for the most serious historical crimes, they blame others for everything, point their fingers at other, while they also happily wallow in the swamp of dictatorship, oink and eat up pigwash [...]. They can’t and won’t learn or work, only envy and murder anyone who gets any success in work, learning or innovation*”.<sup>4</sup>

4 Tamás Pilhál: Magyargyalázás egy Kossuth-díjastól. [Kossuth Prize winner shames Hungarians] Available at: [https://mno.hu/migr\\_1834/magyargyalazas-egy-kossuthdijastol-878305](https://mno.hu/migr_1834/magyargyalazas-egy-kossuthdijastol-878305). 12 September 2011 (06 February 2018).

Partially in response to this liberal flagellation, Viktor Orbán announced “illiberal democracy” in 2014, which claims to respect the democratic framework: there are opposition parties and elections<sup>5</sup> are held but it rejects the political correctness, habits and rhetoric of liberalism. It depicts itself as ‘straight talk’ and promises a new world order which brings about major transformations in the early 21st Century powers of finance, world economy, world trade, global powers and militaries. This new order breaks up with the unquestionable direction of intertwining in globalism, becoming universal and commercialistic, which were prevalent after the regime change, and establishes a new system of sovereign national communities. In this structure, Hungary becomes a civic, conservative and Christian state in Central Europe that is competitive, innovative and able to protect its citizens, as well as old European values (Bretter 2016). Liberal democracy does not serve national interests, it generally defies the idea of a national interest even existing, it does not believe that Hungarians around the world are parts of the Hungarian nation and community and it fails to protect families. In his speech, Viktor Orbán clearly explained what the illiberal Hungarian state would look like: *“It doesn’t deny the fundamental values of liberalism, such as liberty [...], but it doesn’t make this ideology a central element of organising the state; it includes a different, specific and national approach.”*<sup>6</sup>

### ***Between East and West... but in or out?***

Nowadays, the society of Hungary is practically ethnically homogeneous, the assimilation of minorities is considered very advanced. The only social integration issue is related to the Roma minority and is referred to in political debates in welfare and public safety related contexts. However, the majority of the Hungarian population is also strongly divided culturally and politically. Certain social groups (especially within the intelligentsia) are sensitive to specific issues of national identity. These groups are highly concerned about ancient Hungarian history, the fates of peoples joining the Magyars (the Hungarian people) and the assimilated populations. A prominent theory professed by certain groups of Hungarian society since the 19th Century (with variable intensity), especially lately from the 1990s, states that Hungarian people are related to oriental populations and it has increased in popularity and acceptance. This “old and new” Hungarian history interprets ancient Hungary and the origins of the Magyars in a radically different way than scientific history and it has become very popular among self-recognised right-wing and nationalistic groups. This alternative interpretation of history blends oriental origins with close ties to

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5 Further information about the electoral reform and the new electoral system: Vörös 2016.

6 Full text of Viktor Orbán’s speech. Available at: <https://mno.hu/belfold/orban-viktor-teljes-beszede-1239645>. 29/07/2014 (15 April 2015).



Turks, the theory of Hun-Hungarian continuity, stating that the Carpathian Basin is an ancient habitat of Hungarians who spread around the world from here to conquer and contact other people. This statement of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán presented in Budapest on 24 February 2015, also supports this: *“...there is no other country we discuss history so long with, than in the case of our Turkish friends. On such occasions, all legends are mentioned. We both know the idea of being the grandchildren of Attila the great.”*<sup>7</sup>

It would be impossible to understand the widely popular perception that “Hungarians are used and lonesome people, living in the centre of the Carpathian Basin” without this, as well as the notion of a unique small nation surrounded by Slavs which could only survive due to its knowledge, cultural prevalence<sup>8</sup> and adroitness. This is supported by politics, as it appears in this speech of Prime Minister Orbán in 2018: *“Our common goal is to raise youth who believe in values making it possible for the Magyars to survive for a thousand years, always making do”*.<sup>9</sup> A person from the East who loves and protects its freedom, that settled in the heart of Europe and the sense of being “proud Hungarians as Europeans” is shared by almost everyone in the Hungarian community (4). This further supports the rationale and success of campaigns appearing at rallies organised by pro-Fidesz civil society organisations such as the Peace March of 2012 (“We will not become a colony”, image 1) or these street posters in 2014 (“Our message to Brussels: respect for Hungarians”, image 2).

Image 1



Image 2



7 [http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/beszed/az\\_a\\_cel\\_hogy\\_erkezzon\\_gaz\\_torokorszagbol\\_magyarorszagra](http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/beszed/az_a_cel_hogy_erkezzon_gaz_torokorszagbol_magyarorszagra) (12 May 2015).

8 This is also prevalent in the works of some great Hungarian thinkers such as István Széchenyi (often dubbed the greatest Hungarian), as well as 19th and early 20th Century cultural ministers Ágoston Trefort and Kunó Klebersberg (respectively).

9 The speech of Viktor Orbán at the inauguration of the National Centre for the Hungarian Boy Scouts Association, 27 May, 2018, Nagykovácsi. Available at: <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-a-magyar-cserkészszövetség-országos-kozpontja-a-teleki-tisza-kastely-avatasan> (13 January 2019).

The Hungarian national spirit would also be incomprehensible, as well as the dispute defining all political discourse for more than a century, which focuses on these people bridging the gap between the East and the West, that is proud of its past, independence and tries to find its true nature at the edge of the two worlds. The shared past and the political-economic efforts are also the explanation for the cabinet's "Opening to the East" policy, announced after 2010 (Tarósy – Vörös 2014). It is Hungary's response to a trend in the world economy which understands that the future economic potential underlies in emerging Eastern regions and thus these territories are open market opportunities for Hungary. This is supported by a statement of Viktor Orbán: "*A person needs to be proud of their national identity to be powerful*". "*In Europe, Hungarians are the most western oriental people [...] today it is an honour to be called an oriental person.*"<sup>10</sup> Interestingly – partly supporting and partly refuting the above – according to research, being a part of Europe is clearly an evident choice of values for Hungarians. The consequent government propaganda against the EU and Brussels from 2014 (in a more powerful tone than previously) has made many people uncertain, but still, among the four Visegrad countries, Hungary is the most Western-oriented and the popularity of both NATO and the EU is the highest in Hungary. According to a survey carried out by the Political Capital research institute in 2016, in a geopolitical and cultural sense, almost half of all Czech and Slovakian respondents placed their country "midway" between the East and the West. Still, however, Western orientation is strong in both countries. Although general support for NATO membership is quite high in Hungary, Hungarians also tend to be susceptible to the typical conspiracy theories related to the organisation.<sup>11</sup>

Since few written sources of pre-14th century Hungarian history are available, and most of these are vaguely worded and hard to interpret, disputes about the origins of the Magyars frequently arise. After some time, the related discourse was extended to cover scientific theories on the origins of the Hungarian language and its language family, as well as issues related to teaching history. Several subcultures of variable depth and intensity have surfaced related to the examination, research, re-enactment and transfer of knowledge related to the topic, with a clearly strong identity-building role. From the last third of the 19th Century to the Second World War, serious research efforts were conducted in Hungary to study relations to Asian people and to identify ancient Hungarian myths. According to the main programme of the new direction, we, Hungar-

10 Hungary ready to open a new chapter of Hungarian-Turk cooperation, Available at: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/magyarorszag-keszen-all-a-magyar-turk-egyuttmukodes-uj-fejezetenek-megnyitasara> (3 September 2018).

11 Foreign policy orientation in Hungarian society – Political Capital research (17/11/2016) Available at: [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc\\_kulpolitikai\\_orientacio\\_20161117.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_kulpolitikai_orientacio_20161117.pdf) (22 April 2018).

ians, overestimate the West and since Hungarians are originally people from Asia, in order to become Europeans, we have to look for where we came from. This complex set of ideas blending cultural, religious, anthropological and psychological elements, in addition to scientific research, has given ground to the paradigm of “oriental people finding a new home in the West” (Ablonczy 2016). Although the scientific works of acclaimed historians and archaeological artefacts do not support the theories of alternative Hungarian history (or only in small parts), disputes do not seem to quiet at all. On the contrary, they gain momentum through expectations and beliefs of society, a vast range of uncontrolled, pseudo-scientific sources, online opportunities to gradually make people more confused and also through political considerations. These together have an impact that aligns with the objectives of online fake news forums as well: to make people doubt basic facts, knowledge, norms and meanwhile to destabilise and incite chaos and disorder (5).

The emotions unleashed after the transition to democracy in 1989/1990, as well as the swiftly deteriorating political and economic circumstances, jointly triggered a whole lot of conspiracy theories. Some of these build on the theories of a veiled global power and the financial elites controlling it, which reinforces a sense of vulnerability, creating a sceptical and strongly anti-elitist attitude. This story suggests that the failures of Hungarians and the unfulfilled hopes are exclusively the works of the veiled power (often identified with Jews (the “New York-Tel Aviv-Budapest axis”) and the Hungarian politicians who serve its interest. Therefore, Hungarians have to fight a constant ‘freedom fight’ against these internal and external factors (Krekó 2018). Based on a survey, 40–60% of Hungarians believe that:

1. Veiled powers use the crisis to colonise and destroy Hungary;
2. Others govern instead of the government, such as ‘hidden powers’;
3. The world is ruled by a small group of enigmatic people.

After the transition to democracy, more and more people started to question the facts about Hungarian history described in history books and what was being taught in schools. A common element in each alternative approach is that Hungarian history has been falsified consciously and systematically, with covering up existing knowledge and removing or misrepresenting facts (by the Habsburgs, communists, foreign powers intending to colonise Hungary, etc.) (Lendvai 2011). One of the most important questions is the following: why should it be concealed that the period before King Saint Stephen leads up to leader of the Hungarian tribes, Árpád, while he is a descendant of Attila and the Huns? This ‘proves’ that the theory of Finno-Ugric<sup>12</sup> linguistic relations is

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12 According to the currently generally accepted position of Hungarian and international linguistic science, the Hungarian language is also a member of the Finno-Ugric family of languages, comprising the Ugric

untrue, even though it is currently the cornerstone of Hungarian scientific history and education. Such alternative theories tend to increase the historic role of Hungarians in human civilisation. In addition to Hun-Hungarian, theories of Sumerian-Hungarian language relationships are also highlighted, as well as the concepts of the Turkic origin of Szeklers (or Székelys, a Hungarian group of people living in Transylvania). The presumable purpose of the conspiracy is to deprive Hungarians of their identity and support maintaining rule over them (Pap – Glied 2018). This is supported by common public perception, professed by many members of the alternative Hungarian history researcher/reader sub-culture, with a significant number of followers on social media: *What do you mean, it is not a foreign power writing (rewriting) Hungarian history? The proponents from the “Hungarian” Academy of “Sciences” are not Hungarian. Similarly to the real controllers of the governments imposed on us for 70 years, who are not Hungarian either. And then, it is obvious that we are oppressed by a foreign power.*<sup>13</sup>

## The triumph of populism – the migration crisis

In my opinion, consciously constructed populism appeared in Hungary after 2004 and extended throughout the subsequent economic and moral crisis, while since 2015, this has practically driven every political action. Viktor Orbán and then Ferenc Gyurcsány also introduced several novelties to political language in the 2000s. Their speeches often contained exaggerated, demagogic statements, metaphors and symbolism which were known in public speech so their references and thinly-veiled messages could not be denied. While Gyurcsány was less keen to ‘tend to’ the spirit of the people, Orbán pays attention to this. He did not want to change the way Hungarians think but aligned his political messages to this way of thinking. With reference to the national consultations (guided surveys) launched after 2010, the government’s communication reflects the will of the people in all aspects, practically making it the executor of this will. Viktor Orbán originally used the term “national consultation” in his 2005 state of the country speech, referring to Fidesz intending to win the 2006 parliamentary elections based on dialogue with voters.<sup>14</sup> The strategy of “one camp under one flag”, followed by Viktor Orbán, contributed to establishing and then maintaining a strongly bipolar political system after 2004, which permanently ripped apart the groups of the political system and society, which was to be open and committed to politics (Körösenyi – Patkós 2015: 36). From 2004 to 2010, political conflict escalated to become a duel between the two dominant figures:

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branch of the family, together with the Mansi (Vogul) and Khanty (Ostyak) languages.

13 Ők is a magyar történelem meghamisítói. [They are also falsifiers of Hungarian history] Available at: <http://www.magyardudat.com/a-magyar-tortenelem-meghamisitoi/>. (29 March 2015).

14 The institutionalisation of national consultation was announced by Prime Minister Orbán after the 2010 elections.

socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány and the leader of the opposition, Viktor Orbán. Acclaimed researchers estimate 2006 to be the vantage point for the crisis of liberal democracy (Bozóki 2014; Bíró-Nagy – Győri – Kadlót 2015; Körösenyi – Patkós 2015) when the infamous speech of Ferenc Gyurcsány was leaked in which he recognised that the government had continuously lied to people about the state of the country. This led to a permanent political crisis, further deepened by the drastic global economic recession after 2008. Populist forces in Central and Eastern Europe reacted to the crisis efficiently. In Hungary, “two especially prominent representatives of the anti-liberal populist wave – Jobbik<sup>15</sup> and Fidesz – increased their influence.” (Enyedi 2015: 50). Fidesz-KDNP had already followed a partially populist strategy before taking over the government in 2010, manifested primarily by emphasising the importance of popular referendums, as well as by communication which blamed the international elite and global/international financial circles for the economic crisis. Meanwhile, the newly established right-wing propaganda machine shouted to Hungarian society that the dominance of liberal norms, the constitution founded on rights and the free market, endangers the existing democracy (Enyedi 2015).

After 2010 (when Fidesz won an overwhelming, two-thirds majority in the national assembly), Ferenc Gyurcsány, as the most obnoxious politician in Hungary, gradually lost his significance (Körösenyi 2013). After the repeated two-thirds majority of Fidesz in 2014, the left-wing/liberal opposition was practically destroyed but in the autumn of the same year, the government’s rhetoric was also losing breath and the political horizon saw the rise of a new radical right-wing innovation led by an ambitious young politician, Gábor Vona. The election defeat of Jobbik in 2014 made Party Chairman Vona conclude that radical and extremist buzzwords and appearances are hurdles to any further expansion of the party. Since Vona made it clear that Jobbik aims to take over the government, he launched a new communications direction in late 2014. Radical topics popular with followers of the party – such as anti-Semitism, ‘gypsy crimes’, anti-EU sentiment, etc. – as well as any related rhetoric, were restricted and moderated. Following several scandals uncovered in late 2014,<sup>16</sup> in little more than a month, the popularity of Fidesz took a 12% dive, unparalleled in history after the regime change.<sup>17</sup> Although the opposition could only benefit from the deep-dive of the governing party to a small extent, Fidesz badly needed a topic to bind its messages to. It was the migrant crisis reaching Hun-

15 Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary), the largest opposition party after 2014 until 2019. From 2003 to 2014, a radical, populist/far-right, from 2015 a radical centre-right populist party.

16 American entry ban scandal and protests against internet tax.

17 Medián: 16 százalékos esett Orbán népszerűsége egy hónap alatt. [Orbán’s popularity drops by 16 percent in one month] Available at: HVG. [http://hvg.hu/itthon/201450\\_kiabrandulasrol\\_tanuskodo\\_partyprefereciak](http://hvg.hu/itthon/201450_kiabrandulasrol_tanuskodo_partyprefereciak)\_ 2014.12.10. (25 June 2015).



gary with an elementary force in the spring of 2015 that could halt any more loss of popularity and change its course.

Fidesz and the government gradually introduced and mixed the migration/refugee topics with terrorism, the problems of co-existence and integration in Europe and the NGOs financed by George Soros, a Hungarian-American financier with a Jewish background, as well as the ineptitude of decision-makers in Brussels (influenced by Soros), which could now be linked to euro-sceptic ideas as well (6). The 'big picture' slowly emerged. The political discourse and communication space created in relation to the migrant crisis balanced on the verge of reality and semi-reality when it expressed and conveyed powerful messages, in multiple stages, to both Hungarian citizens and the migrants. Initially, this caused a great divide in public opinion. The main element of the discourse was the need to protect Hungary and its residents from the impacts of the migrant wave, relying upon the people's need for safety and their instinctive fear and it also highlights the importance of preventive action, thus legitimising the measures taken by the acting party. Conscious of all the above, government political communication succeeded in deliberately confusing refugees with immigrants, illegal migration with legal, as well as migrants with terrorism. The anti-migration campaign started immediately after the bloody attack on the editorial office of the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, in January 2015. The first step of communication was *raising awareness* with three distinctive elements:

1. As regards the increasing volume of migration in March-April 2015, Hungarian citizens needed to be explained to why hundreds of thousands of migrants with a different culture and religion cross Hungary to Western Europe. The main message was "*If you come to Hungary, you have to respect...*". The billboards and the television commercials launched in the early summer raised awareness in the Hungarian public through messages addressed to migrants that the situation was severe since the public did not have (and could not have had) any personal experience related to the phenomenon.
2. The government launched mail-in and online national consultations about immigration and terrorism. The two terms have thus been linked.
3. The government's communication and politicians of the governing party attacked the cumbersome and slow decision-making of the European Union, the indulgent and liberal migration policy of Brussels, as well as its politically correct communication, in addition to Berlin's *Willkommenskultur* approach, relying on unconditional acceptance.

By appropriating the word "protection", the cabinet strengthened the coherence of its own communication since obviously political, legal and policing means were available to control the wave of migrants. The same was not available to opposition parties and, in addition to this, they were hesitant at the beginning

of the crisis; they did not have adequate information on how to assess the process realistically and since Fidesz was extremely successful in constructing its own communication, the opposition (including Jobbik) could merely follow governmental communication as of summer, 2015, being unable to control it. Fidesz-KDNP gradually took over almost the entire communication space (Glied – Pap 2016).

The terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015, was the basis to further increase the intensity of communication. According to the Hungarian Premier, the link between immigration and terrorism was undisputed because all terrorists are migrants. The question remains, “when did they come to Europe”. The West is at war with Islamists in the Middle East, so it is no surprise that the enemies send warriors among the arriving migrants. If we allow millions of people into Europe without identifying them, the danger of terror is going to increase. Therefore, according to him, external borders have to be secured, the Schengen Zone has to be protected instead of being delayed and working out new ideas is necessary.<sup>18</sup> The Hungarian government closed down the border with Serbia on 14 September, 2015, with a supposedly temporary border fence also providing physical protection to Hungary.

It is also interesting to assess how the migrant issue has become the highest-ranking item on the political agenda because in Central and Eastern Europe, immigration practically causes no everyday problems. Numerous research has confirmed that, until 2015, citizens of Hungary did not consider the process especially dangerous.<sup>19</sup> There are no major immigrant groups in Hungary, religious citizens typically follow a Christian denomination and cultural identity is based on Judeo-Christian cultural cornerstones; this is why people consider belonging to a Christian Europe so important. After the transition to democracy, numerous studies have examined xenophobia and discrimination in Hungary. TÁRKI has studied xenophobia since 1992, as well as the attitudes of Hungarian society towards foreigners and minorities. In summary, almost half of all Hungarians, and since 2015, two-thirds of them, basically express rejection or at least prejudice towards immigrants from third-world countries. The higher rate of xenophobia compared to other countries in the region is partly caused by problems of co-existence with the Romani minority, as well as a lack of information. Citizens project Western European problems to their own country and the traditional approach that Hungarians – with their unique language,

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18 All the terrorists are migrants – [http://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen/?utm\\_source=mandiner&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=mandiner\\_201512](http://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen/?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201512) (23 March 2016).

19 Poverty, fear of an uncertain future, emigration all ranked higher in the polls than fear of immigration, however, among other Central and Eastern European countries, the degree of xenophobia is extremely high in Hungary. This is also supported by the Eurobarometer surveys – Standard Eurobarometer 82, Autumn, 2014 Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82\\_anx\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_anx_en.pdf) (24 October 2017).

culture and history – are an island in Europe who have to protect their sovereignty also plays an important role (Glied – Pap 2016). According to research conducted in 2015/2016, the rates of xenophobia did not show a significant difference between voters of different parties, i.e., the migrant crisis and the anti-migrant government campaign succeeded in making rejection general (Simonovits – Szalai 2013).

According to the surveys of TÁRKI and Závecz Research, the level of xenophobia has reached unprecedented heights. By October 2016, not the Romani minority but Arabs have become the most rejected ethnic group. 58% of the respondents considered themselves openly xenophobic, which is clearly a consequence of the anti-migrant political campaign. After the migration crisis, based on the sense of being threatened and the prospective state of emergency, negative messages have surfaced (*We don't want illegal immigrants!; The number of molestations against women have risen sharply in Europe since the beginning of the crisis*). As a consequence of the crisis, and also based on the criticism expressed against the European Union, the government has started to reinforce existing euro-scepticism and launched a campaign against Brussels (*Let's stop Brussels! Sending a message to Brussels, to make them understand!*). Still, however, it was necessary to dehumanise and objectify the enemy ('migrants' instead of refugees!), thus, in an effort to build on populist anti-elitism and link the opposites of "Us" and "Them" with xenophobia, the first posters of the so-called Soros Campaign surfaced in 2017, depicting Hungarians as "Us" and Mr. Soros, Brussels, the veiled power, global capital, Angela Merkel and the German Wilkommenskultur, etc. as "Them" (*Don't let Soros have the last laugh! – Figure 3; Soros plans to resettle millions from Africa and the Middle East!*) (Kákai – Glied, 2017: 26).

Image 3





Political bullying and propaganda was manifested in the *Stop Soros* bill submitted to Parliament in June, 2018, which intended to sanction organisations which promote mass migration and are supported from abroad.<sup>20</sup> Considering developments observed in political rhetoric, we see the outline of a conscious process of the governing party not only linking populist ideology with xenophobic sentiment but by promoting the two phenomena simultaneously, it also supports its own legitimacy and its influence has become unquestionable in the media and political arena as well (7). From the perspective of the latter, the success of the populist political direction is unquestionable but we still face the dilemma of whether this process can be interpreted within the framework of a democracy and also what damage it does to the mental health of Hungarian society.

## Additional remarks

It is an extremely complex and risky task to discover how a populist-right wing political programme can be this successful since it requires honestly facing our own reflection. We do have exact figures, polls, reports which enable us to understand the opinions, attitudes of voters and any changes thereof. However, we tend to distort responses related to soft factors, national characteristics, psychological approaches or the reasons of human reaction according to our own ideology, desires and ideas. Much of the research conducted in the last decade comprises no more than indefensible explications, as well as already known facts which do not contribute to the discourse with any novelty or fail to face reality under the umbrella of political correctness. Some published materials consciously mask or misinterpret the reasons and many researchers simplify their answers and articulate collective accusations or may even enter the territory of flagellation (of themselves and their people). However, it might be extremely misleading if we only consider a few examples of these explanations individually because they will not bring researchers closer to understanding the phenomenon. We ask questions that are incomprehensible for the majority of the people. Not because they would be unable to comprehend them but because they are not interested in the nature of this system, only the messages. And that is alright. The Curse of Turan, because migrating ancient Hungarians roamed away from their home territory; cultural heritage; characteristic Hungarian self-destruction; the Goulash Communism of the Kádár era and nostalgia; a Mafia State; a Developer State, an octopus of a crime organisation with many tentacles; a hybrid democracy; an operetta democracy; a Putinist democracy; an accumulat-

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20 Proposal of the STOP SOROS bill, submitted by the Government of Hungary. Available at: <http://www.kormany.hu/download/c/9a/41000/STOP%20SOROS%20T%C3%96RV%C3%89NYCSOMAG.pdf>. 20/06/2018 (08 January 2019).

ing state building an authoritarian capitalism?<sup>21</sup> The list could go on endlessly but we are still no closer to a solution since populist politics takes extremely effective steps, motivated by political advantage. A strong leader, centralisation, state-controlled ‘liberal capitalist economy’, expanding bureaucracy, personal hierarchical relations, the creation of a national capitalist class, destroying the fundamentals of long-term competitiveness and development, all in order to satisfy the short-term demands of ‘national’ capital, propaganda, symbolic political activities, doublespeak, etc. (Pálné et. al. 2017). Indeed, these all contribute to getting the right picture but only get us closer to a better understanding, not to definitive explanations.

While taking a stance for order and against corruption, promising to make the criminal code stricter or meeting the expectations of the majority, populist politics approve the demands. Keeping the idea of restoring the death penalty on the agenda (Fidesz, Jobbik), forced emotions and crying (Gyurcsány), awkward appearances on talk shows, overacted ‘unexpected’ events and the almost cynically repeated buzzword of “hard-working ordinary people” (Fidesz) may give way to a sense that some politicians pursue popularity to such an extent that they absolutely believe that people are stupid but if they understand this, then why do it? Possibly because many people believe deception, misleading, lying, reframed reality and propaganda based on a system of half-truths without any reservations. There is a pre-fabricated worldview for them, an alternative which can be accepted without even thinking since no one has time for that nowadays... Politicians also know and understand this and when they smell success, they will use it, which Viktor Orbán did not deny in a speech in 2018: *“We act rightfully when we can bend reality according to our own way of thinking, our own personal will. As a politician, I think this is the essence of innovation.”*<sup>22</sup>

The fact that fear, danger and uncertainty trigger deep human reactions cannot be denied. As a former staff member explained, Arthur Finkelstein and his team had developed a campaign for Fidesz which was based on currently existing factors – the uncontrolled wave of migrants – as well as on stigmatising György Soros and the organisation he supports, alongside doubting the decisions taken by Brussels (the EU). They selected multiple identified and faceless enemies for the negative campaign who were unable to defend themselves or strike back, who could continuously be attacked and onto whom everything voters consider bad could be projected but they also played on the centuries-long

21 Scheiring, Gábor: Az Orbán-rendszer természete: autoriter kapitalizmus és felhalmozó állam [The nature of the Orbán system: the authoritarian capitalism and the accumulating state] Available at: <https://merce.hu/2018/12/25/az-orban-rendszer-termeszete-autoriter-kapitalizmus-es-felhalmozó-allam> (27 December 2018).

22 Orbán: Képesek vagyunk akaratunk szerint hajlítani a valóságot. [We can bend reality according to our own will] Available at: [https://index.hu/gazdasag/2018/05/29/orban\\_egyedulallo\\_eszjarasa\\_van\\_a\\_magyaroknak](https://index.hu/gazdasag/2018/05/29/orban_egyedulallo_eszjarasa_van_a_magyaroknak). (20 January 2019).

anti-power stance of Hungarians, redirected this time at the Belgian capital of liberalism, the seat of the EU. According to this artificial narrative, Hungary is under siege (like so many times throughout its history) and it has to defend itself; against the (mostly Muslim) illegal migrants on the one hand and against international financial capital and the dictatorial efforts of Brussels on the other. Our partners are not helping us (except for the Visegrad countries, especially Slovakia and Poland) in this fight, so we have to go into battle alone to protect our values and Western Christianity. We are already experiencing the degree to which the anti-migrant and anti-Soros campaign succeeded at in increasing the level of xenophobia in Hungary but we as yet only have gloomy ideas about the long-term impacts. Birnbaum gave a very interesting answer to the question asking how responsible he feels for what happened: *“Our campaign has not turned anyone into an anti-Semite, if they hadn’t been one before. We might only have shown them a new victim; nothing else happened. There is nothing I would do differently.”*<sup>23</sup> This sentence includes everything that makes populism successful. Populists actually or apparently react to the expectations of the ‘people’, quasi-fulfilling them, which cannot really be complained about. I see the main issue as a lack of responsible behaviour and liable decision-making because co-existence and – considering climate change – survival, would definitely require these. Most of the people who understand history know where a prevalence of unrestricted, extreme populism leads to. Others deliberately, due to their political interests, fail to understand or concede to this. This is a dilemma that poses a serious challenge to mankind from time to time and we probably think that the answer is complex, whereas it is actually very simple: if liberal democratic systems are unable to find a solution to the problems affecting people, if they fail to mitigate crises, then the age of stupidity will exist under the guardianship of populism.

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<sup>23</sup> Fidesz campaign advisors spill the beans: this is how Soros became the perfect enemy. Available at: <https://24.hu/belfold/2019/01/14/soros-gyorgy-fidesz-kampany-arthur-finkelstein-george-birnbaum/>. 14/01/2019 (11 March 2019).

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**Viktor Glied**, PhD in political science, assistant professor at the University of Pécs, Hungary. He is historian and political scientist. His research interests cover ecopolicy, civil society, Hungarian and international history in the 20th–21st centuries and migration issues. He is the author and editor of several academic books and studies, furthermore member and contributor of researches that examine different aspects of political science, migration and sustainable development.



# Common Points in the Policy of Italy and Central Europe

PETRA HAMERLI



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**Abstract:** *Recent news often compares current Italian policy to that of Central Europe – especially Hungary. The latest elections brought victory to right-wing populism in Italy and the Visegrad countries – especially in Hungary and Poland – with the key points of their discourse concentrated on similar topics such as Euroscepticism, migration and security, which are tightly connected to the refugee question. Right-wing theories have historical traditions both in Italy (Fascism) and Central Europe (rightist and extreme rightist parties) that I think important to summarise, as some of their elements can also be found in the political thinking of nowadays. The paper presents the main parties of Italy and those of the Visegrad countries and compares their common elements to see whether Italy can politically belong to Central Europe.*

**Keywords:** *Populism, Italy and the Visegrad Group, Euroscepticism, Migration.*

## Introduction

In the spring of 2018, the Italian political situation changed a lot as, instead of the previous leftist government, the populist parties gained victory in the elections. The majority of the votes were given to *Movimento 5 Stelle*, a “third way party” whose programme is full of ambivalences – e.g. regarding the migration question, as the welcoming of migrants is, in principle, refuted by the party but at the same time, it agrees with the quota system. The key figure of Italian political life is Matteo Salvini, the leader of *Lega*, which is characterised by Euroscepticism and anti-migration. Similar goals have been declared by the majority of the Central European parties and recently, Italy has begun to approach one of the Visegrad

Countries, Hungary. This raises the question of *whether Italy is politically part of Central Europe*. Geographically, the country belongs to Southern Europe, while Italians sometimes prefer to define themselves as Western Europeans. Nevertheless, the Northern regions of Italy are often considered parts of Central Europe because of the similarities in historical-political development. In my paper, I make an attempt to summarise the similarities and differences of Italian and Central European political thinking through presenting the most significant parties' goals. First, I introduce the historical roots, followed by presenting the key points of the ideas of these parties of Italy and Central Europe, and, as a conclusion, I summarise the common features of Italy's and the Visegrad Group's programmes.

## Historical Roots

Italy was unified in 1861 under the Kingdom of Victor Emmanuel II (Savioa Dynasty), King of Piedmont-Sardinia, who is still nowadays respected as the father of the Italian state. The unification was realised due to the *Risorgimento*<sup>1</sup> movement that aimed for the formation of the politically and culturally quite different Italian city states into one nation-state, and its leader was Giuseppe Mazzini, whose name became the symbol of the national unity in Italy<sup>2</sup> (Biagini 2016). Even so, diversity among the regions of the country still exists and the common conflicts between the southern and northern part of Italy are well known, as well as the fact that Rome is often considered a separated entity within the country. These three parts of Italy – Southern Italy, Northern Italy and Rome – quite significantly differ from each other regarding the customs and traditions of the inhabitants and the 'southern question' is one of the most significant problems that the political parties still have to deal with.

It is my persuasion that a country's political system cannot be understood without knowing the historical roots that influenced the policy-making of the examined state, so I think it necessary to make an outline on those stages of Italy's history – comparing them to Central European characteristics – that can be considered historical roots of the political culture of nowadays. In my opinion, in both cases, it originates from the Interwar Period.

Italy's political system was formed after the unification of the country and is often called the 'Liberal Era', when social reforms were made by the Governments which frequently rotated around each other. As a result of earlier disintegrity, the country was characterised by linguistic, cultural, political and economical diversification. This caused general dissatisfaction within society

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1 This research project was supported by the European Union. EFOP-3.6.3-VEKOP-16-2017-00007 – Young researchers from talented students – Fostering scientific careers in higher education. The word *Risorgimento* literally means rebirth.

2 In the unification Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour – the Premier of Piedmont-Sardinia – and General Giuseppe Garibaldi, played an important role as well and they are also respected as national heroes of Italy.



which resulted in demonstrations and strikes. The Governments followed the policy of *transformism*, which resulted in an adaptation to existing circumstances (Tanács-Mandák – Nuber 2017: 16–20.). The social, political and economic crisis deepened after the Great War (1914–1918), which ended with a delusion of the Italians as, at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Italy did not gain all the territories promised to it in return for joining the Entente Powers.<sup>3</sup>

These factors combined resulted in the strengthening of the rightist movements and a group of returning ex-soldiers, together with the followers of Futurism<sup>4</sup> and young nationalists, founded the *Fascio di Combattimento*, a movement that propagated the importance of Italy's interests and social reforms. The *Fasci* were organised regionally – this regional organisation of political groups having traditions even today in Italy – and they fused into the National Fascist Party in 1921 under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, who became Prime Minister of Italy in 1922 and established the one party system in the country (De Felice 1966).

Fascism (1922–1943) was a determining period in the history of Italy.<sup>5</sup> Before summarising very briefly its most significant elements, I think it is important to note that the expressions 'Fascism' and 'neofascism' are – as a heritage of Communist historical-political thinking – often used in terms of all the extreme right-wing parties, which is incorrect: historically, only one type of Fascism existed, which is the Italian one; the regime of Mussolini. This is why the expression should be used just in the case of Italy. Now back to Mussolini's theories, which dominated Italian politics for over two decades, and fascism aimed at totalitarianism. In order to stay in power, Mussolini had to accept that the governing form would remain a monarchy – the King was Victor Emmanuel III (1900–1946) – and, as the majority of Italian society insisted on Catholicism, the Duke had to make a compromise with the Catholic Church (Lateran Pacts 1929). These decades were characterised by – at least apparently – a certain stability in the inner affairs and an expansionist foreign policy which aimed to make Italy one of the Great Powers of Europe (Ormos 2019).

In my point of view, Fascism is a typical example of early populism. To verify this, it is necessary to define briefly what populism is. The Italian politologist, Ilvo Diamanti, and his French colleague, Marc Lazar, say that it is a complex and hardly definable concept which is present in the ideologies of all the mass

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3 At the breakout of the Great War, Italy remained neutral but there was a group of interventionists – with Benito Mussolini among them – who voted to enter into the war for territorial gain. The nationalist interventionists claimed South-Tyrol, the Istria and the Dalmatian Coast and the Entente Powers promised them to Italy with the secret Treaty of London (1915). After the birth of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, these promises could not be fulfilled, which led to a general delusion of Italian society.

4 Futurism is an artistic movement born in Italy in the early 1900s, which emphasised the importance of technology modernisation, violence, war and youth.

5 As we will see, Fascist elements are still present in certain Italian political circles.

parties and which has roots going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when ‘the people’ became an important actor in policy-making. Populism usually appears after some political, social or economic crisis and its modern form has been becoming a significant element of policy from the 1980s (Diamanti–Lazar 2018: 16–31). Roberto Biorcio, another Italian scientist, explains that it cannot be described as an organic ideology, however, there are some typical features that are present in all the populist parties’ programmes. At the center of all of them, there is the ‘folk’, the people, and the goals conceived by the party leaders serve to ‘defend people’s interests’, where ‘people’ refers to a homogeneous social unit. Every populist party and movement has a *leader* who is ‘working for the people’ and who is often charismatic. Besides the ‘people’ and the ‘leader’, a third common element of all the forms of populism is that the ‘people’ always have an ‘enemy’. (Biorcio 2012: 2.). The Hungarian politologist, József Bayer, completes these points of view with the statement that populism refers to the way of policy-making and the discourse and not on the manner of political programmes. This means that the discourse – how content is expressed in the programme – is much more important than the content itself (Bayer 2002).

How do all of these elements appear in Fascism? It can be pointed out that Fascism did not mean an organic ideology as it had always been adapting to momentary circumstances. The best example of this is the case of the racial acts: originally, Mussolini did not make a difference among the people based on ethnicity but at the end of the 1930s, as Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany became a more and more dominant factor in the international relations of Europe, Mussolini introduced measures against Jewish people (Ormos 2019). Mussolini can be considered a charismatic leader, as he embodied the iron-handed ‘father’ of the Italian nation who took care of all the Italians. This myth was not only diffused among Fascists but the majority of society accepted it (Andreides 2014). Mussolini wanted to ‘reform’ the Italian people – *il popolo*, as he called it – into a society full of agile and strong young people and he was able to influence them through his well-structured speeches. He made the Italians believe that he could transform – according to the interests of the *popolo* – Italy to be a significant Great Power of Europe. Besides the leader and the *popolo* in the center, in Fascism, ‘enemies’ can be found as well; the main ones being the Freemasons and the Communists (Ormos 2019. and De Felice 1974).

Mussolini lost his popularity and authority because of the alliance with Hitler made in 1936, which led to the participation of Italy in the Second World War (1939–1945, Italy joined in 1940). The resistance – which had been existing during the whole Fascist period – strengthened, and, as a consequence of the defeats in the war, Mussolini was failed by his own party comrades (25 July, 1943). This resulted in King Victor Emmanuel III being imprisoned by Mussolini who nominated Prime Minister Pietro Badoglio who later liquidated the Fascist Party and the Southern Kingdom capitulated in September, 1943. In the mean-

time, Mussolini – who was liberated from prison by Nazi soldiers – became the Head of the Republic of Salò (Italian Social Republic), which was a puppet state created in the northern part of Italy, a territory invaded by the Germans. After the Second World War, German occupation ended in the region and Mussolini was executed by the Italians on 28 April, 1945 (Candeloro 2014).

In the meantime, in Central Europe, a dual state, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was formed in 1867. Under the reign of Franz Joseph I (in the Monarchy: 1867–1916, in Austria: 1848–1916), the state enjoyed relative stability and modernisation. Just like Italy, Austria-Hungary was also characterised by diversity but there was a huge difference between them: while in Italy, regional differences could be found within one nation, the Monarchy was a multi-ethnic state with approximately a dozen different ethnic groups. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered the century of nation state building, the minorities of the Monarchy also targeted independence which, in the long-term, led to the collapse of Austria-Hungary.

During the Interwar Period, nationalism also appeared in the Central European countries. Successor states formed, instead of Monarchies, aimed at national homogeneity. As the different ethnic groups of the former Hapsburg Empire mingled during the centuries, homogeneity was impossible to gain and the new countries were, in reality, “multi-ethnic nation states”, as the Historian László Szarka calls them (Szarka 2016). The governments of these countries introduced different measures – agrarian reforms or limitations of minorities’ laws – to assimilate the minorities which sometimes – like the Iron Guard in Romania – led to chauvinism.

As all of these countries gained huge territories from Hungary, here, nationalism appeared mainly through revisionism and rightist parties and movements started to form under the slogan of “protecting the Hungarian nation”. The most extremist one was the Arrow Cross Party which, after a series of inner transformations, took on its final form in 1944 and, with the help of the Nazis, it managed to gain the power until the end of the Second World War. Just like the northern part of Italy, Hungary also suffered a German invasion during these years. The ideology of the Arrow Cross Party is called *Hungarism* and also included some elements of early populism. It had a charismatic leader, Ferenc Szálasi, the *Nemzetvezető* (Head of the Nation), who considered himself the unifier of “Hungarian people within and outside the frontiers”. Within the Hungarian nation, the most significant element of society was the peasantry, as Szálasi thought that agricultural work – which produced the meals – meant a basic necessity for people to survive. As with populist movements in general, Hungarism also found its enemies in Jewish people who were considered the evocators of “Hungarian Tragedy”<sup>6</sup> (Paksa 2012).

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6 In the Interwar Period “Hungarian Tragedy” meant the situation created by the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which led to the loss of two thirds of historical Hungary’s territories.

Regarding the other Visegrad Group countries – Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia – rightist movements were present there as well. The Czech Republic and Slovakia formed a common state under the name Czechoslovakia, where populism appeared in *Hlinkova Slovenská ľudová Strana* (Hlinka's Slovakian People's Party), led by the charismatic Andrej Hlinka, who targeted the autonomy of Slovakia. Besides the leader, the 'enemies' appeared in the party's ideology among its populist features. Hlinka considered the Hungarian minority, the Communists, the Jewish people and all the leftist theories as enemies (Wacławczyk-Laros 2017: 49). In Poland, Marshall Józef Piłsudski, the first President of the Second Polish Republic (1918–1922), a member of the *Parti Polska Socjalistyczna* (Polish Socialist Party), established an authoritarian regime (1926–1935) which can be considered populist in terms of the role of its leader, as Piłsudski was respected as the "father" of the country (Kochanowski 2002).

This summary shows that, during the Interwar Period, an early form of populism was present both in Italy and Central Europe. After the Second World War, both territories' situations were quite different. Regarding Italy, Diamanti and Lazar, in their common book, say that populism was present in the leftist programmes, as the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, PCI) used its elements during the *Resistenza* (Resistance). It means a political activity of the antifascist groups – Communists, Monarchists, Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberalists and Republicans – in majority united in *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (Committee of National Liberty). The Antifascist Resistance was led by the head of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, who targeted the unification of the Italian people for the civic-democratic transformation of the country (Diamanti-Lazar 2018: 77). This activity ended with the proclamation of the First Italian Republic on 2 June, 1946, which was a result of a referendum that can be considered a common method of populism to demonstrate to the people that they can actively participate in policy-making. After that, populism appears again in the 1980s in *Forza Italia* (FI), led by Silvio Berlusconi, and in *Lega Nord*, founded by Umberto Bossi (Diamanti-Lazar 2018: 111 – 112.), which will be presented later in more detail as part of the present study.

Regarding Central Europe, the region belonged to the sovietised regimes, so between 1945 and 1990, the main ideology in these countries was Communism – or maybe it is better to say 'Communisms', as the regimes were built upon in different ways in each countries. The present study does not aim to analyse this question, rather, it focuses on populism which, of course, is itself represented in the Communist parties' ideologies as well. Each of these parties had a leader who used propaganda to demonstrate that they were able to change the life circumstances of society and to make all members of 'the people' equal – the usual governing form of Communist regimes in 'People's Republics', with the aim of showing that the people can take part in policy making. The birth of the Hungarian Constitution on 20 August 1949 can be mentioned as a good example

of the measures taken by these parties to make people believe this, as this constitution was the first written one in the history of Hungary (Vörös 2016: 26).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Communist regimes failed in Central Europe as well and, from the 1990s, such as in Italy and also in this region, right-wing populism began to diffuse. Henceforward, after presenting the roots of populism, I shall refer to its current situation in the two territories.

## The Current Situation in Italy

The latest elections held on 4 March, 2018, brought victory to populism in Italy: the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (5 Stars' Movement), which defines itself as a 'third way party', got the majority of the votes (32.7%).<sup>7</sup> It means that Movimento 5 Stelle does not belong to either of the two traditional coalitions; to *Centrodestra* (centre-right) or *Centrosinistra* (centre-left). Although one of the parties of *Centrosinistra*, the *Partito Democratico* (PD), came in second place with 18.7%, the *Centrodestra* won the right to participate in a government reshuffle as its two strongest parties, *Lega* (the former *Lega Nord*, Northern League) and *Forza Italia* (Force Italy) altogether got 31.4% of the votes (17.4% by *Lega*, and 14% by FI).<sup>8</sup> These three parties (Forza Italia, Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle) are all populists.

Among the modern Italian parties, the first populist one was that of Silvio Berlusconi, a typical charismatic leader who, as a media-man (the founder of Fininvest), used mass-media to influence the people. Berlusconi founded his party in 1994 with the concrete aim of changing the Italian political structure, characterised earlier by the Christian Democratic–Communist bipolarity. His slogan was “In the name of the people”, which helped him gain sympathy from the masses. In the beginning, he propagated that *Forza Italia* was not a party but a movement which was able to change the future of Italy (Tanács-Mandák–Nuber 2017: 161–163). He gained success in the elections of the same year due to his promises which offered economic freedom, meritocracy and a possibility for ‘the people’ to dismiss the “corrupt political elites” that had governed Italy from 1946 (Ruzza–Balbo 2013: 167). Later, in terms of personalisation of the policy, he made ‘the people’ believe that he could guarantee a positive development of the country and that he was always acting according to the interests of the Italians. He presented his media career to the public as an example of how every Italian could benefit from a good-working political system. Although it was revealed soon after that he was motivated mainly by his own ambitions to gain power (Tanács-Mandák–Nuber 2017: 161–163), the FI remained one of the strongest parties of *Centrodestra*.

7 See the results of the elections on the site of *La Repubblica*. Available at: <https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2018/cameradeideputati> (19 January 2019).

8 Available at: <https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2018/cameradeideputati> (19 January 2019).



Another populist party in Italy is *Lega Nord*, founded in 1991 with a fusion of six regional groups under the leadership of Umberto Bossi (Molnár 2002: 74), who, like Berlusconi, was a charismatic leader as well but there was a huge difference between the two politicians: while Berlusconi – as we could see – embodied the successful businessman, Bossi came from a small village, from a modest family and represented traditional values like being proud of one's origin and the importance of family. This background helped Bossi become the head of a traditional community which contributed to the success of an ethno-national ideology that *Lega Nord* represented (Ruzza–Balbo 2013: 168–169). The followers of the party often expressed that they felt during the speeches of Bossi that he was giving shape to their own thoughts. Thanks to this, the party was attractive to the – especially Northern Italian – voters (Passarelli–Tourto 2012: 129). He used a language in his remarks which was closer to the common way of expression than the traditional political language in order to emphasise his difference from the politicians of Rome. Bossi's slogan was “Against Rome”, which meant that he was opposed to the traditional Italian party system and the previous Governments (Molnár 2002: 77).

In the original programme of *Lega Nord*, hate towards Southern Italy and Rome, a willingness for separatism or, at the very least, a federal transformation of Italy, along with xenophobia, were present. In the 1990s, criticism of state bureaucracy and traditional parties were then added. With these new aspects, it later gained more support from the moderated part of society of Northern Italy as well (Molnár 2002: 74–75). Hate towards Southern Italy turned to anti-migration which was explained with the necessity of defending territorial identity and security. The latter one was – and still is – a key point in the discourse of *Lega Nord*, as Bossi and his followers explained that security is endangered by the “aliens” coming into the country. After the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September, 2001, an anti-Islamic statement was added to the previous aspects and *Lega Nord* began to emphasise in its discourse that the party could be a defender of Christian values from the Islamic culture's diffusion through migration. Connected to this, *Lega Nord* supports every foreign policy step which is explainable as a measure to defend European values from the diffusion of Islamic culture (Passarelli–Tourto 2012: 117–126). Regarding *Lega Nord*'s statement on the European Union, its Euroscepticism is strong, which can be said to have originated from the fact that, after Italy joined the European Monetary Union, the majority of Northern Italians were not interested in separatism anymore, which led to a weakening in support of the party by the electorate (Molnár 2002: 158).

Since 2013, the new president of *Lega Nord* has been Matteo Salvini, the actual Home Secretary. He, like Bossi, is a charismatic leader as well, who pays special attention to the way of political communication. In order to modernise *Lega Nord*'s way of connecting with the people, he prefers the use of social

networks, posting comments to his personal sites. This technique seems to work well as Salvini managed to gain popularity not just in the Northern regions of Italy but also in other territories of the country. (Passarelli–Tourto 2018.) Salvini managed to transform Lega Nord from a regional party to a national one – the change of the name into *Lega* expresses this – with a programme whose key point is Euroscepticism (Diamanti–Lazar 2018: 116): while Lega Nord of Bossi propagated that the local identity of Northern Italians should be preserved by the federal transformation of Italy, Lega of Salvini says that the Italians’ national identity should be defended from the European Union and from migration (Passarelli–Tourto 2018).

In 2018, Lega and Forza Italia participated as part of *Centrodestra* in the elections, which was by no means not the first occasion. I do not wish to enter into the details of the forming of the relations of the two parties but, in brief, they were in multiple coalitions and at the beginning of the 1990s, *Alleanza Nazionale*<sup>9</sup> (National Alliance) of Gianfranco Fini joined them as well (Ruzza–Balbo 2013: 170). Originally, *Alleanza Nazionale* had a programme with neofascist elements, among which the asseveration of the importance of national unity caused a debate in 1995 between Bossi and Fini, as the latter targeted the separation of the Northern region of the country from Rome and Southern Italy (Ruzza–Balbo 2013: 170). In the same year, Bossi secluded his party from an alliance with Berlusconi and Fini. It was revealed soon after that Lega Nord was not able to gain enough support to become a determining factor in Italian politics so Bossi decided to renew the alliance with Forza Italia in 1999 (Molnár 2002: 85–95).

Despite the disagreements between Bossi and Fini, in 2002, they together drew up a draft in order to limit illegal migration towards Italy – the Bossi–Fini Law – which regulated settlement criteria in Italy and introduced a punishment for those persons and civil organisations caught helping illegal migration (Innocenzi 2016: 29). The law ordered that job-seeking individuals in Italy had to have a valid employment contract. In the event of losing their job, the individual could only remain in Italy if they found another job within six months. Besides this, the law increased the role of regional authorities in dealing with migration (Glied–Keserű 2016: 280). The Bossi–Fini law cannot be considered successful, as tar-spinkler has deep traditions in the country, so persons living illegally in Italy cannot always be discovered (Innocenzi 2016: 30).

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<sup>9</sup> The party’s predecessor was Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement), founded in 1946, which grew out of the traditions of the Republic of Salò. In 1972, the party fused with the monarchists and changed its name to Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale (National Right-Wing). In 1995, the party was merged into *Alleanza Nazionale*, led by Gianfranco Fini, which merged with Forza Italia under the common name *Popolo della Libertà*, which broke up in 2011. Nowadays, *Alleanza Nazionale* is united with *Fratelli d’Italia* (Italy’s Brothers) and led by Giorgia Meloni in 2014. (Ruzza–Balbo 2013.)

On the latest elections, Forza Italia and Lega Nord – together with the other parties, *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Noi con l'Italia – Unione di Centro*<sup>10</sup> of *Centrodestra* – participated with a common programme made with compromises. It summarises the four parties' principles across 10 points, with the slogan “For increase, families, security and full employment”, reflecting on the main problems of Italian society – main problems for the ‘people’. The programme – as is usual with populist programmes – is built upon promises that offer solutions for those circumstances that make the majority of Italians unsatisfied. Regarding “increase”, it promises a reduction in taxes, support of Italian small businesses, a development programme for the industrialisation of the Southern regions and protecting “*Made in Italy*” products. The programme declares that the nucleus of society should be family and proposes to increase birth rates in the country while also promising special attention to young mothers' possibilities of employment. Other social measures are included as well, such as supporting Italians living in poverty, increasing pensions, ameliorating the sanitary system and approving meritocracy in schools and universities. The promise of full employment for Italians – with special attention given to younger generations – also belongs to social measures. For *Centrodestra*, resolving the problem of the refugees and providing security is a question of high priority. Regarding this, the programme includes the necessity of repatriation for all refugees (“*clandestini*”) and resolving their problem with a ‘Marshall Plan to Africa’. The reintroduction of border control and the blocking of debarkation of refugee-ships are also considered to be necessary. Of course, Euroscepticism also appears in the programme of *Centrodestra* as a common idea of the four parties and it has been declared that the EU should intervene less with Italian inner affairs and that sovereignty should be returned.<sup>11</sup>

The third populist party, *Movimento 5 Stelle*, which won a majority in the latest elections, is a relatively new party in Italy. The party was founded in 2009 by Beppe Grillo, who was originally a comedian from Genova. Before founding his movement (party), he often criticised the actual politics of Italy through the television programmes that hosted him. He used – both as a comic and, later, as a politician – an anti-politics and anti-elite rhetoric, and – like Berlusconi and Bossi – was opposed to the traditional way of policy-making and targeted a personalisation of politics. Like Salvini, he also used the Internet for communication with the electorate which contributed to the party's success. (Chiapponi 2012.)

In 2005, Grillo started a blog which offered a wide range of topics that criticised Italian politics. The blog soon had numerous followers, especially from

10 Noi con l'Italia – Unione di Centro (UDC) is a Christian Democratic coalition formed in January, 2018.

11 Available at: [http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma\\_centrodestra\\_condiviso\\_10\\_PUNTI.pdf](http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma_centrodestra_condiviso_10_PUNTI.pdf) (19 January 2019).



the younger generation, who began to see in Grillo their voice to express their generation's problems. Besides this, ecological questions and, through Italian intervention in the Iraq conflict (2003–2011), pacifism were at the center of the blog's tags. As Grillo saw the attendance to his blog, he began – in 2005 – to organise occasions – called Meetup – where the problems brought up on the blog could be negotiated. As these occasions seemed to be successful, in 2007, Grillo suggested to create *liste civiche* (Civic Lists)<sup>12</sup> that express the agreement of the signers with “five stars” (5 stelle), which symbolise the central elements of the programme: water, energy, connectivity, rubbish collection and social services. In 2009, Grillo – using a formula adapted frequently by populist politicians – communicated that he did not want to found a party but a movement with a programme. (Bertocchini 2016: 49–52.)

This movement was born to *protest* against the current situation of Italy, current government, the traditional parties, etc., and offers an alternative way of policy making, claiming a radical change in Italian politics (Passarello–Tourto, 2018). The programme made for the elections of 2018 was entitled “A programme written by the Italians”, with the subtitle “The first program in the world voted online by the citizens”,<sup>13</sup> as the topics included were negotiated. The long phrases of the programme attempted to refer to all the current problems of Italy, such as ecological, social and economic problems, which could be analysed over several pages. Here, I extract only those points that are present in *Centrostrema*'s programmes as well: Euroscepticism, migration and security. The Euroscepticism of Movimento 5 Stelle emphasises in particular the importance of supporting the *Made in Italy* products which, according to the party, can be damaged by EU commercial policy. Regarding EU bureaucracy, Movimento 5 Stelle requests a transparency in financial matters and the publicity of negotiations.<sup>14</sup> About the EU's migration policy, it says that Italy cannot be a refugee camp so a collaboration among EU members is necessary in dealing with the question, and that illegal migrants should be repatriated.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the party emphasises the importance of security for Italian citizens, including personal rights and liberty as well.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up the Italian governing parties' programmes, it can be seen that Euroscepticism, the migration question and security are key points for all of

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12 Lista civica (plural: liste civiche) in Italy means a party list presented on a local election which is not connected officially to national political parties.

13 Available at: <https://www.movimento5stelle.it/programma/index.html> (19 January 2019).

14 Available at: <https://www.movimento5stelle.it/programma/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Unione-Europea.pdf> (19 January 2019).

15 Available at: <https://www.movimento5stelle.it/programma/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Immigrazione.pdf> (19 January 2019).

16 Available at: <https://www.movimento5stelle.it/programma/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Sicurezza.pdf> (19 January 2019).

them. Both in the common programme of *Centrodestra* and in that of Movimento 5 Stelle, it appears that instead of EU imports, *Made in Italy* products should be given priority, which promotes the protection of the national economy. Regarding the migration question, Lega represents an anti-migration and anti-Islam position the most within *Centrodestra*. The security question is tightly connected to immigration, as all three populist parties agree that the increasing number of illegal migrants in Italy causes a decrease in the sense of security by the Italian citizens.

## The Central European Situation Compared with Italian Trends

Reading the key points of the Italian parties' programmes, Central Europeans certainly find them familiar, as similar problems are in the limelight of the policies of the Visegrad Group as well. Many online posts and articles draw a parallel among Italy and the Visegrad Group because populist parties govern in both territories and Euroscepticism and anti-migration is a common feature of their programmes.

As I already mentioned, in Central Europe, populism diffused after the failure of Communism. The change of the regime did not bring the expected results which caused a political crisis that led to the diffusion of right-wing populism as it refuses the existing political and social system and usually rejects individualism and the market economy. These movements aim to establish a strong, centralised state but, at least in principle, they are not opposed to democracy (Bayer 2002). Still, according to Bayer, in Central Europe, early agrarian populism has traditions which, in the Interwar Period, refused industrial capitalism maintained by 'aliens'. This tradition is connected to economic populism which targets an enclosed national economy controlled by the state and tries to seclude itself from the effects of the world economy. A third form of populism is present as well in the Visegrad Group – and this is currently the most diffused one – which is political populism, characterised by nationalism, xenophobia and anti-globalism. (Bayer 2002.)

According to a study by Tamás Boros and Tibor Kadlót, in the Czech Republic, around 50% of the electorate voted for some of the populist parties. Here, both right-wing and left-wing populism can be found, such as the eurosceptic *Svobodni* (Party of Free Citizens) and the anti-migration *Úsvit* (Dawn – National Coalition) – which wants the Czech Republic to leave the EU – as right-wing nationalists, and *KSČM* (Communist Party of Czech Republic), whose support is around 11% of the electorate, as left-wing. The biggest party of the governing coalition, *ANO 2011*, is a centrist-populist political group that was founded to express the general dissatisfaction of the Czech people. The support of populism in Hungary is extremely high, as almost two thirds of voters prefer right-wing populists such as *FIDESZ* and *Jobbik*, both of them eurosceptic and anti-migrant

parties. In Poland, the right-wing populist parties are supported by around half of the electorate. The most significant among them is the actual governing party, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice), which was founded by Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński in 2001. Last but not least, in Slovakia, the extreme right parties' support has been growing recently. The most significant ones are *Slovenská Národná Strana* (Slovakian National Party) and *L'Udová Strana Maše Slovensko* (People's Party Our Slovakia), both of them nationalists and eurosceptics, and L'Udová Strana Maše Slovensko's programme includes anti-globalisation, anti-migration, anti-Ziganism and antisemitism as well (Boros–Kadlót 2016).

In her study, Věra Stojarová summarises the common elements of the programmes of Visegrad countries' populist parties. As she points out, nationalism, Euroscepticism and anti-migration are present in each of them and in some cases – such as the programme of Jobbik and L'Udová Strana Maše Slovensko – the anti-Roma and the anti-Jewish statement is also added to these. That said, Jobbik has recently started changing its image. As the former President, Gábor Vona, explained in 2015, he wanted to transform his party from an extremist to mainstream one and decided to moderate his rhetoric. Still, despite radical elements such as racism, hints of the revision of Trianon are eliminated from the discourse of Jobbik (Stojarová 2018).

Now, the key points of these parties are Euroscepticism and anti-migration, with the security question (or put another way: the danger of terrorism) tightly connected to them. As we can see, the situation is the same in the Italian parties' case, so Italy and Central Europe can be connected to each other at this point. According to an analysis by Anna Molnár, in the early 2000's, Italian public opinion was in favour of EU integration but in the center-right parties' programmes, Euroscepticism was already present as their leaders, Berlusconi and Bossi, felt that it could limit the sovereignty of Italy. Later, Euroscepticism began to diffuse, mainly because of the increasing economic crisis that followed the introduction of the Euro to the country (Molnár 2016). As we can see from the above, Euroscepticism appears in the programmes of all the three mentioned parties, as their politicians think that EU integration results in an EU that is too involved in its members' internal affairs (Passarelli–Tourto 2018).

The aforementioned Central European populist parties share the same statement, especially because of the EU's plan to deal with the refugee problem with the introduction of a quota system that obligates all EU member states to accept a certain number of migrants/ refugees. In 2015, migration became multitudinous and as a consequence, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, argued for the protection of national interests and closed up the borders to migration; the other three Visegrad countries also took up this statement (Schmidt, 2016). As Visegrad Group leaders agree that migration increases the danger of terrorism, they decided not to accept any of the refugees. In their discourse, they argue with an importance on the defense of European

civilisation which can be damaged by the spread of Islamic culture (Stojarová 2018). As I have already mentioned, Lega is anti-Islam as well, so this can be considered another common feature. Both in Italy and in Central Europe, the populist parties propagate that security can be guaranteed only by refusing to accept migrants. At this point, Italian and Central European interests seem to be in harmony but it should not be forgotten that Italy – as a huge number of migrants try to enter Europe via Mediterranean coastlines and land on Italian soil first – is logically interested in the introduction of a quota system which, for the Italians, would mean a decrease in the number of migrants living in the country. This statement is expressed in the programme of Movimento 5 Stelle,<sup>17</sup> as Forza Italia and Lega Nord are for the repatriation of all refugees.<sup>18</sup>

Current daily news often brings up the possibility of an anti-migration alliance between Italy and the Visegrad Group, as their political discourses are in harmony. Most of this news speaks about a possible agreement between Salvini and Orbán – who recently, on May 2, 2019, had a meeting to negotiate the matter – as both of them follow an anti-migration policy “in defense of Christian-European values”, as they explain. An ideological agreement is undoubtedly possible as both of the politicians share the statement that refugees and migrants should be sent back to their homeland and helped by the EU there but the Italian public opinion’s point of view is that it would not resolve the migration problem. Geo-politically, the Visegrad countries are not at the center of migration so for them, the protection of European culture is rather an ideological question, while for Italy, it is a real problem for two reasons: On one hand, Italy feels responsible for saving the lives of migrants arriving across the Mediterranean Sea but on the other hand, both Italian public opinion and the actual governing parties are of the statement that migration endangers security in the Mediterranean and that this security should be defended by the Italian Government.<sup>19</sup> Some Italians criticise the Visegrad Group for not accepting refugees and they judge Salvini because of the approach of these countries. These critiques affirm that, despite the similarities of the populist parties’ rhetoric in Italy and in the Visegrad countries, the two territories’ long-term interests can be different, so Italy probably won’t become part of Central Europe.<sup>20</sup> This goes without saying that it is just a guess – the future will come to a decision on this

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17 Available at: <https://www.movimento5stelle.it/programma/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Immigrazione.pdf> (19 January 2019).

18 Available at: [http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma\\_centrodestra\\_condiviso\\_10\\_PUNTI.pdf](http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma_centrodestra_condiviso_10_PUNTI.pdf) (19 January 2019).

19 Available at: <http://www.occhidellaguerra.it/migranti-rifugiati-accoglienza-le-differenze-italia-visegrad/> (19 January 2019).

20 Available at: <https://www.nextquotidiano.it/visegrad-salvini-conte/> and <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/orban-salvini> (19 January 2019).

question – an answer whose construction mainly depends on whether Salvini would be able to maintain his influence over Italian policy-making.

To sum up, populism has historical roots and it is becoming a significant factor in policy-making both in Italy and Central Europe since it offers solutions to those problems which make the majority of society unsatisfied. These problems are similar in both regions – Euroscepticism, migration and security – and the aforementioned parties use more or less the same rhetoric as they argue with the importance of defending national identity, European and Christian values, sovereignty and security. Because of these similarities, it seems that a possible alliance is currently forming between Italy and the Visegrad Group but, in the meantime, it is becoming more and more evident that there is a huge difference between some basic interests which could result Italy's drawing-away from Central Europe.

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**Petra Hamerli** is assistant lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Studies of the University of Pécs (Hungary). She did a PhD in History in a co-tutelle programme at the University of Pécs and at the Sapienza University of Rome. Her research area is Italian-Hungarian diplomatic relations in the 20. century, and Italy's political system in the 20–21. centuries.





# Cultural Trauma – The Case of the Winner<sup>1</sup>

ZOLTÁN BRETTER



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**Abstract:** *My study is an analysis of the emergence of the “Golden Dream” narrative in Romania, right after World War I. Along the way, I make some theoretical contributions to cultural trauma studies. ‘Winner’ and ‘loser’ are terms used to define fixed situations. Usually, only the loser (the victim, defeated) might suffer a trauma, while the occurrence of trauma is denied for the winner (the perpetrator, victor). We shall dig a little deeper and wider, demonstrating that Romania, an overall winner of WWI, will face, right after victory, a ‘cultural shock’ which has to be repressed, as part of the “Golden Dream” narrative. Through a detailed, economic, social and political analysis, I’ll be trying to argue that a shattering trauma has engendered in Romanian society; yet another addition to a whole ‘traumatic history’. The ensuing orthodox ethno-nationalism takes its root from this trauma. From time-to-time, we will take a comparative glance at the trauma of the loser, particularly when we will be discussing the omissions of an otherwise seamless narrative.*

**Keywords:** *cultural trauma, Romania, Hungary, authoritarianism, interwar period*

## Introduction

“Where the disease is various, no particular definite remedy can meet the wants of all. Only the attraction of an abstract idea, or of an ideal state, can unite in common action, multitudes who seek a universal cure for many special evils and a common restorative applicable to many different conditions” (Acton 1862: 3).

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History does not end at one certain point, when victory is declared and defeat is accepted<sup>2</sup>. Both offspring of that very moment, the winner and the loser, continue their war. Life goes on in the 'afterworld' much in the same way as it had in the realm of the living; it merely "changes venue", as Ernst Cassirer puts it (Cassirer 1954: 49–50). So, the parallel history of the winner and that of the loser begins. Both are ambiguous situations. The winner must consolidate its victory, which is a phase of extensively perceived risk and anxiety, over losing what has just been gained; this is the state of mind of a *would-be loser*. The loser must first explain the causes of defeat with this explanation not likely to show that the outcome is the result of its own fault but due to some external circumstances; foreign factors would often be blamed. Then will follow a period of planning the revenge and waiting for proper circumstances to arise; this is the state of mind of a *would-be winner*. Neither winner nor loser accepts its situation; the 'afterworld' emasculates simple reality. Both states of mind constitute a trauma which takes hold on the whole psyche while anxiety and revenge produce cultural narratives.

Taken as a whole, the history of Romania is a patchwork of victories and defeats and the lands that today constitute Romania represent much of a history under foreign domination.

In his scattered remarks, the psychiatrist Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu summarises most poignantly the psycho-cultural or ethno-psychological outcome of the Romanian historical experience. In his essays, he diagnoses a neurosis among the Romanians (Zamfirescu 2012) that, according to him, might be called "Balcanic neurosis". Zamfirescu's main assumption is that Romanians have a long-standing problem with self-esteem. History teaches them that failure is the most constant trait in the history of Romania and consequently shame, even self-hatred and self-contempt is an unconscious collective reaction to this embarrassing memory. Paradoxically, it seems that a deeply buried traumatic history is the explanation for the exaltations of nationalistic hysteria that Romania so often exhibits.

István Bibó, an eminent Hungarian political theorist and social psychologist, employs the concept of hysteria which plays a crucial role in his work and this psycho-cultural concept points to a very similar direction as we have seen in the essays of Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu's "Balkan-neurosis. Bibó concentrates on Hungary<sup>3</sup> and to some extent, on East Central European 'small states' but Romania might easily be included in his theoretical and historical framework.

Bibó describes hysteria as a cultural-psycho-social phenomenon. The sign that a society is caught in the swirl of hysteria is when reality is conceived as a *constraint*, devoid of any alternative; a reality that inherently commands and

2 A comparison of the culture of victor and defeated, though concentrating on the latter, can be found in Schivelbusch, Wolfgang (2018).

3 The link between Bibó's analysis and present day populism is examined by Viktor Glied, „Populist phenomena and the reasons for their success" (in this issue).

dictates a certain direction to action while not subjecting itself to a scrutiny of reasonable people who would find alternatives for that particular action. The situation of constraint has a cognitive effect for it locks the mind in just a tiny parcel of reality; a partial truth about reality. One part of the truth covers all of it. From this point on, the victim (and Bibó is talking about a particular victim, having the Hungarian Trianon-trauma in mind) only has vindications against the rest of the world in the name of that partial truth which dominates the victim's entire existence. If one would translate this theoretical assumption, it would sound like this: my truth is the whole truth and there is no more need for any quest for truth. A new trauma is then born, doubling the already existing one: the fear of losing the truth, which is mine, my beloved and perhaps only specific possession, therefore being absolute. This fear is then the essence of life and becomes part of one's identity. From this moment on, I am perfectly right and no counter-argument can convince me otherwise. The problem lies precisely in that I possess the *Truth* and nothing but the *Truth*. This is the situation of a community that has lost its sense of reality and lives outside it, in a constructed *eternity*. In some cultural trauma studies, this state of mind is described as living in a world that exists 'out of time'. "The perceived unreality of an occurrence is part of what is meant by shock, a numbing of the senses and an inability to accept or take in what has, in fact, happened. There is also a probable mixing of "this has not happened" and "this cannot happen," as well as "this cannot happen here" (Eyerman 2012).

The theoretical background of these insights can obviously be traced back to Sigmund Freud and his diagnosis of hysteria. According to Freud, the non-traumatic (i.e. that which isn't the result of a single traumatic experience) hysteria is "a series of affective impressions – a whole *story* of suffering" (Freud 1893: 290 – emphasis added).

Fundamental to Freudian theory is the idea that mental illnesses are caused by the repression of painful experiences – in the form of neuroses, obsessions and even psychoses. Individuals who are so traumatised cannot act rationally because they live in a world of distorted information and reality. The way of healing (psychoanalysis in the case of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer<sup>4</sup>) is to help people overcome distorted and unrealistic ways of thinking by enabling them to have more and better information about themselves and their situation. "Each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when: we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words" (Freud – Breuer 1895).

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4 Many valuable insights for a psycho-cultural interpretation of hysteria may be found in Freud, Sigmund – Breuer, Josef (1895).

So, the neurosis, which originates in hysteria, is transposed by Zamfirescu and Bibó into the psycho-cultural realm and extended for a long historical period.

On the other hand, the ‘healing’ process, a return to reality, which would have the effect of dispersing hysteria by uncovering disturbing memories, is not as straightforward as it would be in psychoanalysis. In the case of ‘traumatic history’ (‘story of suffering’), a counter-narrative needs to be constructed which would result in disposing of the ‘story of suffering’. Because narratives are social imageries, few, or at the very least, the patient, would be interested in adhering to the ‘story of suffering’, rather, the ‘story of glory’, as a way to cover up the former. Convincing one single person that healing is in their main interest might be possible but such an effort concerning large communities, whose life-world is that of social imaginaries<sup>5</sup>, may prove to be a lot more challenging<sup>6</sup>.

Table 1<sup>7</sup>

1. Historical period	2. Form of government	3. Dominant cultural narrative	4. Special events
1918		Unity	Bessarabia, Bucovina, Transylvania, Southern Dobrogea became part of ‘Large Romania’
1918–1938	Constitutional Monarchy/	Golden Age/Dream came true	Constitution – 1923
	Authoritarian/		
	“mimed” democracy <sup>8</sup>		Land Reform – 1921

5 See: Taylor, Charles (2002).

6 One of the few successful “healings”, the one I call the “Münchhausen-project”, is the German case after WWII and the development of the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*, a new German imagery. (See: Müller, Jan-Werner 2007). Resembling a psychoanalytic uncovering, when Germany had started to face trauma in the late 50s, as a result, a narrative emerged which resulted in a renewal of national identity. In an incredible performance, fierce nationalism was replaced by *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism). In contrast, for example, a return to the “beloved” trauma might be observed in Hungary, as the analysis of the ‘historical constitution’ shows (See Vörös, Zoltán 2016: 25–38)

7 A similar timeline, though less detailed and concentrating only on political periods, is proposed by Schmitt, Oliver Jens (2018): 19–20.

8 Mattei Dogan uses the term “mimed (fictitious) democracy” in an excellent article describing Romanian political dynamics during the interwar period. (Dogan, Mattei. 1995. „Dansul electoral în România interbelică.” *Revista de Cercetări Sociale*. no. 4: 3-23.) First appearing 1946, the article analyses the electoral results of an authoritarian scheme: King dissolves parliament – King appoints a new Prime Minister – Prime Minister organizes elections – Prime Minister’s party wins the elections.

1938–1944	Dictatorships:	Missing narrative: Dissolution of Greater Romania	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Bessarabia lost to Soviet Union – 1939
	King Carol II		
	Marshal Antonescu		2 <sup>nd</sup> Vienna Award – Northern Transylvania lost to Hungary – 1940
1944 August 23 – 1948	Transitional period		
1948–1989	Communist/Stalinist dictatorship	Communism/	Nicolae Ceaușescu takes power – 1965
		Homogeneous nation-state	Nicolae Ceaușescu overthrown and executed – 1989
1990–1996	Transitional period/ Authoritarian democracy	Homogeneous nation-state	Ion Iliescu President – 1992–1996
			New Constitution – 1991
1996–	Flawed democracy <sup>9</sup>	Homogeneous nation-state	NATO membership – 2004
			EU membership – 2007
			Authoritarian attempts:
			Adrian Năstase, Prime Minister, Iliescu president – 2000–2004
			Liviu Dragnea, Head of Social Democratic Party, effective leader of government – from 2016
			Traian Băsescu populist President – 2004–2012

9 The state of Romanian democracy is constantly indexed as a “flawed democracy”, with a score of 6.44 (10 being full democracy, 0 being authoritarianism or dictatorship) in 2017. See the Economist Intelligence Unit’s assessment: <https://infographics.economist.com/2018/DemocracyIndex/>.

## The moment

On December the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918, a purposefully organized crowd, the *National Assembly of Romanians of Transylvania and Hungary*, assembled near the city of Alba Iulia in Transylvania and declared its desire to join their brethren “beyond the Carpathian Mountains”. The 100,000 ‘delegates’ were supposed to represent the ‘Romanian population’ of the historical region of Transylvania, many of whom were wearing national popular clothing. In 1922, Ferdinand I of Romania was symbolically crowned *King of Greater Romania*. The *Orthodox Unification Cathedral* was built between 1921 and 1923. In December, 2018, Alba Iulia was officially declared *Capital of the Great Union of Romania*. This is the exact place where the “Golden Dream” of national unity came true. The “Golden Dream” is a seamless story (some would call it mythology) about the brave millennial fight of the Romanians and their ancestors to re-unite and inhabit a certain predefined/predestined geographic area; a dream that the majority of Romanians are still dreaming but a dream that has become a curse as it keeps the Romanians bound by strong nationalistic sentiments, impeding Romania to opt for a more democratic political community.

Nationalism and democracy are not only the defining twin ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but it seems that they grew apart, resulting in mutual rejection.

Romania has yet to face the dilemma of solving the problem of the contradiction of nationalism and democracy but the “Golden Dream”, most of the time, obstructs these efforts.

## 1918–1939

In the very moment of political unity, unity became a normative concern for the politicians of the age<sup>10</sup>. Beyond the golden veil of the dream, the realization of unity proved to be more troublesome than ever imagined. This dream immediately expressed “desire and doubt”, as Irina Livezeanu (Livezeanu 2000: 4) points out.

The basic statement is that, in 1918, Greater Romania was assembled from five distinct parts, four of them coming from three empires: the Ottoman (Southern Dobrogea but the two Romanian states, Walachia and Moldova, were largely under Ottoman and sometimes Russian domination during the 15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Centuries); the Habsburg Monarchy, later the Austrian-Hungarian

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10 Similarly, as the famous trope of Massimo D’Azeglio and later Gabrielle D’Annunzio says for Italy: “L’Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani” – “We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.” (For a comparison of Italian and Central European populisms and fascisms, see: Petra Hammerli, “Common Points in the Policy of Italy and Central Europe” [this issue]. However, my point is that the investigation might be extended to East-Central Europe, comprising the Balkans as well. See also about the origins and employment of the trope: Hom, Stephanie Malia (2013).



Empire (Transylvania, Bucovina); and Russia (Bessarabia). Later on, we will concentrate mainly on Transylvania,<sup>11</sup> as this part is the common denominator of both ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ traumas.

From a directly *political point of view*, a new class of Romanian politicians has entered the scene of political struggle in Bucharest, the capital city, the place of Byzantine-type politicking: cunning, deception, intrigue, fight for personal influence, short-term alliances and personalization, rather than an institutionalization of politics. This political culture was entirely alien to the political class whose framework of political socialization had been given by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The previous political experience of this class of Transylvanian (and, to a far lesser degree, that of Bukovina’s) politicians centered almost completely around the issue of Romanian national autonomy within the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Suddenly, this new class had to move from Vienna and Budapest to Bucharest, meanwhile losing what was previously its main political agenda. By the end of the 30s, these politicians had already been complaining about the colonization (“centralization”) of Transylvania by Bucharest.

In 1938, a *Memorandum (Memorandul rommânilor din Transilvania /Ardeal, Banat, Crișana, Satu-Mare, Maramureș/ prezentat M.S. Regelui Carol II în 15 decembrie, 1938)*, signed by 50 preeminent Romanian public figures and politicians, was presented to King Carol II in which countless grievances were listed but the main complaints were that people from the Old Kingdom were settled to serve in administration and judiciary. Also, a “rush for gold”, an eagerness for enrichment, brought with it an extended corruption so specific for Bucharest (Boia 2015: 81–83). We have to emphasize that the *Memorandum* was conceived as part of a political struggle directed against the dictatorship of Carol II by the ‘old’ Transylvanian political elite. However, it reflects that the Romanian political and cultural elite was perfectly aware of its cultural difference compared to the Romanian Kingdom but without being able to assert it politically. Any expression of this cultural difference would have amounted to high treason. This episode is recounted here exactly because it shows the extraordinary constraining and real force of the narrative, of the Golden Dream in our case.

Paradoxically, we may say that not only a large number of different ethnic groups but even Romanians of the newly acquired regions had to be assimilated into the already existing Romanian Kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

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11 By Transylvania we understand the larger area, including the regions of Banat and Crișana/Maramureș and by the expression “Transylvania proper”, we mean the area without these regions. Throughout this paper, I am going to use the Romanian names.

12 “I suggest that the “embarrassment of riches” Romania faced with the postwar settlement was an ambiguous and difficult gift. Like the “Trojan horse,” it brought apparent and momentary glory but concealed untold social, demographic, political and cultural challenges.” (Livezeanu, Irina 2000: 7) Note that Livezeanu, in her seminal work, also talks about the “gift” of unification, which is in stark contrast to the official, interwar and present narrative which portrays unification as a millennia-long struggle.

The ‘assimilation’ of Romanians to Greater Romania prevented Romanians from launching any democratic attack on whatever authoritarian rule or dictatorship was bound to establish the real unity of Romanians. As the 3<sup>rd</sup> column of our table shows clearly, there is a strong correlation between the narrative of the homogeneous nation state and form of government that is predominantly autocracy, dictatorship or, at its best, a flawed/authoritarian/‘mimed’ democracy. The dream, which had to be turned into tangible reality, compensated for the failures in overcoming all sorts of economic-administrative-social difficulties brought about by unification, subordinating those to the national success of unity. This emerging orthodox-ethno-nationalism has proved to be the dominant and constant language of the ongoing unification right up to the present day, as neither the success of a recognized democratic achievement, nor the solution of economic problems of a relatively backward country<sup>13</sup> have yet to be able to offer any alternative.

From an economic point of view, unity brought about huge challenges as the level of economic development of the Old Kingdom, in comparison with those three empires to which the acquired new regions previously belonged, presented differences that proved to be very hard to bridge.

In contrast, Hungary, the ‘loser’, has not been forced to grapple with such economic challenges.

In the following table, we find a comparison between Romania and Hungary’s GDP/capita.

**Table 2: Comparison between Romania and Hungary’s GDP/capita**

GDP per capita		Change (dollars, HUN)		Change (dollars, ROM)	Difference, HUN/ROM, %
(1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars) <sup>14</sup>	<b>Hungary</b>		<b>Romania</b>		
<b>Year</b>					
<b>1900</b>	1,682		1,415		118
<b>1910</b>	2	318	1,66	245	120
<b>1913</b>	2,098	98	1,741	81	120
<b>1926</b>	2,162	164	1,258	-483	171

13 “Another reality must not be disregarded and that is the fact that many of the political leaders in the provinces had serious reservations towards some political realities in the Old Kingdom and expressed their criticism of the political principles, corruption, backward state of the peasantry and especially of the centralist policy supported in particular by the liberals.” (Sorin, Radu 1918: 138–167): Romania and the Great War: Political, Territorial, Economic and Social Consequences.

14 The data presented in this table is extracted from the Maddison Project Database, 2018: <https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2018>. The ‘difference’ has been calculated by myself.

<b>1929</b>	2,476	314	1,152	-106	214
<b>1938</b>	2,655	179	1,242	90	213
<b>1948</b>	2,2	-455	816	-426	269
<b>1965</b>	4,41	2,21	2,386	1,57	184
<b>1980</b>	6,306	1,896	4,135	1,749	152
<b>1989</b>	6,903	597	3,941	-194	175
<b>1998</b>	6,464	-439	2,971	-970	217
<b>2008</b>	9,5	3,036	4,895	1,924	1,94

Source: (Maddison 1995); (Maddison 2003) and (Murgescu 2010)<sup>15</sup>

What is especially noticeable is the decrease of Romania's GDP by 1926 (-483 international dollars) and 1929 (-106 – the year of the beginning of the Great Depression). In the same period, Hungary saw a constant increase in GDP. Even if GDP calculations are not entirely reliable for these periods, we will not be off the mark by that much so can draw a relatively accurate general conclusion. Romania has paid, literally, a huge price for unification, while Hungary – strange as it may sound – economically was not visibly affected by losing Transylvania, registering one of its largest increases in its GDP from 1913 to 1929<sup>16</sup>. By the end of WWII, Hungarian GDP/capita was more than 2.5 times higher compared to that of Romania's.

Overall, it might be concluded that the GDP/capita in 1938, presenting small fluctuations after 12 years of unification, did not even reach the level registered for 1926.

Another aspect of the economic problem was the ethnic dimension of ownership. Statistics indicate that in Great Romania, minorities owned more than 51% of individual commercial and industrial firms – out of a total of 229,042 – and Romanians less than 49%. Only in the former Wallachia were the Romanian owners the majority but in Moldova, slightly more than 40% (while Jewish were 52%), in Bessarabia, around 17%, in Bukovina 14% and in Transylvania proper, 36%.

<sup>15</sup> For more details on Romania's economy, see Bogdan Murgescu's magnificent monograph on the subject: Murgescu, Bogdan (2010). Murgescu, regarding the economy of Romania, for the interwar period, argues that, contrary to public memory, these 20 years were far from being the "Golden Age" of economic prosperity.

<sup>16</sup> This statement is rather risky and – I must acknowledge – is largely unfounded. It is a shortcut to research that has to be carried out and not a conclusion of research that has already been carried out. Without these findings, we won't really know if the acquisition of new territories has had any measurable effect on this rather bad performance of economy in Romania regarding the interwar period. Of course, there might be other explanations as well, for example, the land reform in 1921 which created small, economically not viable lots replacing large estates. However, even a superficial approach suggests that integrating different economies that were integrated before in another economic network – Transylvania and Bukovina to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Bessarabia to Russia – might cause a kind of "transformational crisis".

This leads us further to the socio-cultural troubles caused by victory.

According to the census carried out by the Hungarian authorities, the percentage of different major ethnic communities<sup>17</sup> in Transylvania in 1910 were as follows: Romanians: 53.7%, Hungarians: 31.6%, Germans: 10.7%. This general picture should be refined. In rural areas, Romanians had a larger majority, while in some big cities, they were sometimes in perceptible minority.

To suggest the level of cultural shock at national level (as people living in this region might have been used to but now, having the upper hand, they gave free flow of their resentment because of the former ethnic hardships they had to endure), I am going to compile a table<sup>18</sup> that includes the major cities (county capitals) in Transylvania<sup>19</sup> and shows the number of citizens speaking Romanian, Hungarian and German.

**Table 3: Number of citizens speaking Romanian, Hungarian and German**

City	Total inhabitants	Romanian	Hungarian	German
Cluj	100,844	34,836	54,776	2,702
Timișoara	91,58	24,088	32,513	30,67
Oradea	82,687	20,914	55,039	1,118
Arad	77,181	28,537	41,161	4,617
Brașov	59,232	19,378	24,977	13,276
Satu Mare	51,495	13,941	30,308	669
Sibiu	49,345	19,006	6,782	22,045
Târgu Mureș	38,517	9,493	25,359	735

17 Speaking the language of a community meant belonging to it. Gipsies were mostly speaking Hungarian and they were not considered an independent ethnic group. The same is true for the Jewish population and smaller ethnic minorities. Even if this is not an incorrect methodology, it might distort somewhat the results of the census in favour of Hungarians.

18 Extracted from the 1930s census: Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie, 1930 vol.II. Part 2. Neam, Limbă Maternă. Religie [Folk, Mother Tongue, Religion] It is interesting to note that the official document of the results of the census uses the term “folk” [neam], which cannot be translated as nationality or simply as people. Its connotation entails a good deal of ancestral belonging. My translation as “folk” makes reference to the German “Völkisch” expression, which originates in Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s romantic nationalism and is the core element of ethno nationalism (later further developed by revolutionary conservatism and used by Nazi ideology – and today a component of populism). Refer to note **Chyba! Záložka není definována.** as well. The majority population has been greyed out.

19 Transylvania is taken into account here with the regions of Banat and Crișana-Maramureș that historically, for a period as an independent state, belonged to it.

Lugoj	23,593	9,722	6,226	6,756
Dej	15,11	6,114	5,521	158
Bistrița	14,735	5,671	1,479	4,677
Sighișoara	13,033	8,761	7,138	11,394
Alba Iulia	12,282	8,058	2,49	618
Sf. Gheorghe	10,818	2,02	8,357	206
Deva	10,509	5,471	4,298	393
Odorhei	8,518	931	7,295	168
Diciosânmartin	6,567	1,957	3,878	172
Miercurea-Ciuc	4,807	570	4,007	76

Overall, the urban population in Transylvania saw a radical change<sup>20</sup>, if one compares 1910 to 1930. In urban areas, the Romanian population increased from around 20% to 35% and the Hungarian one decreased from around 60% to 37%<sup>21</sup>.

This situation created a sharp division between the ethnically more homogeneous populations who were thus considered more ‘authentic village’, whereas the cosmopolitan city, which was multiethnic, was more populated by ‘aliens’.

The religious divide went along the same lines<sup>22</sup>.

Wallachia, composed of two regions, Oltenia and Muntenia, the Orthodox were an overwhelming majority: 99% and 94% respectively; in Dobrogea, the competing Church was Islam: 72.3% Orthodox, 22.1 Islam; in Moldova, Bessarabia (today: Republic of Moldova), Bukovina, there was an extensive Jewish community: 6.7%, 7.2% and 10.9, while Orthodox was 88.2%, 87.6% and 71.9% (and in Bukovina, 11.5% were Roman Catholic).

20 Some of this change can be attributed to a natural ‘dissimilation’ process, after the long period of assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom.

21 See: (\*\*\*) 1938–1943: 149) Enciclopedia României, ed. Gusti, Dimitrie. This is due in part to the fact that roughly 200,000 Hungarians took refuge in Hungary and also because an intended (the policy of replacing the staff in administration and members of judiciary) and spontaneous (businesses seeking new opportunities) colonization of newly acquired regions had taken place. The colonization was later carried out thoroughly by Nicolae Ceaușescu, beginning from the 60s until the end of the 80s. The major cities in Transylvania, as they were inhabited by ‘foreign elements’, had to be dismantled and in their place, new cities had to be created. This destroying-by-constructing policy had its natural underpinning in Stalinist ideology. Constructing heavy industries, large factories and homes for the displaced rural people forced people to become workers and to comply with the ideology of creating a ruling, working class, loyal to the regime.

22 Data compiled from the 1930 census.

In Transylvania proper, the situation was very complex:

**Table 4: Religions**

Orthodox	27.8%
Greek Catholic <sup>23</sup>	31.1%
Roman Catholic	12.8%
Reformed, Calvinist	15.5%
Evangelical, Lutheran	7.6%
Jewish	2.5%

**Table 5: Religions in Banat**

Orthodox	56.1%
Greek Catholic	3.6%
Roman Catholic	34.2%
Reformed, Calvinist	2.2%
Evangelical, Lutheran	1.5%

**Table 6: Religions in Crişana-Maramureş**

Orthodox	36.8%
Greek Catholic	25.2%
Roman Catholic	15.3%
Reformed, Calvinist	12.8%
Evangelical, Lutheran	1.1%
Jewish	7.0

The Romanian Kingdom suddenly found herself facing alarming yet unknown religious diversity. (It goes without saying that the majority of the rural population was Orthodox and in the case of Transylvania, partly Greek Catholic, with the exception of Szeklerland, inhabited by ethnic Hungarians who were majority Roman Catholic.)

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<sup>23</sup> Ethnic Romanians, accepting the authority of the Catholic Pope but preserving the Byzantine liturgy.

Some other factors have also contributed to the cultural shock and ‘inferiority complex’ of the ‘winner; (and meanwhile, to the ‘superiority complex’ of the ‘loser’).

One tangible element is the literacy rate of the Romanian and Hungarian population, which registered as 34.8% for the former and 54.8% for the latter (\*\* 1938–1943: 147).

From all this data and tables, we may draw up a partial conclusion: the trauma of the ‘winner’ consisted of a cultural shock that was felt mostly in the Old Kingdom. Greater Romania was to be created not only by the enlargement of a previously relatively insignificant country at the borders of Europe and the administrative tasks this enlargement imposed, rather, by an inevitable, although belated, industrial and cultural modernisation as well, under the pressure of ethnic and religious diversity. “The Romanian elites had to cope with regional cleavages and a national and confessional heterogeneity that had hitherto been unknown to the leaders of the Regat [Old Kingdom]” (Radu and Schmitt 2017: 4).

By 1938, the monumental narrative of Great Romania had been created. Under the golden sand of the dream, a traumatic history and the cultural shock of the unification were buried and for a large part, remain there even today. In 1938, the first volume of the monumental *Enciclopedia României* was published. Assembling leading social scientists, philosophers and *homme des lettres*, this narrative of the “Golden Dream” served multiple purposes. The editor of a planned 6 volume set (only 4 were published), Dimitrie Gusti – a path-breaking Romanian sociologist at the time but in the meantime, a supporter of the King’s dictatorship and close to the Iron Guard – the editor, employing somewhat ‘misty’ wording, sets the scene for the mythology of an ever-existing nation that achieved unity, with the *Enciclopedia* as its equivalent in the history of ideas which reflects this unity. This is a teleological narrative of history fueling continuously the ideology of an orthodox ethno-nationalism and the Golden Dream of a homogeneous nation-state which has found its most radical immediate warrior in Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu and in the Iron Guard led by him but which, in milder or harsher forms, survived during the last 100 years.

## Closing remarks

The Hungarian story is based on the moral superiority of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. The key element of this cultural narrative is the ability to form a state. Statehood is considered the top performance of a community<sup>24</sup>. Independence is strongly related to the freedom of the state so Hungarian his-

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24 This utterly German, romantic vision of the state found its full expression in Georg Wilhelm von Hegel’s philosophy of law and was further developed by the Hegelian historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.



torical narrative is most often the history of freedom-fighting. This also suggests that – from the Medieval Age onwards – there was a permanent need to fight to regain the state because Hungary was caught between the Great powers: in this way, an independent state is more an aim than an existing reality.

The Romanian teleological story<sup>25</sup> centres on bravery. The Dacians were brave in fighting the Roman conqueror Traian, the early Wallachian and Moldavian Kings were brave in fighting the Ottomans; later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Romanian Kingdom was brave in fighting for unification of Wallachia and Moldova and soon after, fighting for independence, ultimately getting involved in the Turkish-Russian wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. And then, of course, utmost bravery was clearly shown in 1918 when Greater Romania came into being and so history came to its natural conclusion. This story also suggests that chance should be excluded from the explanation regarding historical realization.

Missing narratives (greyed out in Table 1) tell a lot about the main narratives. World-shaping narrative *cum* reality, ‘moral superiority’, collapses when Hungarians have to face the blame for collaborating with the Nazis in the Holocaust. Romanian bravery would collapse when Romania ceded Bessarabia and Northern Transylvania without any fight. These are the breaches in the wall.

The studies on cultural trauma have certain common characteristics: usually making a sharp distinction between the *perpetrator* and *victim* (‘winner’ and ‘loser’), dealing almost exclusively with the trauma suffered by the victim and utterly denying the existence of a similar trauma for the perpetrator<sup>26</sup>. Our case study would suggest that cultural trauma does affect both parties involved in a conflicting situation. The starting positions are incomparably different but the narratives explaining each position may show striking similarities.

Another common perception of cultural traumas is that traumas are attached to “volcano-like”<sup>27</sup> *events*, rather than long periods of time. It seems that the event-centered concept of trauma is an American or more broadly speaking, a Western category that is rooted in progressivist cultural tradition. Western political realizations (notably: democracy) and the scientific-technological achievements of civilization stay at the top of historical development so they are all indisputable proof of success-stories, even if national histories won’t constitute uninterrupted success-histories. For East-Central European or Balkan states, the traumatic events should be complemented with the notion of

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25 “The historian who stands on the side of the victorious is easily tempted to interpret triumphs of the moment as the lasting outcomes of an *ex post facto* teleology.” (Koselleck, Reinhart 1988).

26 One case in point can be France and Germany where French researchers are outraged at the mere thought that Germans might claim for themselves traumatic experiences as a result of WWII, while they are considered the perpetrators. The perpetrator is guilty and doesn’t deserve the same compassion as the victim. Germans might claim that even if they are denied the status of victim, nonetheless, they suffered a cultural trauma.

27 Trauma is defined by Arthur G. Neal in this way: “volcano-like event that shook the foundations of the social order.” (Neal, Arthur G. 1998: ix)

traumatic histories, where long periods of time might be regarded as enduring traumas. The common outcome is the “Balkan-neurosis” or hysteria, which manufactures harder-than-reality realities through cultural narratives in order to block any exit towards the solution of the conflict between nationalism and democracy. This is only possible when cultural narratives are stretched to incorporate the omissions which were carefully left behind in an effort to get the cultural narrative itself. (This might be the “Münchhausen-project”, referred to in note 4).

Creating a new cultural narrative might prove to be a fantastic endeavor as it contradicts the ‘reality’ already fixed in the existing narrative.

A narrative is meant to be a public discourse or story to create an image. It is not a historical description so there’s no point in confronting it with historical evidence; this is why these narratives are artefacts of cultural archeology.

The *image* freezes historical explanation, rendering it a homogeneous picture of a continuous present. However, there is going to be a breach in the wall, through which another history or reality could be spotted.

“Telling omissions” are those embarrassing rifts that call for historical research and moral reasoning which are so important for a healthy present and realistic future. From the point of view of an existing cultural trauma, these occurrences tend to be fatal, shaking the very foundation of it. Winner and loser are both in love with their own trauma, as it represents the ‘essence of life’.

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**Zoltán Bretter**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Pécs, Department of Political Science and International Studies. Born 1958, studied at Babeș-Bolyai University (Cluj, Romania – philosophy, and history) and Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest, Hungary), M.A. Philosophy (1984), M.A. Sociology (1987), Ph.D. 2002, Political Philosophy (ELTE). Member of Hungarian Parliament (1990–1998). Director of Hungarian Cultural Institute in Bucharest (2008–2012). Teaching at the University of Pécs since 1987, currently Associate Professor. Research areas: political philosophy, history of political thought, history of ideas, theories of democracy, liberalism. Recently working on comparative Hungarian-Romanian political culture.

# Political Sources of Hungarian Soft Power<sup>1</sup>

PÉTER KACZIBA



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**Abstract:** *In the past decade, Joseph Nye's concept of soft power has become a popular tool for analysing and explaining foreign policy directions of countries that lack significant capacities of hard power. Beyond other states, Hungary has also received special attention in this regard as several surveys and indexes have measured a high increase in its soft power efficiency. This paper attempts to analyse how Hungarian domestic and external political approaches supported this assumed progress and seeks to understand how political values, governance practices and foreign policy strategies have influenced the effectiveness of Hungarian soft power. The paper will argue that the recent Hungarian political directions have produced controversial outcomes and the populist orientation has increased and, at the same time, constrained the effectiveness of soft power. It has increased because populist rhetoric has created a much larger international fame and agenda-setting capacity than would have been expected from a small Central European country. However, it has also been constrained because controversial domestic and conflicting foreign policies were rejected by the European moderate majority. As a result, today, Hungarian external policies suffer from a serious deficit of legitimacy and moral authority which significantly limit the presumed progress of soft power.*

**Keywords:** *soft power, Hungarian politics, political values, governance, foreign policy*

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## Introduction

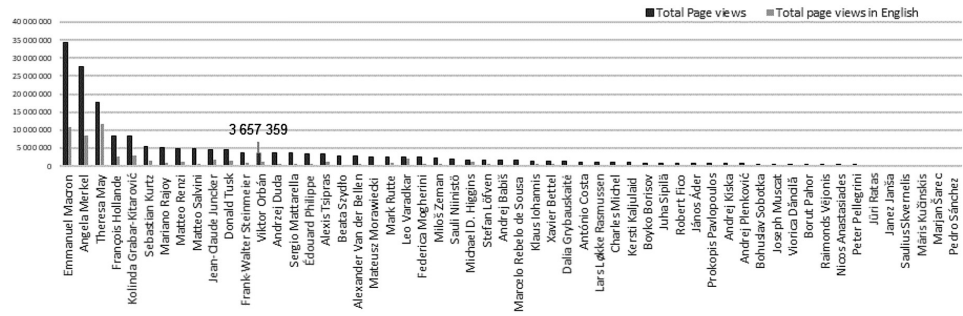
In recent years, objective international surveys began to claim that Hungary managed to increase its soft power capabilities. According to Portland Communication's survey, Soft Power 30, Hungary had the 25<sup>th</sup> most effective soft power in 2018, thus preceding more influential countries such as China (27<sup>th</sup>), Russia (28<sup>th</sup>) or Brazil (29<sup>th</sup>) (McClory 2018: 43). According to the survey, Hungary has managed to improve three positions since 2017 which means a surprisingly rapid change since 2015, when the country did not even make it into the Top 30. Elcano — which measures global visibility concerning military, economic and soft components — has come to a similar conclusion. In this survey, Hungary ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> out of the 110 countries on the soft presence chart of 2017. Elcano's results indicate the increasing effectiveness of Hungarian soft power: in 2016, only 37.3% of Hungary's soft power sources contributed to the country's international visibility, whereas this rate was as high as 41.2% the following year (Olivié – Garcia 2018).

Without accepting the results of these surveys, it can be stated that Hungary's international visibility has truly increased in recent years. As a result of its new Global Opening foreign policy doctrine, Hungary today endeavors to achieve more frequent cooperation with the outskirts of Europe, Asia and some African countries. Hungarian foreign policy is becoming more active — and sometimes more confrontational — in the neighbouring countries as well, whose tendency is related to the current government's more extensive diaspora policy. Viktor Orbán Prime Minister's governments have also established Hungarian cultural posts and institutions abroad, while the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme provides opportunities for thousands of students from abroad to study in Hungary. The Hungarian leadership is also active in exploiting the opportunities provided by the printed and online press; state television broadcasts daily news reports in English, German, Russian and Chinese, while government-related media enterprises are expanding their ties towards neighbouring countries and the Balkans. Besides these direct and government-controlled measures, Hungary enjoys the controversial advantages of indirect international media attention. Although these press reports often criticise the FIDESZ (Alliance of Young Democrats) government, on the other hand, they also provide continuous international attention for Viktor Orbán's arguments and advertise his political strategies (Glied – Pap 2016).

The direct and indirect international effects of the Hungarian leadership's political decisions have not only stimulated international interest towards FIDESZ's arguments but also increased the popularity of Viktor Orbán's political agenda — mainly among the European nationalist and/or Eurosceptic voters and parties. Nowadays, actors of the European radical right-wing consider the Hungarian PM an idol; Orbán has a notably large number of followers on online

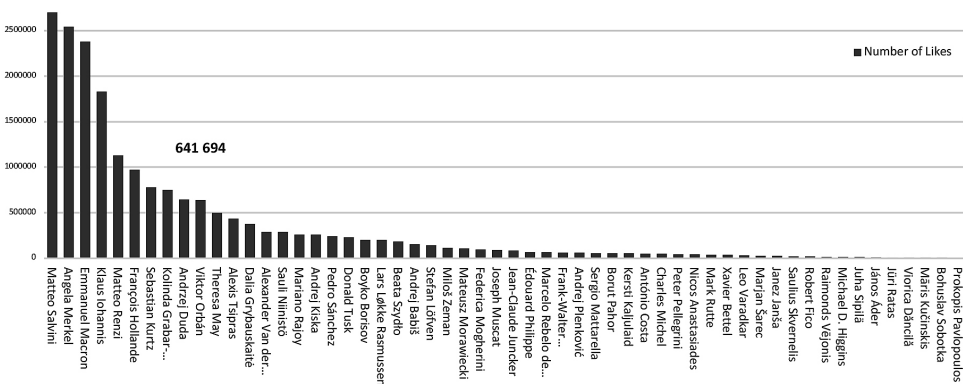
platforms (e.g. Figure 1, 2), while Politico’s Power Matrix survey named him one of the most influential leaders in Europe (Heath 2016). This increasing fame and the political discourse created by it keep Orbán’s agendas in focus and contribute to the seemingly apparent strengthening of Hungary’s soft power.

**Figure 1: Pageviews of selected EU politicians’ Wikipedia sites (7/1/2015–1/4/2019)**



Source: author according to [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), Pageviews Analysis. Data collected on 4 January 2019.

**Figure 2: Facebook page likes of selected EU politicians (1/5/2019)**



has become one of the most important means of Hungarian foreign policy. The political capabilities of Hungarian soft power were based on domestic practices: the political, economic and communication techniques which were used domestically during the extensive centralisation processes have also become the sources of a Hungarian soft power agenda that evidently used domestic examples to gain further popularity in the international arena, especially among those who already sympathised with the Orbán government's unorthodox approaches.

This paper attempts to examine which political factors could have been exploited by soft power means and how politics affected those perceptions that have shaped international opinion on contemporary Hungary. The study has identified three widely interpreted political spheres during the detection of the most effective segments of soft power tools: the *political values*, the *efficiency of domestic governance* and the *attraction of foreign policy* actions. These political segments were determined through bibliographical research, thus the evaluation of Hungarian soft power's political sources will be outlined by existing theoretical frameworks. In the case of political values, I review and examine the attractiveness of the Hungarian government's ideological explanations. In the context of governance, I outline the most important frameworks of governing strategies and analyse the international reputation of Hungarian domestic methods and nationally achieved results. In relation to foreign policy, I identify tools that enhanced the effectiveness of Hungarian soft power, while also pointing out the limitations of the conflicting foreign policy framework.

## Theoretical background

Joseph Nye's original concept of soft power is based on the assumption that power itself has inherent abilities to force our own will on others. Sources of these abilities may be coercion, compensation or co-optive behavior (attraction); the latter perhaps working through the popularisation and credibility of goals which — even without persuasion — can make others accept these aims as their own preferences. According to Nye's theory, every mechanism in foreign policy that achieves its goals by force or compensation is related to hard power abilities, while those based on attraction are more related to soft power capabilities (Nye 2008: 94–95).

According to Nye, soft power is the states' ability to achieve their goals through attraction, rather than through force or compensation. While in the case of hard power, military threat or economic capacity may serve as convincing forces, the sources of soft power are based on factors such as political strategy, culture or ideology which — in the case of effective usage — may influence public opinion of foreign countries. Soft power is effective if the state applying it becomes credible for the majority of international actors and if the desired political, cultural, ideological or other strategic goals become acceptable examples for others (Nye 1990: 166–171; 2004: 2–32).



In his reviewed analysis published in 2004, Nye divides three sources of effective soft power: culture, political values and foreign policy. According to his explanation, soft power becomes an effective tool if the culture of a country is attractive for others; if projected political values show positivity at home and popularity abroad; and if foreign policy creates international legitimacy and moral authority (Nye 2004: 11). In this sense, culture can be interpreted broadly, ranging from academic ideas to Hollywood or Bollywood films. However, the external effects of domestic culture always depend on context, as Nye puts it: “*Coke and Big Mac do not necessarily attract people in the Islamic world to love the United States*” (Nye 2004: 12).

This is the feature which connects the cultural and political segments of soft power. Culture’s attraction abilities are greatly influenced by the political values and foreign policies that the concerned countries represent. In relation to this, Nye highlights that government policies strengthen strategies related to soft power if their most important ideas are based on real national interests and opinions of the wider public and if the government’s credibility can be maintained by honest and straightforward interactions (Ibid 14). Thus, the effectiveness and credibility of domestic politics also affect the efficiency of foreign politics, but domestic trustworthiness and popularity can only be exported if the government is able to display a positive self-image in the international arena (Ibid 12).

**Table 1: Sources and metrics of soft power**

Joseph Nye	Soft Power Survey	Global Presence Report (Elcano)	Soft Power 30
	(Monocle)		(Portland)
Culture	Culture	Development cooperation	Digital (objective)
Political values	Diplomacy	Education	Culture (objective)
Foreign policy	Education	Science	Enterprise (objective)
	Business/Innovation	Technology	Education (objective)
	Government	Information	Engagement (objective)
		Culture	Government (objective)
		Sports	Global culture (subjective)
		Tourism	Luxury Goods (subjective)
		Migration	Technology Products (subjective)
			Cuisine (subjective)
			Livability (subjective)
			Friendliness (subjective)
			Foreign Policy (subjective)

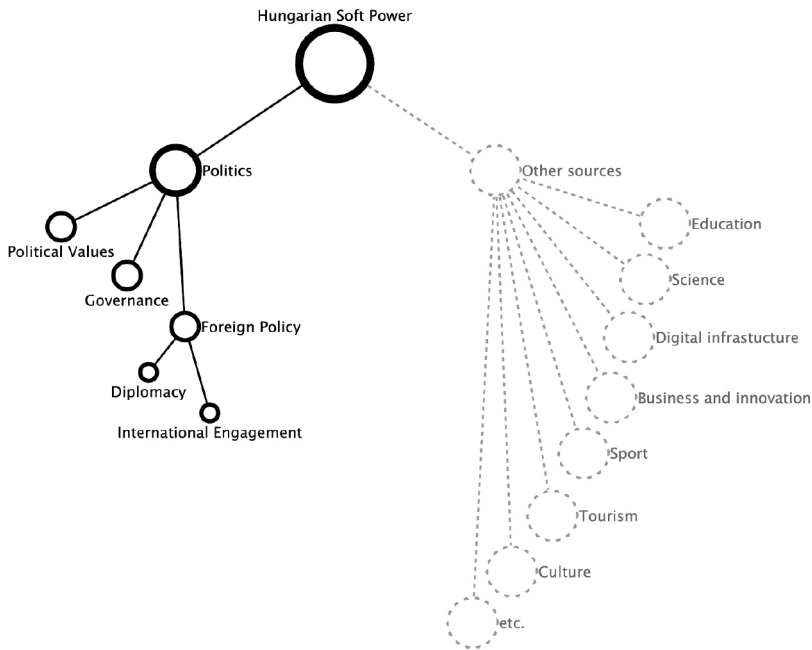
Source: Nye 2004: 12; McClory 2010: 9–13; Olivié – Garcia 2018: 40; McClory 2018: 169–171.

As Nye's approach only makes an apparently wide categorisation possible, surveys that rank and index soft power aim to create more accurate classifications. For instance, a Soft Power Survey, concluded by *Monocle* magazine (Table 1.) – beyond culture and politics – also focuses on education, business and innovation (McClory 2010: 9–13). Besides these, Elcano's Global Visibility Index, as mentioned earlier, also places emphasis on science, sports, technology, information, tourism and views on migration (Olivié – Garcia 2018: 40). The most complex approach is given by Soft Power 30, concluded by Portland Communications, which differentiates objective and subjective components when measuring soft power effectiveness. Concerning objective components, digital infrastructure and engagement are novelties compared to the other surveys mentioned above. The subjective components are based on a poll with samples of 500 respondents and they include attitudes towards each country from the popularity of national cuisine, through the friendliness of citizens to the attraction of foreign policy (McClory 2018: 169–171).

Without claiming exclusiveness of any opinion or classification, we can state that the political sphere itself is named at least in three of the aforementioned approaches. When defining the sources of soft power, Nye identifies political values and foreign policy; *Monocle* encounters government and diplomacy; while Portland Communications measures the role of the political sphere in soft power through the categories of government and foreign policy. Political factors, therefore, have emphasised significance in both the theoretical and practical approaches: the theoretical definitions and the measuring indexes both acknowledge the role of politics in the efficiency of soft power. This observation is not surprising as it is obvious that decisions related to soft power or hard power are both parts of the broadly interpreted politics and policy-making process.

Nevertheless, this study does not examine the role or process of policy-making, rather, it attempts to highlight those Hungarian political factors that may seem attractive or repulsive abroad. To achieve this goal, I shall use political-related soft power metrics of the literature listed in Table 1. From these metrics, political values, foreign policy, government, diplomacy and (international) engagement are the factors that should be distinguished when defining politics-related segments of soft power. Though the role of policy-making is also present in other categories, the latter ones were highlighted because these factors take part directly in a country's political attractiveness or repulsiveness. A state's political values, foreign policy, government, diplomacy and engagement directly influence the political segments of a certain state's soft power, while culture, sports, technology (etc.) attached to the political sphere only do so in an indirect way. (For instance, Russia's foreign policy directly shapes the country's political image abroad, while Russian achievements in sport only indirectly affect the attractiveness of certain Russian policy-making related to sport.)

**Figure 3: Sources of Hungarian Soft Power**



Source: author

As these political sources of soft power were determined through the comparison of different bibliographies, it is important to filter identical items and create groups of units of analysis. This aspect of the study is summarised in Figure 3. In this schematic draft, the broadly interpreted political sphere is part of the soft power sources just as culture, education, business or tourism. Within the political sphere — taking literature reviews into account — I differentiate a segment based on political values, one on governance and another one on foreign policy, the latter of which includes diplomacy and (international) engagement as well. These units outline the analytical framework of following chapters while also marking the most critical hardship of the methodology, namely: political factors of soft power significantly affect each other and are therefore quite difficult to be examined separately. Thus, it is important to highlight that our analysed units – political values, governance and foreign policy – are not separate segments of the political sources of soft power, rather, elements that reciprocally shape and affect the projected political image of Hungary.

## Political values

Political values are closely connected to the most basic values of human societies and — in ideal cases — are recorded in the fundamental values and rights of constitutions and laws. Politics play a crucial role in the definition of morally and legally accepted values. Political decisions show preferences towards values we find positive, while rejecting those we find negative (Bihari 2013). A unique characteristic of positive values is that their positivity is relative. Positive acceptance of values depends on context, interpreter, recipient and on the question of what we consider to be positive or negative. In extreme cases, this relativity characteristic can even be true for the most fundamental values: the positivity of peace may be questioned in war propaganda, the equality of individuals can be doubted in group conflicts, extreme power centralisation may become rational in cases of assumed or real external threats, while environmental pollution may also be legitimised by economic interests. Political socialisation and individual experience are essential parts of the formation of political value preferences, while political choices might also be influenced by innovative political marketing that exploits the failures of previous political practices (Ethridge – Handelman 2010: 69). The failure of practices might undermine the positivity of related values or may transform formerly accepted norms – blamed to be part of the dismissed political model – into negative aspects.

The relativity of political values' positivity or negativity will define the content of the following pages: I will assume that judgments over Hungarian policy-making are characterised by relativity and, thus, depend on context, interpreter, recipient and on the question of what we consider to be positive or negative. For instance, political values and practices represented by the Hungarian government are often criticised by mainstream Western European politics and academics, however, they are increasingly supported by those who are dissatisfied by this mainstream or the values they represent. The dichotomy of rejection and support underlines the fact that there is no unified judgment over politics: values, projected ideas or policies might be considered differently and according to various interests (Geuss 2009: 32–33). This feature of relativity obviously creates opportunities for those who propose less popular policies, however, it also indicates that, in the diverse environment of opinions, still the most popular policies may produce the greatest effects. Thus, in terms of soft power's efficiency, relativity might serve as an opportunity and, at the same time, as a major constraint. An opportunity because, as a result of relativity, even less coherent political opinions might find and impact their audience; and a constraint because, in the end, popularity and the number of supporters will define soft power's effectiveness. As we will see later, Hungarian soft power benefits and suffers from these characteristics: the Orbán government has deliberately exploited the growing dissatisfaction of domestic voters and has created a for-

eign policy that utilises the eroding popularity of liberal democracy. However, it also suffers from the rejection of the European majority who cannot accept principles of illiberal democracy and considers it an extremist idea supported only by a radical minority. These controversial characteristics shape Hungarian soft power approaches which purposefully target the traditions of liberal democracy and attempt to gain support by undermining the values of this seemingly declining political era. This, however, does not mean that Hungarian soft power attempts the impossible and tries to change the values and principles of major international actors. Rather, it means that the current Hungarian government seeks to exploit existing international trends and tries to offer an unorthodox approach to those who already embrace radical policies.

The FIDESZ after coming to power again in 2010, sensibly developed its domestic political strategy based on these assumed trends and developed political values which were domestically popular, supported centralising efforts and helped to maintain government position. The strategy intentionally attempted to distance itself from the gradually discredited political approaches of previous governments and determined itself as the creator of a new domestic order, the initiator of a new Hungarian regime change. The leader of this process, Viktor Orbán, behaved as a reconstructive regime founder leader whose aim has been to demolish the former system and establish a new one (Illés – Körösnéyi – Metz 2017: 116). According to the new rhetoric developed by Orbán, after the seemingly irrefutable reign of “*liberal post-communism*”, the newly formed system, the System of National Cooperation (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere – NER) was going to lead to the establishment of a pragmatic governance that replaced the former era with a new social contract (NER 2010; G. Fodor – Fűrész – Giró-Szász 2010). The pillars of this new contract were work, home, family, health and order, while the exact government programs were characterised by centralised governance, the protection of national sovereignty, statist economic policy, the support of the middle class, focus on historical traditions and the representation of Christian values (Rajcsányi 2018: 130).

New values defined by the NER were based on a wide range of political and economic considerations. In short, political considerations can be characterised by FIDESZ’s requirement of vote maximisation and a need to maintain a governing position. To fulfill these primary aims, the Orbán governments have developed effective methods to influence the political views of the public and, at the same time, assimilated and monopolised historical and contemporary preferences of the Hungarian majority. A value survey, conducted by TÁRKI one year before the FIDESZ’s two-third victory in the 2010 elections, perfectly reflects these societal preferences (Tóth 2009: 13). According to the survey, Hungarian society is characterised by a lack of trust, a sensation of injustice, paternalism and apparent disorder in norms. TÁRKI has also found that the majority of Hungarians consider civil and political rights to be less important,

the trust in institutions is weak and there is a low tolerance towards diversity or atypicality (Ibid).

These features have accurately reflected the historical characteristics of Hungarian society and shown the continued existence of preferences developed during the socialist decades of Kádár's 'Goulash communism', in which the majority sacrificed the opportunity to practise individual and social-political liberties in exchange for the slow but gradual improvement of living standards (Bretter 2014: 152). These historical preferences were not just rediscovered by FIDESZ but were further utilised to promote values that helped the legitimisation of government efforts such as over-centralisation, the creation of a new national economic elite or policies of antimigration. This unilateral value-promoting policy effectively eroded formerly accepted positive principles and, in return for (slow) progress and (assumed) protection of sovereignty, supported the legitimisation of expanding government control over almost all aspects of politics and economy.

Besides politics, the value system promoted by the Orbán governments was also influenced by the ideological approaches of the so-called "economic struggle for freedom". The economy-based values exploited the societal grievances of the 2008 financial crisis which caused severe recession in Hungary and especially negatively affected the middle-class. FIDESZ, which exploited the consequences of the crisis and managed to achieve a two-thirds electoral victory in 2010, promoted values that rejected causes and effects of the financial crisis: the creation of financial independence, the taxing of multinational corporations, the establishment of a national bourgeoisie, the financial empowerment of the middle class were all popular slogans that any voter who was disappointed by the liberal market economy could agree with. According to the new rhetoric, the restoration of the economy has become a freedom fight based on interpretations related to historical dramas and traumas. This struggle was fought against foreign banks, creditors, billionaires and the domestic or foreign representatives of the global financial system (i.e. George Soros, IMF, EU etc.). Gaining back national sovereignty (by extending state engagement and ownership), punishing multinational enterprises (by, for instance, taxing banks), or the selective interpretation of economic competition (during the establishment of a national capitalist class) have all become positive values in the rhetoric of this freedom fight.

Though we will deal with governance in the following section, it is worth highlighting here that the value systems created after 2010 were also influenced by the introduction of controversial governing practices. These practices reflected the theoretical views of the Hungarian right-wing which intentionally attempted to distance itself from the neoliberal good governance model that supported extended pluralism and presumed a self-controlling society. Instead, FIDESZ believed in the effectiveness of a good government model in which the



active, intelligent and strong state is the main force in preserving the balance between market and society, applying problem-based decision-making and representing the majority's interests effectively (Stumpf 2009: 111–112; Böcskei 2013: 2). Values related to this governance model were publicly reviewed in the infamous speech of Tusnádfürdő (Băile Tuşnad), in 2014, when Viktor Orbán claimed that, *“...the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organisation; instead, it includes a different, special, national approach”* (Kormány.hu 2014).

To sum up, Orbán governments during their reign since 2010 have developed new domestic political values influenced by political, economic and governance considerations. These values operate with phrases like: strong centralised government, the protection of national sovereignty, statist economic policy, support of the middle class, consideration of historical traditions and the representation of Christian values (Rajcsányi 2018: 130). During the social embedding of these values, FIDESZ intentionally degraded positive values represented by the previous governments and declared itself the only assurance for the survival of the Hungarian nation. FIDESZ's electoral successes after 2010 demonstrate perfectly that the legitimisation of the new value system succeeded, as the majority of Hungarian society could partly or wholly adapt the new principles.

The domestic acceptance of these principles is a key factor in understanding the international attraction of Hungarian political values. Although these values were developed for a domestic audience, they reacted to problems that are commonly present abroad as well. The stagnation or decline of the middle classes, the presence of inequalities, unemployment, unaffordable real estate prices, the difficulties of small- or medium-sized businesses and social changes related to migration are all examples of challenges that cause tension outside Hungary as well (Glieb – Keserű 2016: 263). Although individual countries and societies give different answers to these challenges, it is still a general tendency that populist parties, who provide easy answers to these difficult questions, are becoming more attractive, while positive attitudes towards more liberal values are decreasing along with the popularity of moderate politicians. Many scholars already pointed out these tendencies during the Cold War (e.g.: Habermas 1975; Huntington 1975), while today, a series of empirical research attempts to understand declining attitudes towards democracy. For instance, Freedom House's survey from 2018 shows that political rights and the opportunity to practise civil rights of liberty have decreased in the past 12 years and liberalism's post-Cold War expansion has practically halted (Abramowitz 2018: 1). Pew Researches' surveys also report the recession of democracy: though in the economically advanced and politically more stable Western countries, democracy is still one of the most supported alternatives, at least a quarter of the respondents



would not object to the rule of a strong leader. It is also indicative that 17% and 30% of the sample claimed representative and direct democracy to be negative, 24% found military governance acceptable, while 52% was dissatisfied with the current framework of democracy in general (Wike – Fetterolf 2018). As it is revealed from the data of Table 2, the acceptance of non-democratic political structures is particularly high in Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter referred to as CEE). In this region, at least 10 countries were measured to have a higher acceptance towards nondemocratic governance than in Hungary.

**Table 2: Percentage who believe that...**

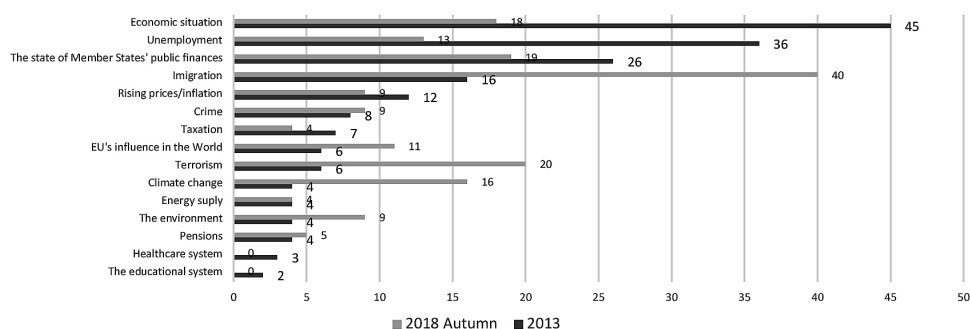
	Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.	In some circumstances, a nondemocratic government can be preferable.	For some like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
Greece	77	15	6
Lithuania	64	15	17
Croatia	54	19	21
Armenia	53	13	32
Romania	52	28	17
Czech R.	49	27	22
Hungary	48	26	18
Poland	47	26	18
Bosnia	46	22	26
Estonia	46	29	20
Bulgaria	39	34	23
Belarus	38	35	17
Ukraine	36	31	23
Latvia	34	30	26
Russia	31	41	20
Moldova	26	44	19
Serbia	25	28	43

Source: Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/democracy-nationalism-and-pluralism>. Survey conducted in June 2015–July 2016.

In parallel to the degradation of values related to democratic structures, the popularity of populist parties is constantly increasing. According to the Guardian's estimation, one in every four European citizens voted for a populist party in 2018, while the European population living under the rule of populist govern-

ments increased from 12.5 million in 1998 to 170.2 million by 2018 (Lewis et al. 2018). The increasing popularity of populist and radical parties naturally causes the expansion of their represented values. These attitude changes are also excellently demonstrated by Eurobarometer's survey that was meant to measure opinions related to the most significant challenges of the European Union. It is highly enlightening to compare all of the results of 2013 and 2018 (Figure 4) but one of the most important conclusions is that fears related to migration and terrorism take the lead by 2018. Consequently, in 2018, the majority of Europeans were concerned about issues that were at the forefront of the Hungarian government's domestic and foreign politics.

**Figure 4: What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at moment?**



Source: Standard Eurobarometer, 2013; 2018: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index>.

After this short review on the trends of democracy and populism, it is obvious that the Hungarian government was able to find its own audience and popularise its political values. One of the most decisive pillars of Hungarian soft power was that Viktor Orbán's populist approach offered a wide variety of potential identification. The values represented by him reflected the preferences of a significant minority of the European voters: the protection of national sovereignty, the empowerment of historical and Christian traditions, the denial of multiculturalism, the 'punishment' of multinational corporations and the rejection of the ineffective liberal elite were all popular phrases even in Western countries. Consequently, unorthodox values and policies have found their external audience, while the political factors of Hungarian soft power have attracted many layers, from Matteo Salvini through Nigel Farage to the average Facebook follower of Viktor Orbán. In this group, Orbán was often considered a political role model, a strong leader figure who stood up against the traditional European elites.

At this point, the most important question is how large and significant the group is that embraces Orbánian values? This question will be analysed in the following section; first, however, the international attraction of Hungarian governing methods should also be examined.

## Governance

While a government's political values influence the country's international reputation by establishing abstract ideological explanations, in the case of governance, the image of a certain leadership and its governing methods may become attractive or repulsive. According to Nye, government policies strengthen soft power if they manage to maintain the government's credibility both inland and abroad through honest and straightforward interactions (Nye 2004: 14). Credibility based on domestic achievements might be exported to the international environment: a government and the methods applied by it may become attractive in the international sphere if the domestic positive image is acceptable and adaptable abroad. From Canada through Sweden to Switzerland, numerous states have attempted to apply tactics that create positive self-image abroad. As we will see later, Hungary's foreign policy shows a more diverse picture in this context. While the examples above, Canada, Sweden and Switzerland wish to create an overall positive picture, Hungary intentionally takes a conflicting approach in its foreign policy. Narratives employed by the Hungarian government are not meant to convince critics, rather, they are intended to show another alternative to those who are dissatisfied with mainstream political approaches (Vörös 2018). Before we study the details of this controversial image, it is worth examining the domestic governance methods created by the Hungarian leadership. These governance methods serve as a basis for the political sources of Hungarian soft power, represent domestically tested practices and are being used to promote and prove FIDESZ's controversial views abroad.

As I pointed out earlier, FIDESZ favors the good government paradigm over the neoliberal good governance model (Böcskei 2013: 2; Stumpf 2009: 111–112). While practices of good governance aim to decrease participation of the state and increase the role of the 'invisible hand', the good government model aims to 'regain' governance. It favors the assistance of an active, strong and intelligent government which, in the name of all-inclusive solidarity, protects public interests from the harmful effects of free market mechanisms (G. Fodor – Stumpf 2007: 93). Consequently, in this model, the state is the most important actor of democratic problem-solving: its active intervention does not only secure the effective and reasonable utilisation of resources but also ensures that everyone can participate in discussions dealing with public affairs (G. Fodor 2008: 133–134). Good government completes democracy in this sense; the active state in the model defends citizens from the repulsive effects of unorganised

freedom, protects exploited layers of society and provides guidance for the most competitive economic sectors.

At least theoretically. In practice, however, the good government model, as with the good governance paradigm, suffers from many weaknesses. The first among these is definitely connected to the idea of representation: it is quite impossible to represent the interests of everyone and even in the best-case scenarios, 'all-inclusive solidarity' may include only the majority. The model also assumes impartiality and neutrality of the state which is too idealistic assumption and ignores the fact that even the most democratic governments need to win elections and thus have their own set of interests. The model also disregards the positive effects of decentralisation while it assumes that all governments are intelligent enough to calculate best-case scenarios.

These controversies overshadowed the ruling periods of the Orbán cabinets as well. Although FIDESZ was able to develop a centralised political, socio-economic and cultural basis for introducing components of the good government paradigm, the established strong and active state was far from being neutral and impartial: it intentionally excluded those who had different opinions and designed governance techniques which helped to maintain power but neglected major elements of the public challenges (e.g. corruption, healthcare, education, housing, etc.). The extensive reform processes following the election of 2010 were determined by strategies for consolidating and maintaining power and, according to Böcskei, they were directed to create a vertical structure of control while ignoring the need for aggregating public interests (Böcskei 2013: 3). These priorities and weaknesses can be observed in the extensive legislative processes after FIDESZ's major electoral victories (2010, 2014, 2018), during which the two-third majorities passed a new Fundamental Law — which has been edited seven times since its coming into force on 1 January, 2012 —, reformed the election law, the municipal system, labor legislation, education, healthcare and the pension system (Sadecki 2014: 11). Though the reforms reflected real problems and offered effective solutions in numerous cases, extensive centralisation, a decrease in checks and balances and the degradation of the division of power served the priorities of the governing elite rather than public interest.

While the executive and legislative power did not make efforts for a widespread representation of interests, FIDESZ — as we have seen earlier — intentionally attempted to reflect and determine the political preferences of the Hungarian majority. This aim has highly influenced governing practices which have begun to use massive campaigning techniques, even in periods when otherwise no elections or referendums threatened the majoritarian rule of FIDESZ. Arthur J. Finkelstein, who was trained during the campaigns of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, played a vital role in the definition of these extensive campaigns. The American policy adviser and his think-tank

team, along with FIDESZ's tacticians, have developed a negative campaign strategy based on the existential fears of the middle classes and have created an overwhelming propaganda scheme that constantly tries to keep the government's rhetoric in focus (Kapronczay – Kertész 2018: 59). Political campaigns, which became regular features of Hungarian daily politics and life, were built on the exaggeration of the former governments' mistakes (e.g. *"They have destroyed Hungary together!"*), the overemphasised achievements of FIDESZ (*"Hungary improves"*), historical and national traditions (*"Hungary is a strong and proud European country"*) and the creation of external adversaries (*"Stop Brussels; Stop Soros; Say NO to illegal migration"*). In these campaigns, a vital role was given to the constantly expanding governmental media empire which attempted to help FIDESZ's political strategies on both traditional and online platforms. These media platforms built up an alternative reality in which credibility was relative and the prevailing 'truth' was always determined by FIDESZ's opinion.

The extensive campaigning has attributed major importance to the personality and character of Viktor Orbán who has been an emblematic figure in the collapse of the Kádár regime and remained popular throughout all the 1990s and early 2000s. His personal successes are largely based on his excellent ability to adapt and transform, which turned the originally liberal FIDESZ into a right-wing, conservative 'catch-all' people's party (Lendvai 2016). The Prime Minister plays a central role in maintaining support of rightwing voters and besides active governance, he is also the most important actor of FIDESZ's political image. This image is designed and influenced by active political communication and campaigning which creates a Prime Minister figure who is pragmatic but value-orientated at the same time. According to the government's rhetoric, his pragmatic political decisions are driven by the values he represents. The protection of Hungarian traditions, culture and overall interest required the development of a strong government which now has the power to protect national sovereignty and wage conflicts when necessary. Thus, in this rhetoric, governance techniques based on a centralisation of power are not tools for reducing domestic liberties and rights but necessary features of defending national interests.

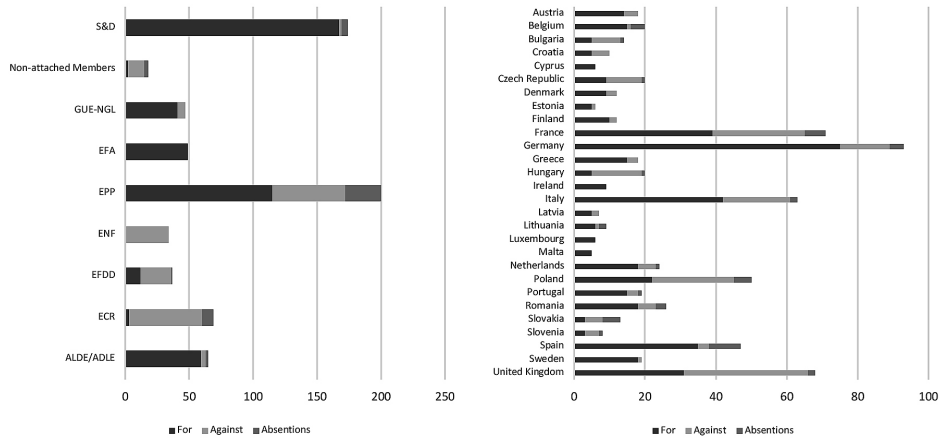
While the election results of previous years demonstrated the domestic effectiveness of these controversial governance practices, external opinions on Hungarian methods showed more diversity. While in the Western part of the EU, FIDESZ's power centralisation and conflicting foreign policy definitely undermined Orbán's government reputation, in CEE – and generally along the peripheries of the EU – the damage was not that obvious. Beyond geographic differences, the Orbán government's external reputation also highly depended

on political opinions and beliefs. While generally the leftist, centrist and even moderate rightwing conservative voters seemed to reject Hungarian practices, the hardline conservatives, nationalists and rightwing radicals appear to have embraced them. The majority of the international press and dominant sections of the academic community were also less enthusiastic when commenting on Hungarian developments, although there is still a large minority who sympathise with Orbánian politics. Since effectiveness of (Hungarian) soft power's political factors is highly influenced by a government's international reputation, in the following sections, it is worth reviewing who embraces and who rejects political factors of Hungarian soft power.

To begin with the favoring opinions, it is apparent that the Orbán government, and the Prime Minister himself, have been particularly popular with CEE voters. Even though CEE members of the European People's Party supported the suspension of FIDESZ's membership in March 2019, the Hungarian government still retains relative popularity among the former socialist countries. According to a survey of the government-related *Nézőpont Intézet*, in 2018, an average of 63% of the respondents from surrounding countries favoured Hungary: 85% of Bulgarians, 74% of Slovaks, 73% of Czechs, 70% of Serbians, 60% of Poles, Slovenians, Croatians, as well as 39% of Romanians had a positive opinion about Hungary (*Nézőpont* 2018a). In relation to the Hungarian government's views on migration, the Slovaks, the Czechs and the Poles expressed positive feedback: an average of 58.3% of the sample from these countries supported the construction of a Hungarian border fence (*Nézőpont* 2018b).

Preferences of the CEE voters were in most cases respected by their political representatives which provided a sort of political shelter for the Hungarian government for years. This tendency was demonstrated by the votes related to the Sargentini report that was submitted to condemn the Hungarian government over the violation of basic European values. The voting distribution showed that the majority of Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Slovakian and Slovenian representatives stood up to protect Orbán, while exactly half of the Croatian delegates also rejected the report. It is also notable that from the political groups of the EP, mainly the extreme rightist, anti-migration (Europe of Nations and Freedom, ENF) and conservative Eurosceptic (European Conservatives and Reformists, ECR) alliances defended Orbán and his party, while in FIDESZ's own family, the European People's Party, only 26.14% opposed the passing of the report (*Political Capital* 2018).

**Figure 5: Voting distribution of the Sargentini report: Votes by Political Groups and Member States**



Votes of 693 MEPs. For: 448 (65%); Against: 197 (28%); Abstentions: 48 (7%). Source: Vote Watch Europe: <https://www.votewatch.eu>.

Voting distribution of the EP’s political groups on the Sargentini report does not only explain the suspension of FIDESZ from the European People’s Party but also demonstrates which political communities favor the Hungarian government in Western Europe. Among those who recently labelled Hungary a positive example, we find mostly populist and rightwing-nationalist figures such as Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, Nigel Farage or Geert Wilders. Beyond the borders of the EU, powerful illiberal allies such as Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also praised the friendliness of Hungarian foreign policy, while Benjamin Netanyahu recently gave positive feedback on the decreasing tendency of anti-Semitism in Hungary (Sternhell 2019). Besides the top politicians, academic experts and political advisers also voiced their sympathy towards Orbán’s methods. Donald Trump’s former chief adviser, Steve Bannon, named the Hungarian Prime Minister a hero, while another former presidential adviser, Jeffrey D. Gordon, claimed him to be one of the best leaders in the world (Micklethwait – Morales – Alfaro 2018; Keszthelyi 2016). Few from the academic arena also embraced the Prime Minister: American historian Daniel Pipes, for instance, called Viktor Orbán the most important European (Pipes 2018).

While CEE countries have an apparent but faltering tendency to support Orbánian practices, public opinions, politicians, academics and journalists in Western Europe seem to follow a more critical attitude. Although positive reactions towards the Hungarian government also have some reserves in those Western European countries where populist movements seem to be attractive, nationalist, anti-migration, Eurosceptic and right-wing radical movements do



not reflect the opinion of the majority. In Western Europe, moderate actors of the political elite, the majority of the academic community and a significant part of the press reject the rhetoric of the Hungarian government. This tendency is clearly shown by various survey results. Just to mention two, for instance: while Czech respondents selected Viktor Orbán as the third most credible politician in 2019, according to Nézőpont Intézet's survey conducted in the summer of 2018, 55% of the Germans judged Hungary unfavourably (CVVM 2019; Nézőpont 2018c).

German public opinion doesn't just reflect the view of many other moderate voters but also mirrors the responses of the Western European political elite. At this point, voting distribution of the Sargentini report, again, an important point of reference in which not just the European left and the liberals condemned the Hungarian government, but former allies such as Manfred Weber, Sebastian Kurz, Joseph Daul and Daniel Caspary have also distanced themselves from FIDESZ's side (Political Capital 2018).

Beyond the public and political elite, the Western press also has a tendency to criticise Hungarian political developments. In 2016, Nézőpont Intézet, after examining 13,261 articles of 18 countries' 115 printed and online media products, came to the conclusion that about 29% of the articles judged Hungary negatively, 68% neutrally and only 3% of the articles considered Hungarian developments to be positive. Germany has proven to be the most critical country towards Hungary that year, where 60% of the articles condemned the country, followed by Israel (53%), Italy (51%) and France (50%) (Nézőpont 2016).

Lastly, it is important to point out that, beyond the aforementioned layers of Western European political societies, the Hungarian government also failed to convince analysts and observers of various international and non-governmental organisations. As a result, from Human Rights Watch through Freedom House to Amnesty International, many IGOs and NGOs have criticised recent events in Hungary and pointed out a tendency of decreasing democratic principles (HRW 2019: 231–233; Abramowitz 2018:16).

All in all, the Hungarian government's international reputation is rather controversial, which highly influences the effectiveness of its soft power. To quote Nye once again, although support of the public masses, credible domestic and external interactions and a positive self-image could increase the effects of soft power, the lack of these elements may also undermine it (Nye 2004: 14). Political projections of Hungarian soft power profits and, at the same time, suffers from these tendencies. Regarding support from public masses, the Hungarian Prime Minister profits significantly from widescale domestic and relative central European popularity: in contemporary European politics, Viktor Orbán is the only leader — besides the resigning Angela Merkel — who has managed to remain in power since 2010. This continuity in domestic policy has greatly increased Viktor Orbán's ability to shape international agendas and has made

him a decisive factor in several significant European issues such as migration politics. This attractiveness originated from domestic stability and regional popularity, however, is greatly decreased by the fact that Orbán is greatly criticised in Western Europe where he is being more and more challenged, both in the political and moral sense.

Western criticism is highly influenced by another crucial factor of soft power's effectiveness: The Hungarian government fails to demonstrate its credibility both at home and abroad. Although it spends billions of forints on political campaigning, the Orbán government only seeks to build communication frameworks of its alternative answers and pay less effort to the validity and credibility of its messages. While at home, mainly widescale corruption charges decrease the credibility of FIDESZ, in Europe, illiberal governance methods, anti-EU rhetoric, Soros propaganda and Russian-friendly foreign policy also hinder Hungarian leadership's international image. These actions push the Hungarian government away from the moderate conservative and right-wing majority and embed FIDESZ in the European far-right. The radicalisation of FIDESZ's political image, however, is often increased by intentional political manoeuvres: moderate European parties within the European Parliament are obviously attempting to decrease FIDESZ's limited positive reputation by labelling the party as far-right, fascist or anti-Semitic.

## Foreign policy

In the last section of the study, I will attempt to identify those segments of the broadly interpreted Hungarian foreign policy that presumably increased and constrained the effectiveness of soft power. My starting point is once again Nye's interpretation, who stated that soft power could only become an effective external tool if foreign policy creates international legitimacy and moral authority (Nye 2004: 11). According to this view, the international image of a government is considered positive when foreign policy is effective and whose success also increases the given leadership's domestic and external political capital. However, in the case of ineffectiveness, the international image might become repulsive, which can critically decrease international and domestic policy opportunities.

The Hungarian leadership has clearly realised these characteristics and, alongside its conflicting rhetoric, has launched several official and non-official strategies to internationally popularise Hungarian views and increase its damaged reputation. One of the most effective fields of these strategies was external communication which was supported by both government-controlled efforts and indirect effects of controversial international fame. The range of direct communication strategies directed to influence foreigners was extremely wide, scaling from the press conferences and European Parliament statements

through the websites of the governmental institutions to official media and online releases. The centralised approach to communication is excellently phrased by the National Communication Office, which states that, *“the aim of the Government is that all financial organisations (...) or institutions under the control or supervision of the Government (...) perform activities that are in harmony with the Government’s communication goals”* (Nemzeti Kommunikációs Hivatal 2019). In the meantime, the latter approach was not only true for government organs and institutions but also determined the communication duties of government-related politicians and state employees. This tendency was also reflected in international communication, traceable in press statements (e.g. interviews with Hungarian FM Péter Szijjártó on CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, CBN etc.), in speeches at international organisations and in FIDESZ’s speeches in the European Parliament (see: EPTV).

The other vital domain of external political communication was state- or government-controlled media. Among these, we must highlight the Hungarian News Agency’s (MTI) English news service, which reports as both Daily Bulletin and Newsletter (Hungary Matters), as well as the Hungarian Television’s daily news program which broadcasts in English, German, Russian and Chinese. The most significant online interfaces designed for international audiences are the English and Romanian pages of [hirado.hu](http://hirado.hu), as well as the English and German sites of Hungary Today/Ungarn Heute, both of which having a large number of followers on popular social media sites as well.<sup>2</sup> Beyond ordinary foreigners, the Hungarian government also pays special attention to reach the Hungarian diaspora abroad, especially the minorities living in the Carpathian Basin. The platforms of such diaspora-directed broadcasts are usually Duna TV and Hungarian National Radio (Magyar Rádió). The latter one — mostly for cultural rather than political reasons — also transmits Polish, Slovakian, Ukrainian, Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian and German programs for the respective minorities living in Hungary. Last but not least, it is important to highlight that communication strategies are also benefiting from the regional expansion of certain Hungarian enterprises which purchased media outlets throughout Central Europe and the Balkans. These platforms often provide further opportunities for the propagation of the Hungarian government’s messages.

According to the Soft Power 30 survey – which was quoted at the beginning of the study – in previous years, Hungary has been advancing rapidly in the field of digital developments. This advance was undoubtedly true for the online political activity of the government, which has become one of the most important segments of communication besides those listed above. The Hungarian government sensibly attached elevated importance to online platforms which are now part

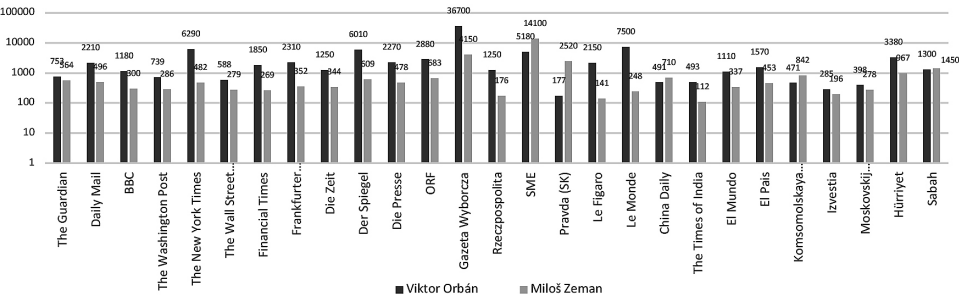
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2 Facebook followers of Hungary Today: 66853; Facebook followers of Ungarn Heute: 16553. Data collected on 28 January 2019.

of bureaucracy, information campaigns and political mobilisation. The official website of the government offers constantly updated content in English and most of the governing politicians, state institutions or press products have official profiles on social media. The most popular among these are Viktor Orbán's profiles who, besides being present on Twitter and Instagram, maintains up-to-date Facebook profiles in both Hungarian and English.

Hungarian leadership's international communication also includes advertisements in public spaces, online ads and uses marketing tools such as promotions, event marketing, presence at fares and sponsorship. Hungary spends billions of forints on such activities as it believes that, *"it is essential for international public opinion — besides domestic public opinion — to learn about the views and opinions of Hungary"* (Nemzeti Kommunikációs Hivatal 2019). It is an important component of this strategy that, besides the directly controlled publications, indirect media publicity can also help to inform international public opinion. Though in this case the Hungarian government's positive judgement is not guaranteed at all, the political messages represented by it can still be indirectly transmitted to foreign audiences. Figure 6 points out the importance of indirect media publicity by comparing publications about Viktor Orbán and Miloš Zeman based on online databases of major international press organisations. The most informative part of the figure is not the fact that Orbán received greater publicity by representing a more conflicting foreign and domestic policy; it is more like the fact that the indirect press releases provided wider publicity for free than direct communication which cost billions.

**Figure 6: Number of press releases about Viktor Orbán and Miloš Zeman**



Source: google.com, last updated on 29/01/2019

Beyond communication, the Hungarian government's international image is influenced by other means of soft power. Among the official platforms, the network of diplomatic missions and state leader visits are worth having a look at. In 2015, Hungary had the 48th largest number of embassy networks out of 196

countries, which were supplemented by a series of consulates and permanent representations delegated to international organisations (Kacziba 2018). Beyond these permanent delegations, visits of state officials also served important foreign political purposes. In relation to official visits, we can attach particular importance to Viktor Orbán once again, as he spent 67 days in total abroad and visited 33 foreign destinations in 2017 (Lőrincz 2018). The country has also practised active cultural and sport diplomacy. Currently, the country finances the operations of 25 cultural delegations abroad whose posts popularise Hungarian culture in cities such as New York, London, Istanbul, New Delhi and Beijing, among others (Balassi Intézet 2018). The Orbán governments have also attributed special attention to the international attraction of sport: while in 2010, only 32 international sports events were hosted in Hungary, this number increased to 113 by 2017 (Jandó 2019).

In recent years, Hungary has also actively attempted to compensate for its anti-migration image by aiding persecuted Christians around the World. This policy developed its institutional frameworks in 2016 when the office of ‘Deputy Secretary of State for Assisting Persecuted Christians’ was founded. The office — under the Hungary Helps program — had already supported Christians with a total of 4.5 billion forints by October 2018, mostly in the crisis zones of the Middle East and Africa. The program supported the (re)construction of religious and educational infrastructure in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Nigeria and it also provided scholarships and education in Hungary for 187 students originating from various crisis zones (Miniszterelnökség 2018). Another popular and much more extensive educational program of the Hungarian government was the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, which financed the higher education of 5,148 foreign students in 2017. The program reflected the geographical orientation of Global Opening foreign policy: during the sample year of 2017, most of the students came from Jordan (476), China (387), Azerbaijan (333) and other developing countries such as Mongolia, Laos, Kazakhstan or Tunisia (Tempus Közalapítvány 2018).

Another highlighted sphere of the government’s external aiding activity has focused on Hungarian minorities and diaspora in the Carpathian Basin. This target group is unquestionably the most successful area of Hungarian soft power. Hungary’s success in this group is based on deep historical and political roots, as well as on extensive economic support coming from Budapest through various programs. These state-based, bilateral or EU-funded programs have aided Hungarian minorities and their organisations in the fields of economy and infrastructure improvement, enterprise and business development, as well as education and culture, among other examples. The Hungarian government has also supported the diaspora by providing citizenship through a simplified naturalization procedure. As of May 2017, the new citizenship law of January 2011 granted about 835.000 new citizenship to ethnic Hungarians residing abroad,

while another 115.000 new citizens acquired nationality through standard application procedures (Kovács 2017). These new citizens have begun to play an essential role in domestic politics as well. Since 2014, the gradually expanding group of new citizens have received the right to vote in parliamentary elections, and especially impacted the proportions of party-list votes.

Finally, it is important to point out that Hungarian foreign policy intentionally attempts to exploit the weight of its international embeddedness. EU and NATO membership of the country is a significant factor of Hungarian soft power and the government intentionally tries to exploit this in its international activities. Outside the EU and NATO, Hungary often acts as an ambassador for these organisations and it tries to exploit the political and economic advantages of its memberships and veto power.

Although positive practices such as the aiding of persecuted Christians or the scholarship programs for foreign students definitely have some positive impacts, good precedents and extensive propaganda campaigns could not annul the negative consequences of conflicting foreign policy. In recent years, beyond the limited efforts to improve the country's international legitimacy and moral authority, the reputation of the Hungarian government was also judged through the overall characteristics of its foreign activities from which the 'domestication' of foreign policy and the Global Opening doctrine have seriously undermined Orbán's government's external image. From these two, the 'domestication' of foreign policy meant that the influence of domestic politics had a much greater impact on Hungarian foreign policy than necessary: by 2014, the frameworks of Hungarian foreign policy were not defined by its international embeddedness and alliance structures, rather, by the needs of justifying internal political developments (Deák 2013: 163). The 'domestication' of foreign policy was a direct result of FIDESZ's efforts of centralisation which did not only limit the decision-making autonomy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also entrusted diplomatic personnel with the task of protecting and justifying domestic developments abroad. Of course, this would not count as an irregular request, but it placed Hungarian diplomacy into disadvantageous situations in which the constant explanations and excuses discredited highly respected diplomats and often undermined their decade-long work. Consequently, the new tasks also required new diplomatic staff: after the elections in 2014, an extensive dismissal process took place in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which replaced Foreign Minister János Martonyi and his wider circle of experienced and proficient diplomatic staff. By 2015, the almost entirely new diplomatic personnel led by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó implemented the new directions without hesitation and exported domestic political views on central issues such as migration, the European Union and economic freedom fighting.

Beyond the large impact of domestic politics on foreign policy, the doctrine of Global Opening has also undermined Hungary's external reputation. The



doctrine, which has diversified Hungary's previously EU-, USA- and NATO-based foreign policy, has evolved from Viktor Orbán's regime founding ideas that, along with domestic changes, aimed to reform external relations and reduce Hungary's unilateral dependence on the West. The original framework of this new foreign policy direction was determined by the doctrine of Global Opening which first redirected Hungary's attention towards the global East (2010) and then to the global South (2015). The often-criticised new approach, according to the official explanation, was meant to respond to new global trends and intended to channel the Hungarian economy into seemingly skyrocketing developing markets. The new strategy made efforts to establish cooperation with globally (Russia, China) and regionally (Turkey) significant countries and also resulted in a more active and sometimes more confrontational foreign policy towards neighbouring countries (Tarrósy – Vörös 2014: 145–151, 155–157).

Though the original economy-oriented idea of Global Opening did not aim to divert the country from its traditional Euro-Atlantic direction, domestic illiberal measures, friendly relations with Russia and anti-EU rhetoric automatically generated antagonistic feelings among Hungary's Western allies. Increasing Western criticism and the Orbán government's harsh responses to it further deepened disputes between Hungary and its NATO and EU allies while raising the importance of Moscow, Beijing and Ankara who were all anxious to exploit the effects of these new oppositions. This parallel process has created an interesting constellation in which Hungarian foreign policy undermined its own legitimacy among its allies; meanwhile, it simultaneously increased its reputation among those who were obvious international competitors of these Western allies.

This controversial international position provided opportunities but also served as a great limitation. In terms of opportunities, Hungary's "rogue behaviour" often increased its agenda-setting capacity, especially within the EU where certain member states and officials hoped to appease and control Budapest by offering larger involvement. The FIDESZ could also exploit its conflicting image in communication terms. Its messages directed to the foreign public began to propagate that Hungary approaches the most critical contemporary challenges differently to others in the mainstream: Hungary considers protection of the states' independence and sovereignty as a vital issue, it rejects the social tensions generated by multiculturalism and migration and views the unilateral dependence on the West as a political and economic mistake. The EU critical approach has personally increased the fame of Viktor Orbán who even began to cherish European dreams after his election victory in 2018. As the Prime Minister put it: *"We thought 30 years ago that Europe is our future; today we think that we are Europe's future"* (Bíró 2019). This future — according to Orbán — will be determined by the committed Christian, anti-communist, nationalist generation of the 1990s who will replace the liberal *"European elite of '68"* (Ibid). According



to FIDESZ's rhetoric, in this process, Hungary has to act as a role model and should export its domestic practices to the European sphere.

Besides the advantages, Hungarian foreign policy – along with the impacts of its soft power – suffers from serious limitations as well. Even though the country has developed strategies to compensate for its controversial decisions, its international legitimacy and moral authority still suffer from policies that are incompatible with values and interests of Western European countries. It is important to point out, however, that these Western European countries are not just random members of the international community, they are allies of Hungary; states which not only share cultural, historical and civilisation similarities with the Hungarians but which have also provided economic and financial support for them. Members of the EPP have sent a clear message to the Hungarian government regarding what they expect in return for this support: FIDESZ should stop campaigning against the EU and must begin to act as an actual ally. Recent consultations between Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini indicate that Hungary may again choose a different, more conflicting path of foreign policy. These conflicting policies will definitely bring some short-term advantages, however, in the long run, they seemingly block the development of an externally positive self-image which would be much needed for the efficiency of soft power. Thus, it seems that foreign policy is the weakest political metric of Hungarian soft power: while some programs definitely increased Hungary's external reputation, the overall characters of a conflicting foreign policy framework oppose the basic theoretical assumptions and practical examples of effective soft power and therefore undermine the international image that other factors may have improved upon.

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to examine which political factors could have been exploited by Hungarian soft power and how politics affected the international reputation of contemporary Hungary. The paper has used three widely interpreted political spheres during the detection of the most effective segments of soft power tools: political values, the efficiency of domestic governance and the attraction of foreign policy actions. In the case of political values, I reviewed the Hungarian government's ideological explanations and analysed their possible international attraction. In the context of governance, I outlined governing strategies and examined the international reputation of Hungarian domestic methods and nationally achieved results. In relation to foreign policy, I identified tools that sought to increase the efficiency of Hungary's soft power, while also pointing out the limitations of a conflicting foreign policy framework.

It became apparent during the analysis that politics and political strategies have truly become one of the most important pillars of Hungarian soft power

and it was also outlined how the country has developed a strategy that intends to increase its external popularity and agenda-setting capacity based on political efficiency. In this strategy, domestically tested political values and governance techniques were projected towards an international audience and were able to gain ground among those who supported populist policies and were critical towards the mainstream political landscape. The success of Hungarian soft power, however, proved to be relative and was seriously constrained by the opinions that condemned Orbán's policies and decisions. Analyses of political values, governance techniques and foreign policy practices all indicated the presence of this duality: success of Hungarian soft power was significantly limited by the conflicting and controversial policies that undermined the legitimacy and moral authority of projected ideologies.

This duality perfectly demonstrates the controversy of Hungarian soft power's effectiveness. On the one hand, it is obviously observable that Hungarian soft power was effective on those who were open and attracted to Orbán's messages and political views. On the other, the political background and orientation of this audience constantly diverts the popularity of the Hungarian government towards the extreme right which is clearly flattering for the populist Orbán but is not advantageous in the long run. Weaknesses of Hungarian soft power are related to this close extremist connection: in the eyes of the Western political elite and the moderate majority, the Hungarian government's reputation is critically negative which hinders the effectiveness of soft power in those groups which are the most important for Hungary from the aspects of politics, economy and culture. These characteristics influence not only the effectiveness of Hungarian soft power but also undermine the country's credibility in the international arena.

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***Péter Kacziba** is an assistant professor at the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Pécs, Hungary. He studied history and holds a Ph.D. in political science. He is a lecturer of several university courses including Theories of International Relations, Theories and Practices of International Conflict Resolution and World History in the 20th century. His research interests focus on conflicts and conflict resolutions in the Eastern Mediterranean region, as well as on the network paradigm of International Relations. Email: [kacziba.peter@pte.hu](mailto:kacziba.peter@pte.hu)*





# Hungary's Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Post-American World<sup>1</sup>

ISTVÁN TARRÓSY<sup>2</sup> AND ZOLTÁN VÖRÖS



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**Abstract:** *This paper seeks to provide an overview of Hungary's foreign policy priorities since the change of the political system of 1989–90. It intends to critically analyse the rise of pragmatism, in particular, in the new policy chapters of the 'Turn towards the East' and the 'Opening to the South', while it also looks at the international system itself with its recent developments and how Hungary has behaved in relation to them. Focal attention will be given to certain regions of the world, together with some global issues such as China, Turkey, Russia and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the ongoing refugee crisis and climate change.*

**Keywords:** *Hungary, foreign policy, post-American world, China, Russia, Turkey, strongmen, Africa.*

## Introduction – Changing foreign policy priorities in the 'post-American world' scenario

The international system has been changing quite fundamentally as more actors carve out space for manoeuvring, articulate interests and views that were not (well-)heard before and in general, build up capacities that are necessary for them to prove that they can also attract the attention of others, as well as grow up as centres of gravity – at least in their own regions. While witnessing the

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‘rise of the rest’ (Huntington 1996; Zakaria 2012), we can follow a new type of play with an increasing number of middle powers wanting to demonstrate their geopolitically articulate aspirations. Geopolitics has not ‘returned’, as opposed to what Mead (2014) proposed, rather, it has always been with us and we have probably entered a new era of geopolitical considerations. With an expanding and rising China, a politically more active Russia and a more inward-looking U.S. along with a hesitant EU with all its internal tensions, a confident-looking North Korea with all its tricks played against the international community, together with a re-confirmation of the importance of national interest across many different regions of the world – in a number of cases, by the accentuated tones of populist governments – we see that there is now time to re-think global order. In fact, as Haass suggests, we need to deal with how to manage the deterioration of the old order along the lines of ongoing challenges, including the “problems of globalisation, especially climate change, trade and cyber-operations” (2019: 29). Although “the world is not yet on the edge of a systemic crisis,” cooperation has been more difficult to materialise as “protectionism, nationalism and populism gain” global attention (Ibid: 30) amidst visible power shifts. Zakaria describes a messy reality in which the U.S. “remains by far the most powerful country in a world with several other important great powers and with greater assertiveness and activity from all actors” (2012: 53). As Brzezinski already in 1997 clearly underlined, “global politics are bound to become increasingly uncongenial to the concentration of hegemonic power in the hands of a single state” as power – both in terms of knowledge and the economy – is “becoming more diffused, more shared, [...] more dispersed” (1997: 209–210). At the same time, identity politics seem to sweep across the international landscape, especially in Europe, as the ‘migration crisis’ is looming and fears are fuelled by several governments. “The region is not threatened by immigrants so much as by the political reaction that immigrants and cultural diversity create,” causing a confusion of national identity on the continent (Fukuyama 2018: 153). Although Slaughter is right about the “rising importance of non-state actors in corporate, civic and criminal sectors” (2004: 32), which certainly requires more thoroughly-planned global governance, with the rise of nationalism in the form of the “assertion of identity” (Zakaria 2012: 41), it is getting more unlikely to foster collaboration. Increasingly, “nation-states are becoming less willing to come together to solve common problems. As the number of players – governmental and non-governmental – increases and each other’s power and confidence grows, the prospects for agreements and common action diminish. This is the central challenge of the rise of the rest – to stop the forces of global growth from turning into the forces of global disorder and disintegration” (Ibid: 34).

Along different geopolitical cleavages – Wallerstein named at least three quite different major ones (2003: 273), i.e. (1) the struggle among the U.S., the EU and Japan; (2) the struggle between the core countries of the North and

countries of the South in other zones; (3) the struggle between the spirit of Davos and the spirit of Porto Alegre – national foreign policies and pragmatism, in fact, pragmatic foreign policies, have been formulated and put in place by many governments. Such policies consider the national interest as a guiding principle, taking into account primarily economic and security-related aspects. Any pragmatic foreign policy is capable of serving economic interests within the confines of geopolitical realities. Actors of an interdependent arena with more centres of gravity make attempts to influence others while strengthening or redefining their positions. All these can be seen in the form of increased international trade, or attracting investment, piercing into new markets and in general, improving global performance in the global economy and international politics.

Zakaria's 'post-American world' is not an "anti-American world" but rather an arena "defined and directed from many places and by many people" (2012: 4). More centres of attention obviously still do not mean that power is equally shared among states – such distribution is "relatively rare" (Nye 2011: 153). Several regions of the world present a number of complex scenarios involving continuous demography booms, rapid urbanisation and human security challenges. The "rise of the rest" is first of all to be understood in a political way as far as more aspirations and wants come along with it for a newly designed global governance structure. "There are more demands for seats at the table and that means that negotiating trade standards, aviation agreements, telecommunications regulations, environmental agreements and others becomes more complex to manage. [...] The problem of leadership in such a world is how to get everyone into the act and still get action" (Nye 2015: 99–100). The leading role of the U.S. in all these processes has been diminishing over time but remains crucial. As no. 1 challenger to the leading role of the U.S., China "has become more willing to assert its interests, particularly in the Asia region" (Fewsmith interview 2019: 44).

In such a changing international environment, rational decision-making remains a key feature of pragmatism for governments. Our intention is to take a look at Hungarian foreign policy via a number of key actors and regions of the world and discuss how Hungary relates itself to them in a pragmatic manner. First, bilateral relations with China are discussed.

## **Relations with the People's Republic of China<sup>3</sup>**

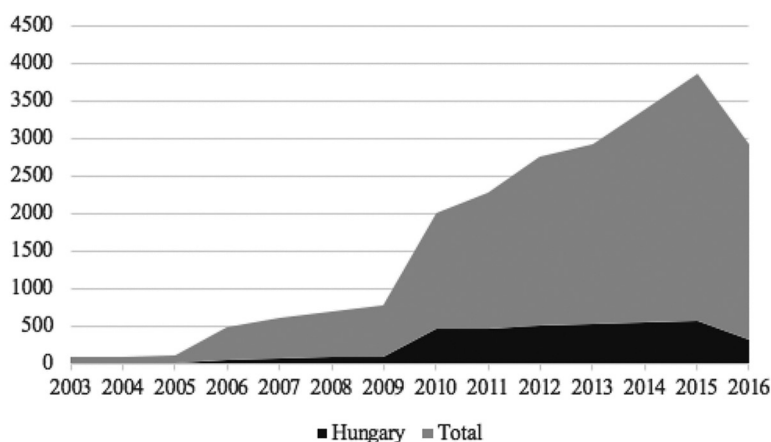
Hungary's pragmatic approach towards PR China is not unique – it was among the first countries in Europe to recognise the potential in trading and cooper-

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3 We published a paper about the V4 countries' position on China in 2014. The chapter is based on that paper, with topical updates and new processes. See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

ating with Beijing, even at a cost of not addressing the issue of human rights violations. Hungary has been establishing itself as a regional partner of China for years now and the Orbán Government's foreign policy openly declared its turn towards China – continuing and obviously extending bilateral relations previously enacted by the left-wing governments headed by Péter Medgyessy (2002–04), Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004–09) and Gordon Bajnai (2009–10) (Kaľan 2012: 61). By analysing Hungarian-Chinese relations, we can realise that, within its own region in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Budapest is competitive. Hungary plays a prominent role in the region's relations with China, especially if we focus on investments or trade relations – not to mention the country as the most popular regional destination for Chinese immigrants. As Szunomár notes, “although Hungary is not a priority target of the intensive Chinese FDI outflows of recent years, since the turn of the millennium, Chinese investments show a growing trend here. Chinese investment in Hungary started to increase significantly after the country joined the EU in 2004. According to Chinese statistics, it means a really rapid – more than a hundredfold – increase from 5.43 million USD in 2003 to 571.11 million USD in 2015” (Szunomár 2017: 4). She also quotes Chen, according to whom: “in 2010, Hungary itself took 89 percent of the whole Chinese capital flow to the region.” and adds, “although this share has been decreasing since then, as other countries of the CEE region also became popular destinations for Chinese FDI, the amount of Chinese investment in Hungary has continued to increase and it is by far the highest in the CEE region” (Ibid.).

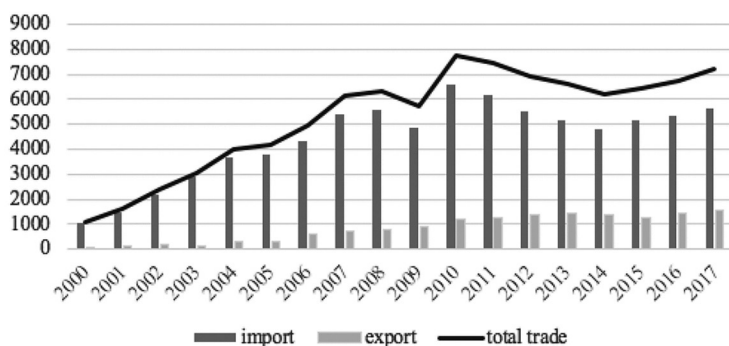
**Figure 1: Comparing OFDI in Hungary to Chinese OFDI in the 16 CEE countries (million USD)**



Source: Világgaľdasági Intézet, MOFCOM (Szunomár 2018)

Trade is also steadily growing, although we have to add, Chinese-Hungarian trade is dominated by imports from China, while exports represent a significantly lower share. “Hungarian exports to China represent around 2 percent of Hungary’s total exports” (Ibid.), while around 6 percent of Hungary’s imports come from Beijing (Szunomár 2018).

**Figure 2: Chinese-Hungarian trade (million EUR)**



Source: Világgazdasági Intézet, EUROSTAT (Szunomár 2018)

The “Eastern Opening”, introduced by the government in 2011, was a foreign policy tool designed to help trade (and investment) ties with countries of the East. The term “East” was never really clarified and Hungary had a wide range of diplomatic meetings from Kazakhstan to China and from Russia to Vietnam but Beijing was always among the top priorities. Looking back again at Figure 1. and Figure 2., however, shows that the policy failed to attract significantly more investments from China or to build up even closer trade ties with the Asian giant. Of course, needless to say, these policies can have long-term effects and Chinese exports to Hungary did start to grow again after 2014 but since Péter Szijjártó, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, declared in 2015 that the “Eastern Opening” was over, the real relevance of this episode is still not clear and we have still to wait for desired consequences – a few hopes at least, as we will see, are there.

In some cases, China also emerges as a sample country which Hungary should follow to gain GDP growth and stability<sup>4</sup> but we already noted in 2015

4 “The world today is about the phenomena that while Europe is arguing, the East is working. In Europe, out of 100, 65 people work; in the US its 75 out of 100, while in China its 85. Sometimes, one feels that the debates on our continent are more honourable than the work and if this is the case, then this continent will fall”. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary in 2015. Source: Website of the Government. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-magyarország-baratai-alapitvány-második-világtalálkozója> (1 August 2019).

that praising the ‘Chinese way of democracy’ over that of what the European Union fosters, is dangerous, together with the emphasis put on manufacturing based on the Chinese labour market producing illogical outcomes, especially when the education sector gets less and less attention and money in Hungary from year to year.

To sum up Hungarian relations with China, in a critical way, the sometimes high expectations were not always planned according to realities. The visit of Wen Jiabao in the summer of 2011 seemed to mean an advantage for Hungary compared to other countries in the region. The Chinese Prime Minister and Viktor Orbán signed twelve agreements, including a one-billion-euro extra credit of potential infrastructure investments but most of those agreements were abandoned, actually representing Chinese foreign policy, since this was also not unique behaviour.

Altogether, reflecting on this reality, Szunomár also notes that: “The China-Hungary relationship is a significant one, however, it shall not be interpreted as a strategic and influential alliance that could affect world politics or economy [...]. In its current stage, the China-Hungary cooperation is more like a new relationship full of potential” (Szunomár 2018). Coming from this perspective, Hungary’s possible leadership in the region is still very fragile and many countries are willing to offer the Asian country immediate and full partnerships – where the China+16 cooperation scheme (16+1) offers a great forum for that. Albeit the situation of Hungary within the region is fragile, Lukács and Völgyi noted that slowly, “one of the main goals specified in Hungary’s Eastern Opening policy, namely to increase FDI from China (Asia), seems to have been fulfilled by newcomers or growing investments of those Chinese companies operating for years in Hungary [...] In the field of trade, it is obvious that China has been paving the way for Chinese products to the EU market in a comprehensive manner but at the same time and in line with the other goal of Eastern Opening policy, the number of Hungarian companies exporting to China has significantly increased and agricultural/food/beverage exports of Hungarian companies can show up successful expansion in the Chinese market” (Lukács – Völgyi 2018: 19).

## Russian dependency?

Hungary always had an ambiguous relationship with Russia: on the one hand, it has been about avoiding or competing with their influence; on the other hand, it is for making the aforementioned goal a complex one: Hungary also depends on Moscow when it is about the energy market. Already in 2014, we noted<sup>5</sup> that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia remained an important partner for Hungary, mainly because of energy trade – although Moscow has always played

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5 See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

a decisive role in Hungarian politics. The ‘shadow’ of the former socialist era and energy dependency, together with the attitude of the actual governments towards Russia, always generated arguments among political actors and thus influenced Hungarian political agenda on multiple occasions.

**Figure 3: Main origin of primary energy imports, EU-28, 2006–2016**  
(% of extra EU-28 imports)

	Solid fuels										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Russia	25.0	24.8	26.1	30.0	26.9	26.0	25.5	28.8	29.1	28.9	30.2
Colombia	11.4	12.7	12.3	17.4	19.9	23.5	24.1	21.8	21.1	23.9	23.4
Australia	12.0	13.0	11.7	7.5	10.5	8.7	7.3	7.5	6.3	9.8	14.6
United States	7.8	9.1	14.0	13.5	16.8	17.9	22.9	22.4	20.5	16.1	14.1
South Africa	23.1	20.1	16.5	15.8	9.6	7.8	6.3	6.7	9.8	7.7	5.1
Indonesia	9.3	7.8	7.3	7.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.0
Canada	2.8	3.0	2.6	1.4	2.0	2.2	1.6	1.8	2.5	1.6	2.0
Mozambique	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.8
Kazakhstan	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.8
Others	8.5	9.4	9.2	7.3	8.6	8.6	7.4	7.5	6.4	7.4	6.0
	Crude oil										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Russia	33.8	33.7	31.8	33.6	34.7	34.8	33.7	33.7	30.4	29.1	31.9
Norway	15.4	15.0	15.0	15.1	13.7	12.5	11.2	11.8	13.1	12.0	12.4
Iraq	2.9	3.4	3.3	3.8	3.2	3.6	4.1	3.6	4.6	7.7	8.3
Saudi Arabia	9.0	7.2	6.8	5.7	5.9	8.0	8.8	8.7	8.9	7.9	7.8
Kazakhstan	4.6	4.6	4.8	5.3	5.5	5.7	5.1	5.7	6.4	6.6	6.8
Nigeria	3.6	2.7	4.0	4.5	4.1	6.1	8.2	8.1	9.1	8.4	5.7
Azerbaijan	2.2	3.0	3.2	4.0	4.4	4.9	3.9	4.8	4.4	5.2	4.5
Iran	6.2	6.2	5.3	4.7	5.7	5.8	1.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	2.9
Algeria	2.5	1.9	2.5	1.6	1.2	2.6	2.9	3.9	4.2	4.2	2.8
Others	19.7	22.4	23.3	21.8	21.6	16.1	20.9	19.7	18.7	19.0	17.0
	Natural gas										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Russia	39.3	38.7	37.4	33.0	31.9	34.4	34.9	41.1	37.4	37.6	39.9
Norway	25.9	28.1	28.5	29.7	27.9	27.6	31.8	30.4	32.1	32.0	24.8
Algeria	16.3	15.3	14.7	14.1	13.9	13.1	13.3	12.6	12.0	10.8	12.4
Qatar	1.8	2.2	2.3	5.9	9.7	11.6	8.3	6.5	6.8	7.7	5.6
Nigeria	4.3	4.6	4.0	2.4	4.0	4.4	3.1	1.7	1.5	2.0	2.0
Libya	2.5	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.7	0.7	1.9	1.7	2.1	2.1	1.3
Peru	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.5
Trinidad and Tobago	1.2	0.8	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.7	0.9	0.6	0.2
Turkey	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Others	8.8	7.3	8.3	9.7	8.2	6.8	4.8	4.5	6.5	6.7	13.1

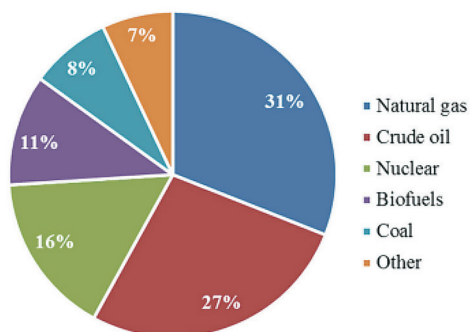
Source: Eurostat

Energy security is one of the most crucial questions for Europe, with Russia dominating the solid fuel, crude oil and natural gas imports of the 28 EU members by 30.2, 31.9 and 39.9 per cent (see Figure 3.), with this dependency even more critical in the CEE region. If we are looking at the total energy supply of Hungary in 2016, it is dominantly fossil-fuel based, only 14.19 was coming from renewables (57% of these renewables were biomass and biogas)<sup>6</sup> but nuclear power also played an essential role, especially in the generation of electricity. According to Szóke, 31% of the total energy supply comes from natural gas, 27% from crude oil and 16% from nuclear power, which is also connected to Russia (Szóke 2018: 5).

6 A sor végén kullog Magyarország a megújuló áramtermelésben. Portfolio.hu, 21 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.portfolio.hu/vallalatok/a-sor-vegen-kullog-magyarorszag-a-megujulo-aramtermelésben.298620.html> (1 August 2019).



**Figure 4: Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) in Hungary**



Source: Szóke 2018.

Though oil trade is relatively competitive, as Ámon and Deák noted (2015: 86) and as a result, Hungary imports from other regions as well, still 50–75 percent of the country's petroleum oil import comes from Russia (according to the 2018 first semester data of Eurostat)<sup>7</sup>. As Szóke underscored, although a lot has been done in the region to combat energy dependency, “according to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), Hungary imported approx. 8.6 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas in 2016, of which 95% came from Russia based on a long-term gas supply contract” (Szóke 2018: 6). If we add that Hungary had already signed a deal with Russian Rosatom and Russia in 2014, about expanding the nuclear power plant at Paks worth around 12.5bn EUR, we can see that dependency is a major question in present-day Hungary–Russia relations.

Besides the energy issue, the sanctions imposed against Russia also have economic relevance, hitting Hungarian agriculture the most. According to Minister Péter Szijjártó, “Hungarian enterprises incurred damages of 6.7 billion dollars in lost export opportunities between 2013 and 2016”<sup>8</sup>. Whether or not these sanctions can help change Russian foreign policy directions, Viktor Orbán was among the first ones to criticise them, saying: “because of these measures, we are losing opportunities. If there were no sanctions, we would be able to cooperate more and make greater advances”.<sup>9</sup> This results in the political ties between Hungary and Russia to blossom which therefore means they are getting closer and warmer than ever: Putin and Orbán regularly visit each

7 EU imports of energy products – recent developments. Eurostat. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/46126.pdf> (1 August 2019).

8 Hungary–Russia relations. Global Security. Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/hu-forrel-ru.htm> (1 August 2019).

9 Hungary's Orbán denounces EU sanctions on Moscow. France24, 15 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20180715-hungarys-orban-denounces-eu-sanctions-moscow> (1 August 2019).

other. Based solely on the front of energy dependency, it is clear how Moscow can influence Budapest, in addition to which some episodes of Hungarian foreign policy can be mentioned indicating even closer ties. The substantial change of the previously anti-Russian Fidesz is clearly visible and shows the obvious adjustment of the party's foreign strategy (Schmidt 2018: 79–81). As the *Economist* noted, “in opposition, the party was a stern critic of the ex-KGB regime in Moscow, berating it for neo-imperialism and shenanigans on energy security and complaining about Western weak-kneedness towards the threat from the east. Now the tone is rather different.”<sup>10</sup>

These episodes of its foreign policy cover a constant criticism of the sanctions, the strange financial deals behind the expansion of Paks (Hungary received the first loan package from Russia but instantly paid it back from market loans because of the better conditions they offered), the Hungarian reaction on the Ukrainian language act which convincingly is dictated by Russia, as well as the even more suspicious Gruevski case, where it seems Hungary helped the former Macedonian Prime Minister and Russian ally to avoid prison and arrive in Hungary where the authorities granted him political asylum<sup>11</sup> – further isolating the Hungarian position within NATO and the EU.

In a report compiled by Political Capital and commissioned by Globsec Policy Institute, authors analysed the vulnerability of Hungary to Russian propaganda based on the position of political parties, the media and civil society. Their results suggested that “the Hungarian political landscape and state countermeasures make the country especially vulnerable to Russian influence, with scores of 4.11 and 4.19, respectively, on a 5-point scale. Desktop research and experts both concluded that the government has a firmly pro-Kremlin view based mainly on ideological, power political and economic-financial (including energy policy and allegedly corruption-related) reasons” (Hunyadi – Molnár – Szicherle 2017: 4).

While Russian ties, especially deriving them from the energy situation, are important and diversifying foreign policy interests are a logical aspiration of the country, there were some alarming steps taken by the government which undermine the credibility of Hungary within Euro-Atlantic organisations and threaten that logical aim. Hungary should actively work on easing its energy dependency, turning towards renewables and looking for new markets, together with trying to look for a position where relations with Russia can be used for signalling the importance of Hungary within NATO as well as in the EU. Taking Hungary's geopolitical and geographical position into account, cutting all such ties is not (and should not be) a reality but more cautious behaviour is definitely needed.

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10 Orbán and the wind from the east. *The Economist*, 14 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/11/hungarys-politics> (1 August 2019).

11 See: Vörös 2018.

## A club of strongmen? – Relations with Turkey

Hungary's global opening with its 'Turn towards the East' chapter covered the countries of the Middle East as well, especially those with abundant financial resources to invest, as both potential short-term and long-term partners for Hungary. We already noted in 2014 that several diplomatic visits were made to the Middle East<sup>12</sup>: Viktor Orbán travelled to Saudi Arabia in 2011 to discuss political and economic cooperation between the two countries. Apart from the Prime Minister's delegation, since the beginning of the new Fidesz-led era, several other missions have paid visits to the Arab World, either on behalf of the government or the City of Budapest and tried to negotiate economic investment projects in Hungary. While no significant deals were made with these countries, the region must be mentioned because of Turkey and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, probably the most successful story of the Hungarian "Eastern Opening" in the region.

Already in 2011, a general foreign policy view of the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hungary<sup>13</sup> considered Turkey an important partner which has just recently become more positive, in accordance with Erdoğan's growing power. On a visit to Turkey in 2017, Viktor Orbán "emphasised that Hungary's loyal support for Turkey is not a one-off event but a consequence of Hungary's strategy, as a conservative country, of prioritising human values. Business and money are important but the most important thing is for one to have friends, he said, adding that this gives rise to obligations and Hungary stands by its friends – even if this is sometimes <uncomfortable>"<sup>14</sup> – reflecting on those countries which are opposing Turkey's EU membership. He said that Hungary is supporting their accession, mentioning: "Whatever anti-Turkish statements there are in important European Union countries, Hungary will never add its voice to them".<sup>15</sup> A year later, Erdoğan visited Budapest, praising relations between the two countries: "We are working hard mutually with Hungary, with which we have deep and rooted ties, to improve our cooperation [...] Our cooperation with Hungary within the scope of international organisations such as NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Union is exemplary"<sup>16</sup>

Bilateral trade is growing at an enormous pace and benefitting the Hungarian markets; Hungary exports twice the amount of imports from Turkey (See

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12 See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

13 The policy view can be downloaded from the following link: [http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign\\_policy\\_20111219.pdf](http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign_policy_20111219.pdf) (1 August 2019).

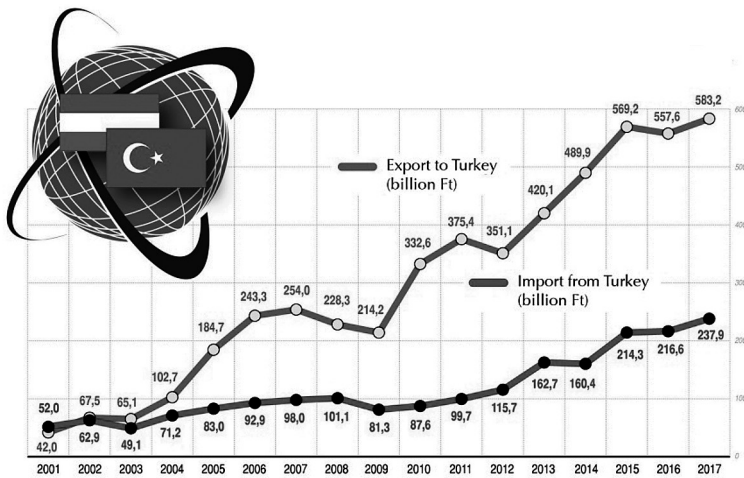
14 Hungary is on Turkey's side. Miniszterelnok.hu, 30 June 2017. Available at: <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/hungary-is-on-turkeys-side/> (1 August 2019).

15 Ibid.

16 President Erdoğan hails Turkey-Hungary cooperation. Hürriyet Daily News, 10 October 2018. Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/president-erdogan-hails-turkey-hungary-cooperation-137724> (1 August 2019).

Figure 5) and Hungary hopes to receive Turkish investments as well in the upcoming years.

**Figure 5: Hungary-Turkey trade, 2001–2017 (billion Ft)**



Source: KSH, MTVA – edited by the authors

Besides successes in trade, Viktor Orbán was portrayed together with Erdoğan (and Putin and Duterte) in a TIME magazine article about strongmen in the world, joining a club of harshly criticised political leaders, somehow reflecting on Hungary’s foreign policy objectives as well (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: A version of the TIME magazine cover for the 14 May, 2018 edition – Later on, a different cover photo was used**



Source: Ian Bremmer Twitter post; <https://twitter.com/ianbremmer/status/991998281642278913>

## Relations with Africa – Focus on education<sup>17</sup>

Turkey may help Hungary successfully re-position itself in the African continent, too. One of the points of the brand new Africa Strategy of Hungary<sup>18</sup> directly mentions Turkey – among other external actors such as Portugal, Germany, Morocco, Egypt, Israel and the United States – with whom Hungary can possibly find ways of collaboration with regard to African engagements.

In a pragmatic perspective, it should not feel surprising that Hungary has also wished to formulate its ‘own’ Africa strategy – as one must have been assured reading the policy document of global opening from 2011.<sup>19</sup> Good reputation and a wide network of personal contacts in many countries of Africa can certainly contribute to successful implementation, if the approach goes further beyond official government rhetoric. Hundreds of young Africans arrived in Hungary during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s with scholarships from the Hungarian state, who represent “an unbreakable link between our country and the continent,”<sup>20</sup> according to the introductory text of the first Budapest Africa Forum, held between 6 and 7 June, 2013, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), predecessor to the African Union (AU). These individuals – who, as Hungarian graduates with partial Hungarian identities, or at least with the feeling of attachment to their former alma maters and Hungarian culture, also bearing the knowledge of the local language – can function as ‘ambassadors’ to foster bilateral ties. “Much to be done”, however, as the academic and NGO circles have been advocating for many years so that such potential commitments are channeled into concrete achievements for the benefits of both sides.

Education, research and culture are extremely important dimensions of pragmatic foreign policy thinking. State scholarship programs can lay the foundations for long-term sustainable bilateral relationships by keeping students who have already obtained a degree in the system as ‘cultural ambassadors’ after graduation. In 2013, according to the authorisation of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education and Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, the Hungarian Government launched the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program which “aims to promote the study of foreign students in Hungarian higher education institutions via the implementation of intergovernmental education agreements and agreements with the ministry responsible for the

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<sup>17</sup> This part is based on Tarrósy 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Published in the Official Gazette (No. 56) of the Hungarian Government on 2 April, 2019: 1177/2019. (IV. 2.) Korm. Határozat [Government Decision].

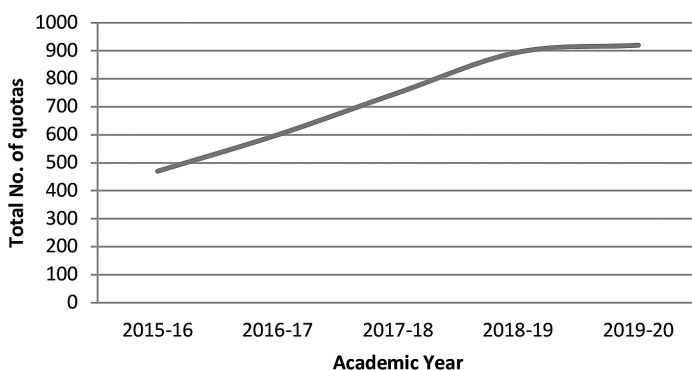
<sup>19</sup> “Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary (2011), at [http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign\\_policy\\_20111219.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign_policy_20111219.pdf). The chapter on Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel runs pp. 47–49.

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://budapestafricaforum.kormany.hu/hungary-and-africa> (1 August 2019).

education of foreign students in Hungary.”<sup>21</sup> István Íjgyártó, State Secretary for Culture and Science in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, stressed that the program “as a foreign policy instrument” was born because of the growing importance of migration for academic and scientific purposes in today’s globalising world. “[...] in the spirit of a kind of cultural dominance, brain drain has begun in the world, even among developed countries, and that countries can gain an advantage which cannot only attract students but also permanently acquire this qualified workforce for their own labour market; therefore, they can count on the knowledge and work of these people in the longer term.”<sup>22</sup> This programme is the revival of the previous ones during the Socialist years.

For the Academic Year 2015–16, Hungary signed bilateral agreements with 7 African countries including Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria and Tunisia, offering annual scholarship quotas to them. In this first year, only 38% of the total pool of 470 such scholarships was approved to applicants. By the Academic Year 2019–20, a 195% increase can be seen in the number of total quotas, this time with 920 places being offered to 15 African countries. In the meantime, Hungary signed agreements with 8 other governments, including South Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Cape Verde. (See Figure 7 and 8) To the latest in the row, the Hungarian Prime Minister paid an official visit at the end of March, 2019. His trip was the first highest-level state visit by a Prime Minister since former Socialist leader Pál Losonczi was travelling to several African countries in the 1970s.

**Figure 7: Total number of country scholarship quotas per academic year**



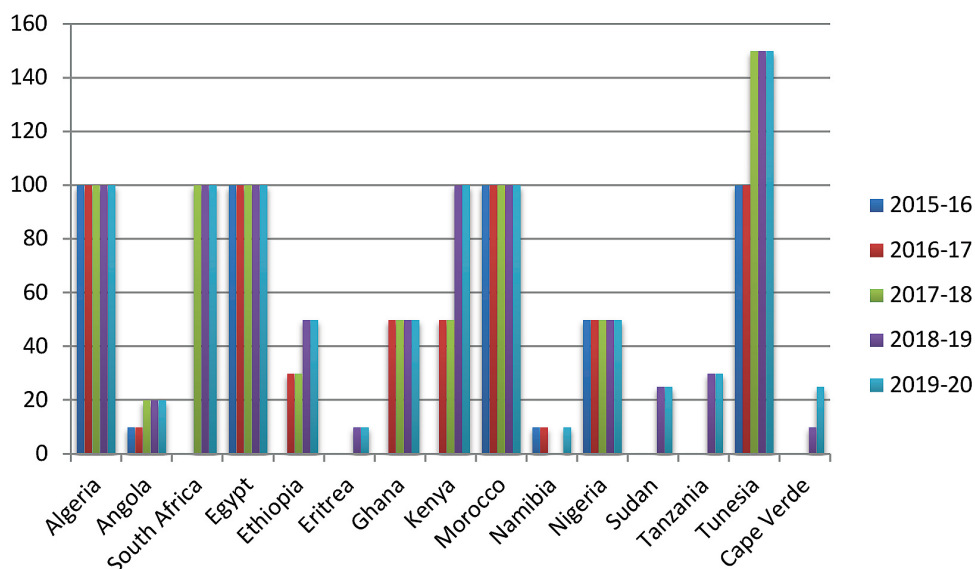
Source: authors. Own edition. Sources of data: Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tempus Public Foundation

21 See 285/2013. (VII. 26.) Korm. Rendelet [Government Decree]: [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300285.KOR](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300285.KOR) (1 August 2019).

22 Országgyűlés Külügyi Bizottsága, Jegyzőkönyv [Protocol of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Hungarian Parliament], 20 May, 2015, No.: KUB-40/72-2/2015., <http://www.parlament.hu/documents/static/biz40/bizjvk40/KUB/1505201.pdf> (1 August 2019).



**Figure 8: Change in annual scholarship quotas per academic year according to African partner countries**



Source: authors. Own edition. Sources of data: Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tempus Public Foundation

As of April, 2019, Hungary maintains 11 embassies in Africa: 5 in North Africa, i.e. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and 6 in Sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola and South Africa. In addition, the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade runs a wide network of honorary consuls and trade attachés. It was also experimenting with yet another soft tool in the form of the National Trading Houses but those turned out to be a failure in the African realm due to several planning-related and management factors and were thus closed down after a short period of time.

Point 12 of the Africa Strategy of Hungary talks about the intent to investigate the possibility to expand this network of representation across the continent, mentioning a new trade attaché position in the Côte d'Ivoire, in particular. Although the document is not a full-fledged strategy, rather a list of tasks and desired actions, it is inevitably the clearest communication for a long time by a Hungarian government to intensify engagements with Africa. The focal point of the arguments in this decision, however, remains the same: to successfully manage the migration of Sub-Saharan Africans by offering them job opportunities in their localities, therefore, contributing to the development of local economies in their vicinities.



## Hungary in its close region

After the change of the political system at the end of the 1980s, Hungary struggled for years with its neighbours, dealing with historical wounds, linguistic differences, nationalistic policies and the Hungarian minorities living outside of the country, all making it difficult to build up peaceful bilateral ties. However, such tensions decreased with the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic organisations: joining both NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004 offered a special role for Hungary: the country became an important bridge to the region of the Balkans. In particular, EU membership helped the countries solve their conflicts as the borders were not separating each other anymore; it also went towards helping ethnic debates get sorted out more easily.

Coming from its strategic position, Hungary has always been active about the integration of the Balkans – partially because of the Hungarians living in Serbia. Hungary hoped to sign the accession treaty with Croatia under their rotating EU council presidency, as well as supporting Serbia's membership to the EU. Beside these activities, the Visegrad Four cooperation is the natural environment for Hungary, a periodically changing (from more active to less relevant) cooperation with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, where recently Budapest has tried to be the engine of multilateral collaboration, emphasising the otherwise questionable EU-level relevance of the V4. In a European Council on Foreign Relations analysis, Janning pointed out that “Hungary is a regional networker with strong ties to neighbouring countries. However, the country has only weak influence beyond its neighbourhood” (Janning 2018). This limitation might be reflected in the country's sometimes questionable behaviour of using vetoes where it is applicable: in the 1990s, Hungary enjoyed its early-received position within the Council of Europe and vetoed the accession of its neighbours in the hope of putting pressure on them: it voted against both Slovakia's membership and Romania's observer status, while it voted against Slovakia's OSCE membership as well.

Just recently, Hungary decided to use the very same tool regarding Ukraine, blocking the NATO–Ukraine committee. The situation is alarming since, together with the aforementioned Gruevski-case, it seems that either Hungarian foreign policy is controlled by an external actor or Hungary is actively working against the Euro-Atlantic organisations and none of it is helping the image and credibility of Hungary, especially since it seems that the attack against a Hungarian Cultural Centre in Uzhhorod, which escalated relations between the two sides and made Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó accuse Ukraine<sup>23</sup>, was a manipulation – uncovered by Polish officials. “A trial of three Polish citizens

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23 Felgyújtották a Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség irodáját. Index.hu, 27 February 2018. Available at: [https://index.hu/kulfold/2018/02/27/ukrajna\\_karpatalja\\_ungvar\\_kmksz\\_tuz\\_iroda/](https://index.hu/kulfold/2018/02/27/ukrajna_karpatalja_ungvar_kmksz_tuz_iroda/) (1 August 2019).

accused of the arson attack on the Hungarian minority centre in the Ukrainian Zakarpattia has started in Cracow. This provocation was aimed at aggravating relations between Kiev and Budapest. Accused Michał P. testified that he was commissioned to organise the attack by a German journalist famous for his pro-Russian views”<sup>24</sup>.

## **The refugee crisis seen from Hungary**<sup>25</sup>

Hungary has a rather unique feature with reference to its migration scene, which basically derives from certain historic tendencies since the so-called Trianon Treaty of 1920, and therefore, the country’s historic heritage and its geographic location: “the overwhelming majority of immigrants are from neighboring countries and mostly have an ethnic Hungarian background” (Kováts – Sik 2007: 158). This is the reason why Hungarian society at large does not really have experience on a greater scale with people from faraway lands and cultures which the population considers different ‘enough’ from their majority society, since they have got used to receiving immigrants of European origin – mainly from the larger Hungarian cultural context. These immigrants speak no different language than the one the citizens of the motherland do, i.e. Hungarian. Up until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the proportion of the immigrant population – that is, “foreigners who stay in the country over a year” (Ibid: 159) – compared with the native population, shows a stable 1.5 to 2 percent, according to the statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), on an annual basis.<sup>26</sup> This is considered rather low in a country with a total population of 9.778 million, according to the 2018 HCSO data. Since 1981, the Hungarian population has been steadily decreasing (see Figure 9 for the last 15 years). “The fall in the population number due to natural decrease was somewhat moderated by positive net international migration in the last two and a half decades. However, in the last decade, immigration surplus could compensate for only less than half of the natural decrease” (Vukovich et al., 2012: 7).

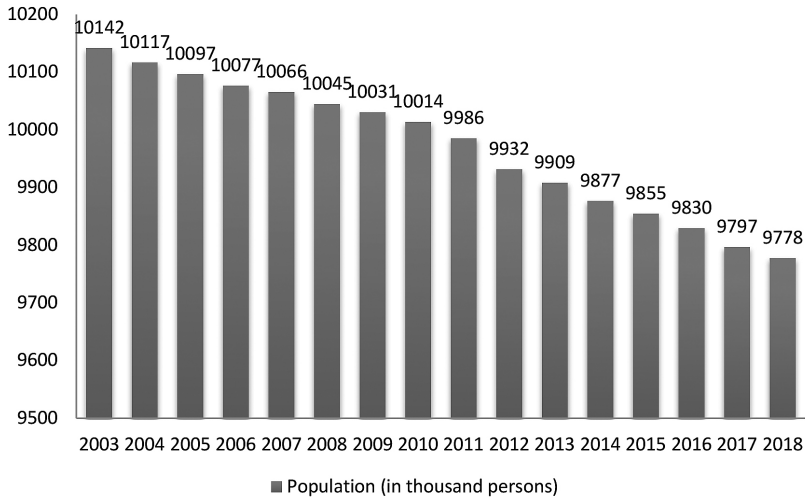
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24 Anti-Hungarian Provocation: Polish Process, German Clue. Warsaw Institute, 15 January 2019. Available at: <https://warsawinstitute.org/anti-hungarian-provocation-polish-process-german-clue/> (1 August 2019).

25 This part is largely based upon a piece under publication. See: Tarrósy 2019.

26 The *International Migration Outlook 2012* of the OECD also confirms this figure. See OECD 2012: 236.

**Figure 9: Change in Hungarian population numbers between 2003 and 2018**



Source: Tarrósy 2019. Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

Since the breakout of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, the Hungarian government favours a strictly anti-immigrant policy, with nation-wide campaigns including slogans such as “If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture!”, or “If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away the jobs of the Hungarians!”. As Drinóczi and Mohai underline: “The billboard campaign and the ‘national consultation’ were successful political tools used to make the Hungarian population fearful of migration, or at least develop increasingly negative attitudes thereto due to economic and security reasons” (2018: 99–100). After the latest landslide victory of his party at the national elections in April, 2018, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán clearly stated that: “We want that Hungary remains the land of Hungarians, the country of the ‘magyars’”.

The incoherent policies towards the refugee crisis are coming from the internal political dynamics of the country: threatening with mass migration<sup>27</sup> gives popularity to Fidesz; at least it was a good recipe to win support in the past few years. It seems that the government has no intention of giving away its trump card: through a very simple logic, they try to sustain the ‘alarming situation’ and prolong the state of emergency (which has been put in place since 2016 and will stay at least until September 2019).<sup>28</sup>

27 More on the European migration challenges see: Glied – Keserű 2016.

28 The situation affected the nonprofit sector as well. See: Kákai 2014 and Kákai 2016 and Pálné et al. 2016.

The logic is simple: when the fence and border control gets expensive, they complain about the EU not financing the border control.<sup>29</sup> When the EU offers help for border control, the Hungarian government criticises Brussels for taking away the country's rights to protect its borders.<sup>30</sup> When the EU tries to put together a solution with the African and Arab League countries to handle the refugee crisis on-site, Hungarian diplomacy blocks these discussions on purpose – being fully aware of the fact that those deals might decrease the number of refugees arriving in Europe. In May, 2018, Hungary (as the only EU country) rejected to sign an agreement in Morocco between African countries and EU members.<sup>31</sup> The Hungarian position derives from the fact that the government rejects all forms of migration and doubts that migration can have positive aspects; this is the reason why they left the UN's Migration Pact as well: "Hungary has zero tolerance for migration" – said Péter Szijjártó the day the Hungarian government vetoed an EU–Arab League agreement.<sup>32</sup>

## Hungary and climate change

While Hungary is aware of the dramatic consequences of climate change and through its president, János Áder, always emphasises the importance of changes at both policy level and within the mindsets of Hungarians, the country still needs to focus more on renewables. When fighting climate change, President Áder is the engine behind Hungary's climate policy, frequently mentioning the threat and addressing the politicians and citizens. At a conference in 2018, Áder János said, "climate change is the largest threat to mankind, threatening the future of human civilisation, [...] In his opening address to the conference, Hungarian President Áder asked participants to put forward their information on climate change with <unrelenting straightforwardness> so that those facts <cannot be bypassed by economic leaders and political decision makers>. Scientists have an obligation to make people and political communities face the consequences of their actions as well as to continually warn them that <the more we postpone our decisions, the more radical changes will be necessary.> Áder insisted that bush fires in several countries, serious draught in Europe and floods affecting millions in Asia this summer have been a <dramatic reminder

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29 Nem fizet az EU a határkerítésért. Index.hu, 1 September, 2017. Available at: [https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2017/09/01/nem\\_fizet\\_az\\_eu\\_a\\_hatarzarert/](https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2017/09/01/nem_fizet_az_eu_a_hatarzarert/) (1 August 2019).

30 Mi az igazság Orbán új háborújában? Index.hu, 18 September, 2018. Available at: [https://index.hu/belfold/2018/09/18/unios\\_hatarvedelem\\_frontex\\_europai\\_bizottsag\\_hatarorseg\\_kitoloncolas\\_orban\\_viktor/](https://index.hu/belfold/2018/09/18/unios_hatarvedelem_frontex_europai_bizottsag_hatarorseg_kitoloncolas_orban_viktor/) (1 August 2019).

31 Hungary to veto EU-Africa Summit Agreement. Daily News Hungary, 28 April, 2018. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-veto-eu-africa-summit-agreement/> (1 August 2019).

32 Hungarian government explains its veto on EU-Arab League migration accord. Xinhuanet, 5 February, 2019. Available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/05/c\\_137800974.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/05/c_137800974.htm) (1 August 2019).

of irresponsible management in the past decades>. He argued that even though mankind has been aware of the greenhouse effects on the climate for 200 years, greenhouse gas emissions are still on the increase. Climate change is <clearly visible and we have sufficient data and experience>”.<sup>33</sup>

There were also signs that Hungary is willing to act – in fact, it was among the first countries (together with Austria, France, Malta, Germany, Portugal and Slovakia) to ratify the Paris Climate Pact<sup>34</sup> and (because of the President) is also active within the UN Climate Framework (Szőke 2018: 10), but later in June 2019 Hungary was among those Eastern European countries, which decided to veto the EU’s 2050 carbon neutral target.<sup>35</sup>

However, as we have already mentioned, looking at the total energy supply of Hungary in 2016, it is predominantly fossil-fuel based, only 14.19% was coming from renewables and 47% of these renewables are biomass, while 10% are biogas and the Government is focusing more on Paks II than anything else. According to a new regulation, installing new wind turbines became impossible: these rules made in 2016 prohibit the installation of wind turbines within a 12 km radius around populated areas (roughly ruling out the whole country).<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding the hectic financial support opportunities in Hungary, the solar power industry is on the rise, proving the maturity of the solar market and the technology itself, achieving a 46 percent increase from 2016 to 2017.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

In our highly interdependent and interconnected world, populism and nationalism (of different types and peculiar character) are on the rise. From a fair and objective academic point of view, globalisation undoubtedly created new opportunities yet at the same time, resulted in some fundamental vulnerabilities. As Bremmer explains, “populists know something important about the people they’re talking to, [as] they understand that many people believe that globalism and globalisation have failed them. [...] They offer compelling visions of divi-

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33 Hungarian President Áder: Climate change threatening future of Civilisation. Daily News Hungary, 3 September, 2018. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungarian-president-ader-climate-change-threatening-future-of-civilisation/> (1 August 2019).

34 Hungary among first EU states to ratify Paris Climate Pact. Daily News Hungary, 7 October, 2016. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-among-first-eu-states-ratify-paris-climate-pact/> (1 August 2019).

35 Four states block EU 2050 carbon neutral target. EUObserver, 20 June 2019. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/environment/145227> (1 August 2019).

36 Wind power utilisation made impossible in Hungary. Daily News Hungary, 23 September 2016. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/wind-power-utilisation-made-impossible-hungary/> (1 August 2019).

37 MANAP: 2017 után 2018-ban is rekordot dönthetnek a napelemez rendszerek Magyarországon. MNNSZ, 19 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.mnnsz.hu/manap-2017-utan-2018-ban-is-rekordot-donthetnek-a-napelemez-rendszerek-magyarorszagon/> (1 August 2019).

sions, of ‘us vs. them’ [...] ‘them’ meaning rich people or poor people, foreigners or religious, racial and ethnic minorities.” (2018: 2) We certainly live in an age of global insecurities and anxieties as we have been witnessing (and experiencing) the rise of transnational terrorism, another intensified flow of international migration, many new geopolitical hot spots, as well as tremendous changes in our weather – in fact, a global climate change – and we struggle with all of them, not being confident in our responses or actions. Different governments have been reacting in different ways to these challenges. “The weakest will fall away, leaving us with more failed states [...] Those still hoping to build open societies will adapt to survive [...] And many governments that have a stronger grip on power will build walls – both actual and virtual – that separate people from one another and governments from citizens” (Ibid: 12).

In this age of global insecurities and anxieties, Hungarian foreign policy can be described – up to a certain point – as pragmatic. Pragmatic since it has overwritten traditional Western orientation of Hungarian foreign policy pursued since the system change by understanding that there are also further opportunities outside of the EU–NATO–immediate neighbourhood policy triangle. This realisation has helped Hungary introduce its policies towards the emerging East and the potential South and while these were never coherent or one might even say successful and long-lasting, at least they proved: giving up all our interests in these countries was a bad decision at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s and Hungary would do well not to end up in the very same street again. That said, this new foreign policy is not always pragmatic, not even logical in some cases. The Orbán government subordinated its foreign policy to internal political goals, losing the credibility of its foreign policy steps. Rebuilding this credibility should be the ultimate goal of the government, therefore, the discourse should not be about offended reactions and confrontation but about trade, business and economic interests; not about political party goals but country priorities.

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**István Tarrósy**, Ph.D. is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Pécs. He also directs the Africa Research Centre. He was a Fulbright Visiting Research Professor at the Center for African Studies of the University of Florida in 2013. His research interests include Afro-Asian relations, the international relations of Sub-Saharan Africa and global African migrations. As a Janos Bolyai Research Fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences his most recent work and book project focuses on the ‘neglected African diaspora’ of Central and Eastern Europe.

**Zoltán Vörös**, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the University of Pécs, Department of Political Science and International Studies and a Visiting Lecturer at the Metropolitan State University, Denver, USA. His research and teaching interests are covering International Relations, Security Studies, Political Geography and Geography of Elections. Currently, his major research project is focusing on the foreign policy of China.

# Development or reflections of the nonprofit sector in Central and Eastern Europe and Hungary<sup>1</sup>

LÁSZLÓ KÁKAI



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**Abstract:** *The CEE countries are celebrating the 15th anniversary of joining the European Union. The ‘feast’ is also of note because the EP elections are just in front of us. Instead of weighing up the expected results, we can surmise that the resolution of Central European voters is now weaker in terms of belonging to the European community and their trust in democratic institutions is also considerably lower than it was in the transition era. But what happened? The answer is too complex to be summarised in just one study; the examination of this issue would require a complex analysis of facts from economic transformation to transitions in social and economic subsystems. Of these elements, I wish to introduce the system-level transformation and the current state of civil society.*

**Keywords:** *nonprofit sector, Central-Eastern Europe, civil society, NGOs*

## Introduction

Social sciences have played a considerable and ‘creative’ role in using the term ‘civil society’. This is well summarised in the dissertation written by János Bocz in 2009, in which the author distinguishes between three different types of terminology concerning content and approaches: “In the *current terminology*, we can see three approaches that lay stress on differing factors in the developed

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Western countries and in Central Eastern Europe but which are in partial overlap. In the first one, mainly used by social scientists, civil society is an *empirical-analytical notion* which is used to describe certain forms of social phenomena and social organisations. This ideal typical approach uses the term in order to understand and describe the complex socio-political reality, its origins, development and consequences. The second one is of *political-strategic nature* and is related to the efforts made to describe what can and what cannot be done in order to reach a political objective. It is in close connection with the existing limitation of power and the relations between state and civil society. As an example, we can mention the politicians who continuously put a limitation on their own power and who promote a transition from an autocratic system into a democratic system. At the same time, we can mention social movements and parties which also use the term 'civil society' as a 'catchword' or to make critiques against current governmental measures, in order to "mobilise" the citizens. In its third meaning, civil society is a *normative, philosophical term* which is not only used to describe social order but to indicate good society itself" (Bocz 2009: 34). According to this post-fundamentalist interpretation, civil society is characterised by the detachment of governmental and civic institutions, publicity, the diversity of communication media not controlled by the state, legally warranted freedom of civic organisations which allows debates to be conducted, as well as accountability and representation (Keane 2004; Seligman 1992).

In trying to define civil society and civil organisations, all the various universities and international institutions emphasise various factors which do not necessarily represent a scientific understanding but render terms easier to comprehend. According to the definition by the analysts of the *London School of Economics* (LSE), civil society means the (unlimited) collective activities that are organised along with common interests, aims and values. Theoretically, these institutional forms can be distinguished from market, governmental and household institutional forms but in fact, this picture is very complex and the borders are in many cases unclear and disputed. Civil society includes various social spaces, social stakeholders and institutional forms and these differ a lot in autonomy, social power and the level of institutionalisation. Civil society is often "made of organisations operating as registered charities, NGOs, community groups, womens' organisations, church organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, alliances and other advocacy organisations."<sup>2</sup>

According to the World Bank's (WB) definition, the term 'civil society' refers to "the non-governmental and nonprofit oriented organisations that actively take part in community life and express the interests and values of their members or

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2 Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS> (18 April 2018).

others, be those of a moral, cultural, political, scientific, professional, religious or humanistic nature”<sup>3</sup> This interpretation says that civil society stands outside the spheres of family, the state or the market. It does not include those doing for-profit activities but includes the professional- and business- (advocacy) like organisations. Formerly, the WB gave a lot narrower definition of the notion of NGOs and included only the professional, advocacy and nonprofit organisations that supplied services and help in the fields of socio-economic development, the protection of human rights or social care. During recent years – probably not independently from the anti-globalisation movements – the World Bank has accepted trade unions, community-like based organisations, various social movements, religious and charity organisations, educational institutions as well as foundations and other professional associations as civil social institutions and potential partners.<sup>4</sup> Overall, we may state that, independently from the way the term ‘civility’ is interpreted, its social importance can hardly be queried. With no active civil society/organisations, there is no independent or democratic political system and there is nobody to defend citizens against state power, the ‘cold reality’ of market mechanisms or the toughness of intolerance against otherness.

This study introduces the way Central and Eastern Europe tackled the state socialist past through Hungary’s example. How did it deal with its forming civil society? Has civil society been able to form an independent entity within the once politicised state in terms of organisation, embeddedness and national economic importance? Has it remained a respected value within the political power system just as it did during the transition?<sup>5</sup>

## System frameworks in brief

The experts who had carried out international comparative research came to the conclusion that the nonprofit sector is far from being uniform and it takes various forms in each country, according to cultural, historical, political and economic relations (Salamon – Anheier 1999: 34). The typology based on the diversity of social roots (*social origin theory*) has proved really useful in describing the differences between countries in terms of their nonprofit sectors (volunteering, donation and sector sizes). Based on this survey, the countries were classified into liberal, socio-democratic, corporative and developing systems.<sup>6</sup>

3 Available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html> (18 April 2018).

4 Available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html> (18 April 2018)

5 The methodology applied while preparing the study was based on one pillar. It was secondary information collection (desk research), i.e. the elaboration, systemisation and analysis of existing data.

6 – Scandinavian or social democratic model (Sweden, Finland and Norway);  
– Anglo-Saxon or liberal model (England, Ireland, Canada, Australia and the United States);

When ‘drawing’ the analysis frameworks, perhaps the developing systems group seemed the most interesting since this practically included a ‘residual’ category that integrated several very different countries into one group (Salamon – Sokolowski – Anheier 2000). Thus, CEE countries were included in the developing model together with the poor/étatist countries. At the same time, in case we do not draw a geographical line but examine the post-socialist countries as a merged category, we will be able to make a more precise distinction, namely because of their political (power relations), economic and social situation (e.g. social classes and institutions), as well as their traditions which differ from one another to quite a considerable extent.

The social and economic embeddedness of NGOs varies among nations. The different national traditions and patterns with respect to the positions of government and the market significantly shape the role that nonprofit organisations play. One major factor is the historic patterns of church-state relations.<sup>7</sup> The type of legal system society uses is also an important (second) factor.<sup>8</sup> A third factor can be described as the influence of the patterns of relationship between government and the third sector is the level of decentralisation of state functions.

The authors of the international comparative research came to the result that the nonprofit sector is not uniformised at all as it represents various forms in each country according to cultural, historical, political and economic circumstances (Salamon – Anheier 1999: 34). The difficulties hiding here are well indicated in Nilda Bullain’s experiment which placed the various European nonprofit organisations into an independence<sup>9</sup> – institutionalisation<sup>10</sup> matrix on the basis of a survey examining European foundations and regulations.

## Central-Eastern European models of the third sector

The decade preceding the political transition brought about the rebirth and re-exploration of civil society all over the CEE region. The preparation and practical implementation of the transition was to a great extent due to civil movements.

According to the features of the above models, Central-Eastern European countries belong more to the developing model. At the same time, in case the

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– Developing or Mediterranean model (Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece);  
 – Continental or Corporatist model (Germany, France, Austria and the Benelux States).

7 For examples in The Netherlands.

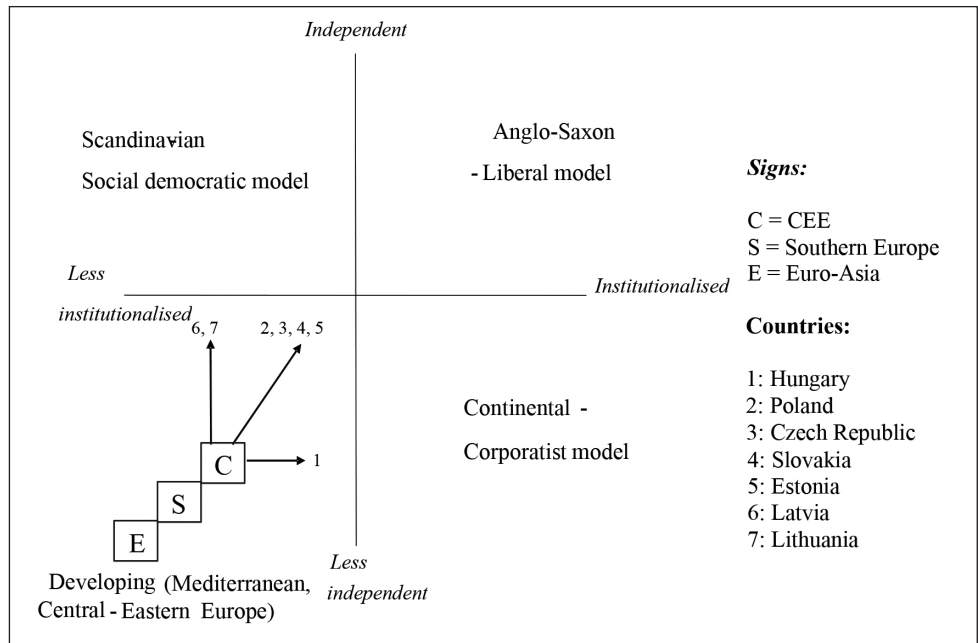
8 Civil or Roman law tend to be more state-oriented, while common laws are more market-oriented.

9 The place taken on the *independence axis* shows the level of independence in a political, professional and financial sense, the level of the autonomy of the organisations and the diversification of their income structure.

10 The place taken on the *institutionalisation axis* depends on the scale of the given sector, the amount of its revenue, the number of its employees, the professionalisation of the organisations and the level to which the sector is able to perform state-welfare functions

border line is not drawn according to geography and the post-socialist countries are examined as a major category, we can make a much more subtle difference. Owing to their political, economic, social situation and traditions, the post-socialist countries show considerable differences. All this is properly presented in the analysis made by Roland Majlath, who completed Nilda Bullain's survey with useful aspects (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The positions of post-socialist countries in the independence-institutionalisation matrix**



Source: Majláth 2009: 66. Kákai 2016: 75.

So the nonprofit sectors of the CEE countries were deeply affected by the destructive and obstructive effects exerted by the Soviet-like regimes. In Central and Eastern Europe, the development of the nonprofit sector is basically connected to the revolutions of 1989. Except for a short period, civil society was practically destroyed in the communist era. It was only Hungary, Poland and the former Yugoslavia where limited pluralism was allowed at universities and in arts and culture. The renewed appearance of civil society was prepared by the Solidarity movement in Poland, by various small clubs and societies in Hungary and by the peace and green movements in Czechoslovakia (Kaldor – Vejvoda 1997: 20–22). Apparently, the civic sector is at an extremely small scale in these countries (Romania, Bulgaria). It employs only 0.8 percent of the economically active population which is only one tenth of the Western European average. In state

socialism, the civic sector was in an ‘embryonic’ state and was only allowed to engage in spare time activities. Time has brought about considerable changes in several fields (education, social care, health care, etc.) since then but these changes are in close connection with the reduction of governmental activity in these areas. Support gained as personal donations make quite a high proportion of the income of the nonprofit sector, while governmental contributions amount to only one third of the Western European average (Salamon – Sokolowski – List 2003: 54). The CEE countries have seen great development.

- The civil sector of each country in the post-socialist region set out from a less institutionalised and less independent position during the transition times; however, the starting point of the three regions – Central Europe, Southern Europe and Euro-Asia<sup>11</sup> – showed differences. The civil sectors of the Central Eastern European countries had the best initial positions and it is them who have made the biggest step towards the social-democratic, liberal or corporative model.
- The states of Southern Europe compose a mixed group, however, they are similar in being less mobile in the independence-institutionalisation matrix, taking an intermediate position between the civic sectors of the CEE countries and the Euro-Asian region.
- Euro-Asian countries have the most static civic sectors: the region is somewhat odd, even in the Mediterranean (developing) model since in many cases, even the justification of civil organisations is queried by these states.
- Within the different categories of regions, the civil sectors of some countries demonstrate really good performance (Ukraine within Euro-Asia), while in other cases, this is just the other way round (Serbia in Southern Europe) – in the former one, changes were brought about by the ‘Orange revolution’ and the ‘Bulldozer revolution’ in the latter (Kákai 2009).

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11 This category includes mainly the successor countries from the Caucasian region that were established subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union.



**Table 1: Overview of economic data of civil society in the CEE**

	Population in millions	GDP Growth (annual %)	GDP per capita (index EU=100)	Value added as % of GDP	Number of employees	Number of employees in CSOs	% of employment in CSOs	Active CSOs	Active CSOs/1000 citizens	% volunteer engagement
Austria	8.50	0.86	127	2.20	3,600,000	234	6.50	60	7.6	27.1
Czech Republic	10.50	4,2	85	1.77	5,023,923	105	2.9	127,3	12.13	34.5
Hungary	9.87	2.94	68	1.55	4,550,000	168,35	3.70	64	6.47	34.3
Poland	38.50	3.65	69	1.40	16,800,000	151,2	0.90	80	2.8	37.0
Slovakia	5.40	3.60	77	0.98	2,200,000	31,9	1.45	13,4	9.70	27.5
Croatia	4.30	1.64	58	n/a	2,200,000	34,32	1.56	57,9	13.70	8.8
Slovenia	2.6	2.88	83	2.6	820	8,364	1.2	28,6	13.90	18.0
Bulgaria	7.60	2.97	46	n/a	2,220,000	13,32	0.60	9,5	1.25	10.0
Romania	20.00	3.74	57	0.60	4,700,000	56,4	1.20	26	1.30	12.8
Albania	2.80	2.56	30	0.28	1,040,000	7,488	0.72	2,4	0.87	20.3
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3.80	3.16	29	0.60	685	2,603	0.38	6,6	1.71	7.9
Kosovo	1.80	3.62	n/a	n/a	250	6,45	2.58	8	4.44	8.0
Macedonia	2.7	3.67	37	0.96	500	1,9	0.38	4,2	2.00	28.6
Moldova	3.60	-0.50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	0.54	18.2
Montenegro	0.62	3.37	0.58	0.58	211	781	0.37	1,1	1.69	7.3
Serbia	7.20	0.73	1.34	1.34	2,000,000	6,8	0.34	37,7	5.20	11.0

Source: Expert Survey 2016.

*In Romania*, NGOs were generally established within the closed circles of intellectuals. Márton Balogh (2008) speaks about three distinct phases of the democratisation of Romanian society up till now. The period between 1990 and 1996 was a time for the creation of legal frameworks. The number of organisations in the early '90s was around 4,700, which meant app. 62 NGOs per 100,000 inhabitants (Balogh 2008: 57). In the early '90s, the sector was slowly growing (app. 400 organisations per month); it might partly be because of this fact that, in 1997, the number of officially registered organisations in the non-governmental sector was around 33,000 (Pop 2002: 338.). In the second period, between 1997

and 2000, the number of organisations kept slowly growing but many of them were not in fact active. Owing to social tensions burdening society, the greatest demand for the activities of the organisations appeared in the fields of social and health care, culture and education. More than 50 percent of the Romanian NGOs were active in these fields (Balogh 2008: 60). Most of the organisations were invisible. The governmental contribution to the sectoral revenue was low (4–5%), thus the greatest part of the income (60 percent) was gained from international programs and multinational companies settled in the country (Harsányi – Széman 1999: 17). The organisations concentrated mainly in big cities, especially in the capital (Pop 2002: 333). In 2000, the new Romanian Civil Law (No. 26/2000) was passed and it introduced many changes like:

- Easier procedure for founding and registration;
- A more permissive practice allowing associations and foundations to start economic activities;
- A strengthened co-operation between local authorities and NGOs;
- Allowing NGOs to get the status of public interest and public utility (Balogh 2008: 60).

Finally, in the period between 2001 and 2004, the number of organisations reached 40,000. In this period, Act No. 52/2003, which launched the reform of public administration, was passed and by declaring the transparency of public administration, it generated a higher level of participation and activity from international organisations, as well as the Romanian NGOs. The first locally financed program with the decisive contribution of a volunteer organisation was also implemented in this period (Balogh 2008: 63).

*In Slovakia*, “most of the organisations were established after the transition in 1989. While in 1994 there were 375 registered organisations, this number was 17,000 by 1997” (Bíró 2002: 8). Similarly to the development of the Romanian volunteer sector, that of the Slovakian sector can also be divided into three phases. The 1990s was the decade of the establishment of the governmental structure; 1996 and the following years were the period of structural reforms. In the phase between 2001 and 2005, a kind of ‘decentralisation’ reform was also implemented (Nemec 2008).

The number of the NGOs kept almost steadily increasing after the early 1990s. In 2006, there were 26,778 registered organisations and this number grew to more than 40,000 by 2010 (Strečanský 2012). The reason for this growth in number can be explained as the expression of the freedom of uniting and of the citizens’ demand to organise which is, in compared to the number of the population in Slovakia (5.4 million), relatively strong. The most frequent type of organisation in Slovakia is the volunteer association, followed by the associations of flat owners and church organisations.

“The amount of support and donations given by the private sector (thus the financial and non-financial companies and persons) to the nonprofit organisations in a narrower sense (excluding political parties, public legal institutions, etc.) are showing a growing tendency. This amount has been moving between € 100 and 150 million since 2005” (Strečanský 2012: 101).

Each year, approximately 10,000 volunteer organisations get registered on the list of organisations receiving 2 percent tax offers. The 2 percent tax offers are in fact public financing and their utilisation is monitored and controlled by the Supreme Control Committee” (Strečanský 2012: 102).

“The amount of the 2 percentage tax offers received by NGOs was showing a growing tendency for years, however, as a result, the latest two years’ financial crisis turned back this tendency and the total offered amount decreased: in 2011, it was €41.5, which is equal to the 2007 level. 60 percent of the total money comes from ventures and according to the data, the proportion of the ventures is increasing, while that of natural persons is slowly decreasing” (Strečanský 2012: 102).

The most important sources of the public money allocated to nonprofit organisations are the support and grants transferred to the NGOs directly from the budget lines of the ministries and their offices (€ 43 million in 2005 and 51.5 million in 2011). Within governmental support, in 2006, the greatest proportion was allocated to culture, sports and recreation (24 percent); these were followed by professional and employer organisations (14.3 percent), education and culture (9.2 percent) and finally, social (3%) and health protection (1.9%). The total revenue of the sector amounted to 1.7 percent of the GDP (Nemec 2008: 121).

Many organisations were active in the social sphere already in the early '90s. In 1998, their presence became stronger in the social and health care field and they also played an increasing role in environmental protection, education and culture. The rate of employees by the sector compared to the total number of employees was just a scrap (0.9%) of the European average (6.9%) (Salamon – Anhier 1999: 61). The volunteer sector was not a substantial employer and its employment potentials have even deteriorated during recent years concerning both full-time and part-time jobs. In 2006, less than 22,000 full-time and 60,000 part-time paid employees worked in the sector. In 2006, the volunteer sector provided 1.1 percent of the GDP (Nemec 2008: 121). The number of full-time workers was 34,000 in 2005 and this number fell to 26,000 by 2010. The data on volunteering show that the number of volunteers increased, however, the time spent on volunteer work decreased. In the language of numbers, this means that the number of the volunteers grew from 227,000 to 304,000 between 2005 and 2010 but the number of worked hours fell from the 33 million in 2008 to 16 million by 2010 (Strečanský 2012: 104). The most important employers in the third sector are NGOs providing public utility services. They are followed

by associations and those organisations with church backgrounds. Most of the part-time employees and volunteers work for associations and nonprofit service suppliers (Strečanský 2012: 105).

*In the Czech Republic*, the development of the nonprofit sector started after the collapse of the one-party system. The birth of the Czech Republic in 1993 created the possibility for the civil sector to revive, however, at first, the government thought this was unnecessary and kept all civic organising suspicious (Pajas 1997: 33). Despite this fact, the citizens' initiations counterbalanced properly the disadvantages arising as a consequence of a centralised state and bureaucracy. In 1996, there were 35,566 registered nonprofit organisations (28,422 of them volunteer organisations, 4,514 foundations and 2,630 church organisations) (Pajas 1997: 32). In 2000, their number reached 44,000 and besides them there were almost 4,000 nonprofit organisations owned by the government (Bíró 2002: 9). At present, there are 13 various legal forms existing within the sphere of Czech nonprofit organisations. The numbers are continuously increasing: while there were 70,000 registered organisations in 2005, their number grew to 103,000 by 2009 (Pospíšil – Prouzová – Škarabelová – Tůmová 2012: 26).

The greatest part of the income of Czech nonprofit organisations is provided by government and households and only one tenth comes from business activities. In the referred to years, the rate of direct international financing was negligible. Concerning the rates, this means that in the period between 2005 and 2008, 45% of the sector's revenue came from the government, 44% was from households (together with volunteer work) and only 1.8% from abroad.<sup>12</sup> The newly established foundations are not allowed to use governmental support so these organisations are usually maintained from foreign donations and international projects (Salamon – Anhier 1999: 63).

The environment, having been evolved as a consequence of the global crisis which arrived in the Czech Republic also exerted considerable effects on the sector. Under the threat of the state debt breaking loose and after the elections in 2010, a new centre-right coalition government was formed which passed severe restriction measures and started the reform of public finances, including the welfare system, primarily the pension system and health care. What can now be seen of the changes is that "the draconian restrictions will surely affect the NGOs, first of all those supplying social services" (Pospíšil – Prouzová – Škarabelová – Tůmová 2012: 32).

*In Poland*, the nonprofit sector broke forth with an overwhelming force in the late 1970s, giving space to the efforts of the Solidarity movement. In this process, the collaboration of the formal and informal networks of the secular and church

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<sup>12</sup> See further data on the web page of the Czech Statistical Office. Available at: [http://apl.czso.cz/pli/rocenka/rocenka.indexnu\\_sat?mylang=EN](http://apl.czso.cz/pli/rocenka/rocenka.indexnu_sat?mylang=EN)).

organisations, the traditions of the Christian church and the ambitions of independence continuously living in peoples' minds played a considerable role (Arató 1992: 56–65). Concerning the scale of the sector, the available data are contradictory: after the transition, their estimated number was around 30,000 (Okraszewska – Kwiatkowski 2002: 255); others spoke of 47,000 organisations (Les, 1997: 108) but 80,000 was also published (Kaldor – Vejvoda 1997: 21). According to official Polish data, the number of NGOs is around 100,000 today (75 percent of them active). From them, there are 11,000 foundations and 89,000 associations (including 26,000 sports clubs and associations, 16,000 volunteer firemen's associations and 47,000 other organisations) (Przewłocka – Herbst – Gumkowska 2012: 60).

The 'condensation picture' of the organisations is geographically varying: 18 percent of all of the working organisations are settled in Warsaw and its environment, 13 percent in South-Poland (mainly in Silesia and the Malopolska region) and more than 5 percent in Northern Poland (Gdansk and environment). In contrast, the rate of the operating organisations remains under 1 percent of the total number in Eastern and South-Western Poland (Okraszewska – Kwiatkowski 2002: 255–256).

The activities of Polish NGOs cover a wide range of fields – they are present in health care, social welfare, culture, human rights, local economy development and environmental protection. Comparing with the number of organisations, the number of employees in the sector is rather low (only 1 percent of the total number of the active population). The reason for this is the relative capital shortage which is also well indicated by the fact that most of the income of the organisations (65 percent) is gained from household and company support. The rate of foreign grants is 15 percent which is completed by a slightly higher state support (20%) (Les 1997: 110). Owing to this, a growing number of organisations use the support of local municipalities and conclude various types of cooperation contracts with local authority organs (Guc 1999).

The development of the Polish nonprofit sectors is properly introduced in the paper written by Jadviga Przewłocka, Jan Herbst and Marta Gumowska (2012) in which the authors present the growth in the financial potentials of the Polish non-governmental sector during recent years. According to the data by the Central Statistical Office, it doubled between 2005 and 2010 – it was about PLZ 17 billion in 2010 (more than € 4 billion). This is partly a consequence of the substantial growth in support and donations utilised by the biggest Polish NGOs and improvement is at a substantial level only with the biggest organisations. However, the 'average organisations' are also in a better position than they were some years ago with the median of the revenues doubling between 2005 and 2009: the annual PLZ 10,000 in 2005 increased to PLZ 18,000 by 2007 and to PLZ 20,000 (€5000) by 2009.

Besides the median value, the diversity of income registered in the Polish non-governmental sector is similarly important. “The budget of the 11 percent of the organisations is below PLZ 100 (€25) while the annual revenues of the richest 5 percent are over PLZ 1 million (€ 250,000) (this makes up for 75 percent of the total revenue of the sector). During the last decade, this distribution has worsened but in the last two years, this tendency has stopped” (Przewłocka – Herbst – Gumkowska 2012: 62).

The Polish authors emphasise the fact that it is not only the nominal value transferred to the organisations that kept continuously growing but also the rate of these amounts within the municipality budgets. According to the authors’ opinion, this refers to the fact that the importance of the role played by the organisations in performing public duties has grown. “In 2003, it was only one third of the regions that provided finances for the NGOs at a rate higher than 0.5 percent of their expenditures; in 2010, this rate was 58 percent. The local authorities’ increasing contribution to the operation of NGOs is also reflected in the NGOs’ budgets. In 2003, 45 percent of the organisations used municipality resources and 51 percent in 2009. Besides, the amount of the allocated money increased as well: in 2003, it was only 16 percent of the disbursements by local municipalities that exceeded PLZ 10,000, while this rate was 27 percent in 2009” (Przewłocka – Herbst – Gumkowska 2012: 68).

There were several factors, primarily from the mid-1980s, that retained growth of the sector at scale. A decisive one of these was that the state preserved its monopoly in the fields of welfare services, education and health care. The excessive governmental control of the sector was well indicated by the fact that the registration of associations and foundations required the permission of the local authority as well.

According to table 1. above, NGOs employ 2 percent of the employees on average (0.9 percent in Poland and 3.7 percent in Hungary) and the contribution of the sector to the GDP is between 0.98 percent (Slovakia) and 1.8 percent (Czech Republic). Concerning organisation density, the data are rather diverse: while in Poland we find 2 operating NGOs per 1000 capita, this number is 12 in the Czech Republic. The rate of budget financing has also changed a lot since the transition. The governmental support of the organisations has considerably grown. In Poland, 55 percent comes from governmental resources and this rate is 65 percent in the Czech Republic, while foreign support has almost totally disappeared. This tendency was present in Hungary, too, until 2010. From that year on, the state support of the NGO sector was radically reduced (from 43 percent in 2010 to 29 percent by 2014; later it increased again to 44 percent by 2017) and the distribution of the grants from the EU structural funds was put under strict governmental control as well (Mayer et al. 2017: 23).

The economic crisis topped this process. Control over and ‘colonisation’ of civil society grew stronger and stronger, the civil/nonprofit organisations criti-



cal with and independent of the government were put under growing pressure, their financing was reduced and was centralised.<sup>13</sup> The political power was practically interchanging between centre-left and centre-right parties. Owing to this permanent 'pendular movement', the attitude of the government in relation to civil society was also continuously changing. Some governments wished to strengthen the role of the state and distrusted civil organisations, while others tried to open doors for them and strived to establish participatory mechanisms in forming their policy.

This process<sup>14</sup> can be detected in many countries today: it is represented not only by the leading elite of the post-Soviet countries that have been built on the ruins of the former Soviet member republics (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Armenia) and are traditionally heavily influenced by Moscow; it has been adopted by several Eastern European (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia), African (Egypt, Ethiopia or Uganda), South-American (Venezuela and Ecuador) and Near-Eastern (Israel) countries and it may reach a breakthrough in a European country, namely Hungary or Poland<sup>15</sup>. Owing to the economic crisis, the situation, however, changed. Right-wing parties gained power in the CEE countries (in 2010 in Hungary, in 2015 in Poland and in 2016 in Slovakia), which brought about a sharp shift in earlier governmental behaviour. Political power is making permanent efforts to bring civil organisations under total control (see the example of Hungary or the state-owned media and the governmental measures taken against the Supreme Court in Poland).

## Hungarian models of the third sector

What can we say of Hungary on the basis of the above examples in a brief and model-like way?

The escalation of the economic, political and social crisis from the mid-80s generated a 'revival' of organisational life in Hungary. At the beginning of the 80s, new types of social self-organising emerged, from peace movements to eco movements which were later followed by a 'new wave' of student movements,

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13 As the harbinger of this, many refer to the start of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000) since when the Russian authorities have continued to attack the NGOs working for civil and human rights, as well as decreasing their operational authority and have been putting the opposition's movements and the independent media and reporters under pressure.

14 Called the Russian model by many.

15 Beata Szydło announced in November, 2016, that order must be made in the world of NGOs. According to the plans having filtered out, a central governmental office is to be established that will manage the financing of civil organisations itself but we can also mention as an example the fact that the department dealing with human rights defence was fused within the Ministry for Domestic Affairs, the council examining racist attacks was abolished, the financing of the legal centre investigating family violence against women was stopped and the aggravation of the abortion law was put on the agenda again and has been given up by the new Polish government only because of the enormous mass demonstrations.



self-directing college movements and the club movement within and outside universities, as well as politically-oriented associations and forums. The beginning of the opening was marked by the reappearance of a foundation as a legal entity in 1987, then it went on with the ratification of the Associations Act in 1989 and was concluded with the amendment of the Civil Code (enacted in 1990) which abolished the former restriction that a foundation could only be set up with the approval of the relevant government authority. Following the 1989 Act which guaranteed the conditions of freely setting up organisations, taking advantage of the historical opportunity and the erosion of the political system, the number of organisations was growing continuously (Kákai 2014: 84).

By the late '90s, the border lines of the civil sector became clearly visible and deep changes took place: the organisations got stronger, their economic importance increased and the social legitimacy of the interest groups stabilised.

The development of the Hungarian civil sector can be indicated by three important figures at the macro level: the number of operating organisations, the real value of their income and the number of the employed (Kákai – Sebestény 2012: 115–135). Since regular statistical survey started, these values were almost continuously growing until 2008; then, except for employment, the growth in these values decreased and in 2012, each of the three indicators lessened as compared to the previous year. The number of organisations has been decreasing since then – this might be a result of the Act no. CLXXV of 2011 on the right of association, public benefit status and the operation of civil organisations (the Civil Law) that initiated a 'clearing' process within the sector. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office (CSO), after the transition, it was first in 2012 that each of the three indicators moved downwards as compared to the previous year and this tendency continued in 2013. The reduction in the number of organisations was not striking, however, the real value of the sector's revenue decreased by 3 percent and the number of the employed by 11 percent. The rate of the resources gained from governmental support kept on decreasing. In 2013, 35 percent of total sector revenue came from governmental or municipal budgets which was 5 percent less than the rate in 2012.

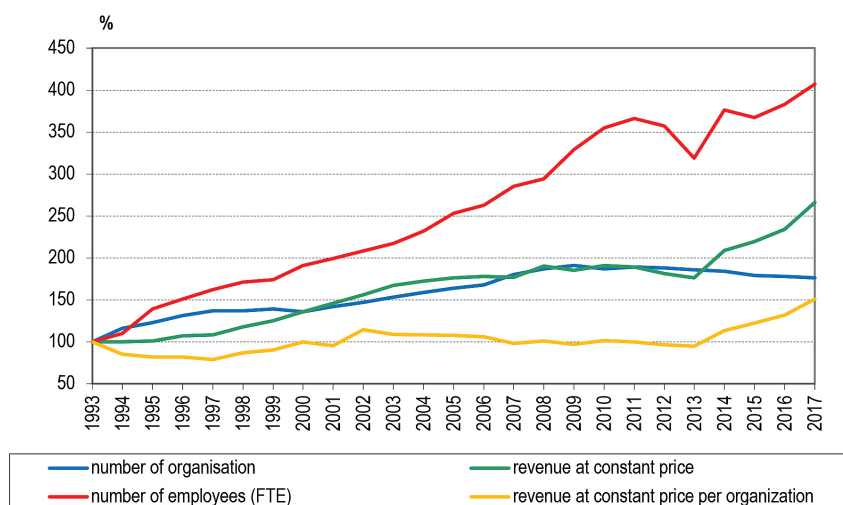
This positive tendency, however, gains another light if we have a look at *the real income in terms of one organisation*. During nearly twenty years, this figure hardly changed. This means that the growth indicated in the number of organisations and the real income did not appear at the unique organisational level; the previous figure actually 'eliminated' the latter one: the financial situation of an average organisation was the same in 1993 as in 2013 (Kákai – Sebestény 2012: 119).

Owing to the changes within the group of nonprofit enterprises and the spread of public employment within the sector, the tendency in the number of the employees that was continuously growing until 2011 has become hectic during recent years. Employment, however, grew a lot more consistently and

rapidly.<sup>16</sup> The nonprofit sector employed almost twice as many people in 2000 and more than three and a half times as many in 2010 as in 1993. Employment, however, is typical within only a narrow range of nonprofit organisations. In 2010, merely 16% of them had a paid employee and, within that, only 11% had a full-time employee. In 2017, the total number of people engaged in the nonprofit sector was 162 thousand. The number of those employed was more than 133 thousand – 91 thousand of which were full time employees, while 42 thousand were part time or not full-time employees.

In 2016, contrary to the 2.5 percent decrease in 2015, the number of those employed in the sector grew by 4.4 percent and by 6.3 percent in 2017. The real value of the income was continuously growing after 2014; this rate was 14 percent in 2017.

**Figure 2: Development of the nonprofit sector: according to number, revenue and employees, 1993–2017**

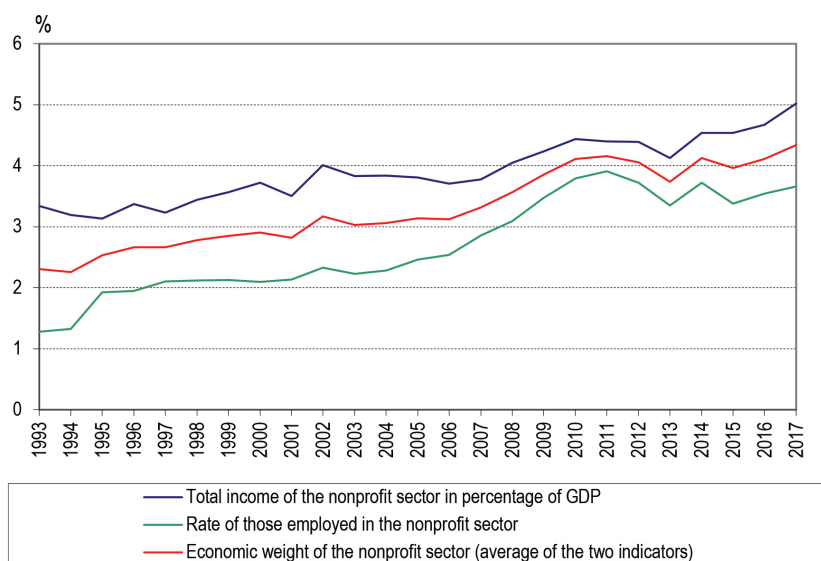


Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2019

The total income for nonprofit organisations as a percentage of GDP had increased by one third between 1993 and 2011 but never reached 5 percent. At the same time, a much more dynamic development was seen in employment: in the very same period, the labour market contribution of the sector grew to three times as much, although remained under 4 percent at all times.

<sup>16</sup> In the comparison we use the indicator of the number of staff calculated in terms of regular, full-time employees. This is the Hungarian version of *full-time equivalent* (FTE) used in the international literature.

**Figure 3: Trends in the national economic contribution of the nonprofit sector, 1993–2017**



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2019.

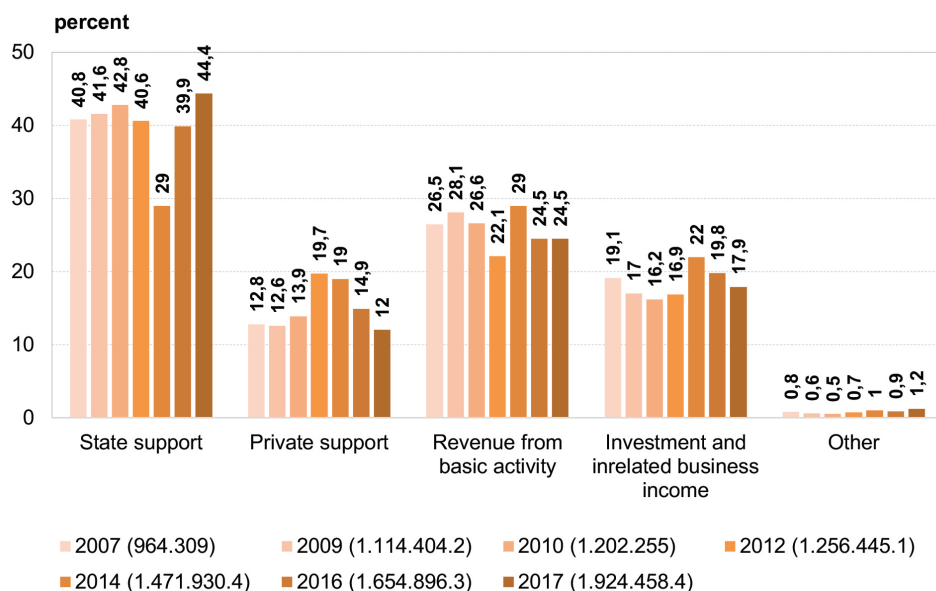
The revenue of the on-profit sector was about HUF 1,924 billion<sup>17</sup> in 2017. This sum came from four major sources. In 1993, nearly 55% of the total revenues derived from investment, unrelated business and private donations. By 2013, the form ratio had changed – around 67% of the total income came from revenue from the basic activity and state support.

The state contributes 42% to the on-profit sector's income, which is relatively low compared to nearly 60% of Western European contribution; however, it is regarded high among former socialist countries. I should remark that perhaps the way of financing itself reveals the inherent distortions of the sector (Figure 7.). The income structure, however, considerably changed. In 1993, the bigger part (55%) of the total income was gained from economic activities and private support. By the late 1990s, this rate considerably changed. From that time on, a growing proportion of the sources were made up of income gained from basic activities and governmental grants. The previous had grown permanently until 2000 and then came a serious recession which was followed by stagnation. The rate of governmental support had remained practically unchanged through long years but began to increase after 2000 and was always above 40% after 2003; this type of contribution reached HUF 435 billion in 2013.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> App. € 6 billion.

<sup>18</sup> App. €1.7 billion.

**Figure 4: The distribution of revenue of nonprofit organisations by source 2007–2017**



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office 1993–2019.

The rate of support from governmental resources considerably increased as compared to that in 2016. 44 percent of total income came from the state or municipal budget which is 4.0 percent higher than last year's data and HUF 194 billion more in numbers. At the same time, *own income (from basic activities and management)* decreased to 43 percent, so the support indicator<sup>19</sup> of the sector grew by 1.0 percent as compared to the previous year, i.e., to 56 percent.

Despite all these facts, it is difficult to categorise the Hungarian nonprofit organisations into one of the dimensions mentioned above very explicitly. As Nilda Bullain put it, “*the sector mostly takes after itself*” (Bullain 2005: 19). One reason for this is that economic and legal regulations in the latest period have in many cases been unconsidered and incoherent. All in all, regarding the facts, we might get a ‘picture’ showing that Hungarian nonprofit regulations do not follow any of the European models, which in itself should not be a problem; it is not compulsory to join any of the ‘lines’. It is, however, a real problem that the prevailing decision makers have practically dealt with regulation of the sector with no concept and no long-term or system-based perspective. Several elements have been taken over from foreign practices, however, this has not been done along a clear concept, so uncertainty deriv-

<sup>19</sup> The rate of total (state and private) support in total income.

ing from the often contradicting regulations has actually been coded into the system (Kákai 2009).

## Attack against the free activity of civil organisations in Hungary

The unfavourable legislative changes adopted between 2011 and 2017 regarding the operation of organisations, as well as the implementation of existing regulations, resulted a degradation of the general legal framework of the sector.<sup>20</sup> The so-called ‘Norwegian Fund Case’ should be mentioned at this point as an important phase of government attacks against NGOs financed from abroad (as well). It prepared the government’s narrative dividing NGOs into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ civil organisations (Glied – Kákai 2017: 25). Already in August, 2013, a communications attack was launched against NGOs partially financed from abroad. They have been called “fake civil organisations” financed from abroad, intervening in politics and the servants of György (George) Soros in the government’s communication who are financed from the Hungarian-born billionaire’s ‘wallet’ (Torma 2016: 268–269). In his speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp in Băile Tușnad (Romania), on 26 July, 2014, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (explicitly mentioning the ‘disputes’ related to the Norwegian Fund) stated that these organisations are “*political activists paid by foreigners*” who intend to “*have influence on the state matters of Hungary at the moment, regarding specific questions*”.<sup>21</sup> The increasing tension escalated during the summer and autumn of 2014 between the Hungarian government and the Norwegian Fund, the EEA Fund and through them, the NGOs managing the fund. Investigations started against the four found implementer foundations and their 58 guarantors. Representatives of the Hungarian government accused the civil organisations and their leaders of committing criminal acts, with the police and tax authority investigating their cases; the tax authority even suspended their VAT numbers and their offices were searched (Glied – Kákai 2017: 25).

The Norwegian Fund halted its payments to Hungary because the Hungarian government unilaterally changed the domestic implementer body of the entire Norwegian Fund and thus diplomatic relations between Hungarian and Norway also deteriorated. This is when the Hungarian government started to investigate the organisations supported by the civil fund and Hungary received many

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20 Sustainability indicators of organisation in 2016 – Hungary. June, 2017. USAID-Ökotárs Alapítvány. Available at: [http://okotars.hu/sites/default/files/downloads/civil\\_szervezetek\\_fenntrathatosaga\\_2016.pdf](http://okotars.hu/sites/default/files/downloads/civil_szervezetek_fenntrathatosaga_2016.pdf) (18 January 2018). Similar processes were witnessed regarding the electoral regulations and the Constitution. See Vörös, 2016.

21 A munkaalapú állam korszaka következik (The era of a work-based state is dawning, speech, Tusványos, 2014) Available at: [http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20140728\\_orban\\_viktor\\_a\\_munkaalapu\\_allam\\_korszaka\\_kovetkezik\\_beszed\\_tusvanyos\\_2014](http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20140728_orban_viktor_a_munkaalapu_allam_korszaka_kovetkezik_beszed_tusvanyos_2014) (16 January 2018).

instances of criticism and warnings from its international partners, including the Council of Europe and the United States. A prosecutor ordered the investigation of 7 out of 58 examined organisations, uncovering minor deficiencies. The National Tax and Customs Administration closed its investigation on 20 October, 2015. The investigation was carried out against the organisations for more than a year and it was terminated without revealing any criminal acts (Glien – Kákai 2017).

Instead of cooperating with true non-governmental organisations operating independently from politics, the government has established its own civil hinterland (GONGO – Government Organised NGO) and gave powers to public bodies that carry out funding allocation and distribution activities, clearly distinguishing between activities that can be supported, ought to be supported and may not be supported. The government significantly cut the number of public foundations and instead created and reinforced funds and bodies operating within the state budget such as the Art Fund, the National Cooperation Fund, the Hungarian Olympic Committee and the Hungarian Academy of Arts (Sárközy 2014: 206).

After April, 2016, the government launched new attacks against civil organisations financed from abroad. These include large, Budapest-based NGOs, as well as professionally organised, permanently operated civil organisations with employees, sustained primarily through donations and funding/grant programmes.

Another proof of the process is Act no. LXXVI of 2017 on the transparency of organisations receiving foreign funds. The law qualifies as an “organisation supported from abroad” each association and foundation that was given financial support exceeding HUF 7,200,000 from abroad in the given tax year. Pursuant to this act, in case an organisation reaches this amount, the registering court registers the data of the organisation as “organisation supported from abroad” and sends them to the Minister responsible for the Civil Information Portal who then publishes these data. Then the organisation is obliged to release its ‘qualification’ on its web page, its programs and its media products. In addition, according to the relevant law, it is obliged to provide a detailed report (including the name of the supporter person or organisation) on each support received from foreign funds exceeding HUF 500,000. The act is in many respects similar to the Russian law, although in Russia, any amount of foreign support must be reported on, according to which the authorities mark the concerned organisation as ‘agent’. The regulation passed in Israel in 2016 has similar features as well, although the Israeli regulation does not specify a definite amount like the Hungarian regulation but connects ‘qualification’ to percentage in the organisational budget (above 50 percent). According to the opinion of the Venice Commission issued on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2018, the regulatory measure in issue “lacks the requisite precision”, “does not meet the foreseeability criterion as under-



stood in the ECtHR case-law” and “the provision may result in further arbitrary restrictions to and prohibition through heavy sanctions of the indispensable work of human rights NGOs”, not speaking of the fact that “legitimate activities are criminalised under the provision”. The summary of the opinion of the Venice Commission is rather clear: “the provision, as examined in the present opinion, infringes upon the right to freedom of association and expression and should be repealed”.

There has been sharp criticism worded in the EU in terms of the enactment. In April, 2017, the European Peoples’ Party made it very clear that the “NGOs are an integral part of any healthy democracy, that they represent civil society and that they must be respected”. This sentence was word by word repeated by EPP spokesman Siegfried Mureşan in 2018 when asked about György Soros’ Open Society Foundation leaving Hungary. Both Manfred Weber and Andreas Nick, CDU representative reporting on Hungary, spoke of impassable red lines in this topic. The positions of the NGOs and the right of association have deteriorated since then. Hungary introduced a special tax on immigration which practically means the fully content-based limitation of free speech. According to the Venice Commission, the “unjustified interference with the rights to freedom of expression and of association of the NGOs affected” “will deter potential donors from supporting these NGOs and put more hardship on civil society engaged in legitimate human rights’ activities” in the future”. The Commission stated that the provision should be repealed.

Several elements of the Hungarian regulation raise perilous questions (Sárközi 2019: 357). On one hand, it violates basic rights and rights principles both at the personal and collective level. Thus, we can mention that the provision contradicts the freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of association, the protection of personal data, the principle of good faith, the protection of good reputation and the prohibition of discrimination. The preamble of the law sets that it is “to see and make see which organisations can be considered as organisations receiving foreign funds”; however, in a statement, an under-secretary made it clear that their intention was not to restrict the organisations explicitly supported from abroad (since the grants received from the EU do not have to be added to the foreign donations in the “qualification process”) – the act attacks specifically the NGOs supported by György Soros (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), Transparency International or the Hungarian Helsinki Committee) – the government considers these advocacy organisations fighting for freedom rights, exploring corruption and governmental irregularities and receiving international financial support dangerous.



## Conclusion

In Europe, we can see the signs of the extension of 'new authorism'. The legal violations and the attacks against independent media and NGOs generated serious international indignation some years ago but similar affairs are now below the threshold of response (Glied 2014).

Changes in the frameworks include changes to the conditions of financing as well. The typical forms of this can be as follows:

- Economic decline, the citizens' impoverishment, reluctance of the rich to widen their donation activities and the slow nature of the spread of CSR may end in the termination of several organisations.
- The mechanisms easing and inciting private donations are lacking, thus private philanthropy remains at a minimal level and the government keeps on supporting its own political allies (NGOs standing close to the government or pseudo-civil organisations).
- In case the current political trend remains unchanged, it will be extremely difficult to keep alive civil organisations that offer alternative services (e.g. in education or health care) for those in need.
- The EU-resources, which are over-bureaucratised and mean a great challenge for the smaller organisations – will become more and more incalculable.

Nonprofit organisations are fighting the same problems in the region: (1) lack of human and financial resources, (2) lack of credibility and (3) a lack of efficient access to the process of policy making.

Mainstream (here: Western) literature sets out from the 'ideal' civil society, i.e. the self-conscious, rational, economically independent citizen who is always ready to participate and defend his/her interests and rights and from the supposition that democratisation initiated from the top or from outside will sooner or later, owing to the natural dynamics of the civil society, become rooted from the bottom and inside as well. In fact, the conditional system of civil society requires a separate exploration. From this, it could become clear that the initial situation of the CEE civil society was drastically different from the ideal model and even the infrastructural development level of the Western civil societies or their degree of supply with resources but the dream of catching up fast pushed reality aside.

In conclusion, Central and Eastern Europe can be expected to remain a very dynamic region in the years to come. In past decades, the region has often been a magnifying glass for international developments and conflicts that have shaped European civil society in general. Some social challenges that are emergent or still dormant in Western European countries have manifested themselves in CEE earlier and with great force, be it the rise of right-wing parties, a lack of public funding, conflicts with partisan media or the development of informal

civil society structures. One might even speculate that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Central and Eastern Europe is sometimes ahead in developments that affect civil society – in terms of challenges as well as potential solutions to overcome them. To sum up: the weakness of the participation culture in the region, a lack of political civil movements, the closed nature of governance towards civil society and the financial difficulties of the nonprofit sector are the main reasons for which civil society can be less active in promoting ‘good governance’ and in implementing the social functions that are generally attributed to civil society.

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**László Kákai** *been professor of Political Sciences at the Department of Political Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs since 1997. He is Head of the Department Political Science and International Studies at the University of Pécs, and from 2012, president of the Community Environment College of the National Cooperation Fund. His main research interest is local politics, local government and civil society. Email: kakai.laszlo@pte.hu*

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