

# Retreating from Europe: Rise and Fall of Political Ideologies in the 2009 European Election Campaign in Hungary

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December 2011

## 1. Introduction: EP elections

The European Parliamentary elections of 2009 were held in a complex situation of simultaneous international and global crisis: beside the general economic crisis, the European Union had been going through a series of constitutional and institutional crises with the negative referenda about the Constitution, increasing Eurosceptic voices and growing disagreement about the future development of the EU.

The economic crisis of 2008 did not cause any significant changes in the distribution of political forces in the European Parliament (EP) at the 2009 elections. As most EU member states were being governed by right-wing parties, the popular discontent amplified by the crisis might have driven European electors to express their lack of satisfaction through left-wing ballots. However, right-wing parties retained their supremacy in the European Parliament. The general public that was discontent with the political and economic situation was mainly expressed through lower turnout and a growing support for Eurosceptic, EU-ritic, and even EU-rejecting candidates and parties.

Since 1979, when the European Parliament was first elected directly by member-states' citizens, political scientists have investigated EP election trends and MEPs' voting behaviour. Especially during the recent waves of accession to the EU, EP election trends have been of intensive research interest (Attina 1990; Hix, Noury, and Roland 2006; Kreppel 2002; Raunio 1997):

“Research indicates that MEPs vote increasingly along party lines and decreasingly along national lines. Also, the cohesion of the European political groups has increased, and the political groups have become increasingly competitive, with left-right splits becoming more common than the grand coalition between the two largest groups (the European People's Party and the Socialists). The main dimension of politics in the European Parliament has been shown to be the classic left-right dimension. In short, the European Parliament is much like other democratic parliaments — dominated by parties and left-right politics, and increasingly so.” (Hix and Noury 2009: 159)

It is also worth investigating whether the new member states' conception of the EU and of the tasks and functioning of the European Parliament converge with those of the old members or differ significantly (Brug et al. 2009). Although ideological

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<sup>1</sup> The research on EP campaign materials was carried out with the participation of Eszter Bakonyi, Krisztina Hetyési, Dalma Lőrincz, Boglárka Meixner, Fanni Szabó.

stances still remain the dominant factor in voting preferences, MEPs from the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) seem to have a much greater tendency to vote along national lines than MEPs from the old member states. As Hix and Noury have observed, there is

„...a tendency among MEPs from the new member-states from Central and Eastern Europe to vote slightly more along national lines than do the MEPs from the original 15 member-states. This nation-based voting was particularly evident on the Services Directive. The MEPs from the new member-states voted in a more pro-liberalization way than did the MEPs from the older member-states, if one controls for the ideological preferences of the MEPs. Specifically, MEPs on the left from the new member-states were less likely to be opposed to the liberalization of the services market than were MEPs on the left from the old member-states. Nevertheless, even on the most important and controversial piece of legislation thus far in the Sixth Parliament, ideological preference was the dominant factor.“ (Hix and Noury 2009: 172)

The differences in voting behaviour of European deputies may be a sign that European politics is conceptualized in different manners in the old and new member-states. MEPs of the new member-states arguably conceive of politics more in national terms and are less used to common European framework and processes of decision-making, including negotiations and compromising. They seem to be more eager to consider national interests and put the emphasis on national sovereignty (Brug et al. 2009). This construction and conception of the political sphere would correspond to the “Audit democracy” model described by Eriksen and Fossum (Eriksen and Fossum 2009). Thus the analysis of the national political arena including EP campaigns may reveal the weight and importance attached to the preservation of national interests and national sovereignty on the political agenda in new member-states. The thematic structure of national public spheres, the competing values represented by the different parties and the actual state of the political and public debate influence the political attitudes appearing on the European level through the choice of MEPs and their activities in the European institutions. The political cleavage between nationalist-sovereignists and liberal cosmopolitan EU integrationists exists both in the old and new member-states. But the power relations between these forces at the EU level is strongly influenced by the actual state of the power relations at the various national levels. The economic slump and the constitutional and institutional crises of the previous years have resulted in an intensifying criticism of liberalism. Fear about the weakening of national sovereignty has led, in the case of several member-states, to the strengthening of mainly economic protectionism. Power relations at the EU level are also influenced by the strength and visibility of the diverse political forces in the international arena and their participation in the various debates about issues of the political agenda. In order to understand the changing climate of the EP and European institutions, it is important to have a clear insight into the weight of the various political forces, the value structure they convey and the popularity of their discourses at the national level.

In the enlarged EU framework many new questions arise: With the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, have the European political agenda and discourse changed? To what extent have the new member-states introduced new (or old unresolved) problems into the EP? How do they contribute to the actual struggles between nationalist and integrationist forces? In the current political, economic and social context it is presumably true that in the near future the EU will have to tackle not only problems of structural reforms, different

economic developments, and harmonization of legal structures and the construction of a common financial and economic governance but will also have to treat the coexistence of diverse democratic cultures and problems of regionalism and nationalism. Can the EU's institutional system tackle the problems of different paces of development between strong and weak economies, between big and small nations, between pro-EU and Anti-EU political forces? These problems do not only appear in CEE new member-states but they may reinforce similar cleavages already present in the old member-states. Will the EU be able to contain the stiffening extremist movements that try to scape-goat various groups of the population? Increasing Euroscepticism<sup>2</sup>, growing intolerance against minorities and immigrants<sup>3</sup> and escalating verbal violence in public discourses should be regarded as admonitory signs.

It has been demonstrated that EP election campaigns often focus on domestic issues, and neglect EU related ones [Jalali and Silva 2011]. But forms and contents of communication about various (even domestic) topics reveal parties' commitment to democratic and European values (usually translated into values of liberal democracy) and to European integration. Thus, in the present report, we take Hungary as an example where the aforementioned problems are strongly present [Tótkés 2000, Rose 2009]. We analyze the 2009 EP campaign in Hungary in order to investigate the causes and characteristics of the quickly deteriorating political climate. Hungary has glided from a leading position among CEE countries before accession to file-closing situation. In many respects the country shows symptoms of the present political, social and economic decay that can also be detected in other member-states [Johnson 2010]. Our analysis of the Hungarian EP campaign seeks to identify the roots of the existing deep cleavages in society, escalating xenophobia and hate-speech, diminishing democratic aspirations, and increasing anti-European attitudes.

The quickly changing context of European politics and the limited scope of our case study do not allow answering all the questions outlined above. Our study aims to investigate the way political parties in Hungary conceptualise the relationship between the nation-state and the EU, how they construct their political identity in relationship to the existing national collective identity constructions and how they define the role of EP delegates.

The aim of this paper is, first, to describe and investigate the causes of the political transformation on the Hungarian political scene before and during the 2009 EP electoral campaign. Second, we intend to analyze how emerging mainstream Hungarian politics is getting more and more detached from democratic values and from the basic principles of the EU (democratic political deliberation and fair political contest, respect for human rights and freedoms, trust and solidarity, etc.) We also intend to investigate to what extent the EP campaign served as an opportunity and an excuse for populist forces to propagate illiberal, anti-democratic views in order to strengthen their political role. Finally, we also attempt to identify the most prominent Eurosceptic topic constructions and arguments used by the various political forces while competing for mandates in the European Parliament.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands, the success of nationalist parties like The Real Finns' Party, or the reinforcement of Eurocritic parties like United Kingdom Independence Party, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. anti-immigrant attacks in Italy, Germany or France, the recent extremist mass-murder in Norway or the anti-Gypsy riots in Bulgaria.

Our study focuses on communication strategies of the main Hungarian parties and their discursive constructions of the EU and the EP. The analysis is based on the parties' campaign material and media sources, collected during the 2009 EP elections. Campaign documents, ads, discourses, political symbols and other visual representations were investigated with methods of critical discourse analysis [cf. Van Dijk 1985; Wodak 1991].

## 2. EP elections in Hungary 2009

In order to understand the deteriorating political climate in Hungary, one has to bear in mind the political transformations of the 1990s [Szelényi and Szelényi 1991, Todosijevic 2008]. Hungary was the only CEE country where the system-change was not preceded by any mass demonstrations, riots or revolutionary events. The system-change was managed smoothly by political forces without the participation of large layers of the population. As Hungary was "the happiest barrack of the camp" with its higher life standards and wider individual freedom, the Hungarian citizens were less eager about system change and had the most to lose. The subsequent economic hardships gradually caused disillusionment throughout the country. In contrast to the negotiated smooth transition, the political arena quickly turned into a battlefield: all the former taboos and undiscussed problems [Lendvai 2003] provoked heated debates (Lakatos 2006, Heller – Rényi 2007). The public sphere quickly became split between left-liberals and right-wing nationalists and the most debated topics included endless controversies about national identity, categorization criteria and exclusion of various minorities [Evans 2006]. The century old cleavage between Westernizer and nationalist forces [Kitschelt 1995] has become a structuring principle not only in the field of politics but gradually in all walks of public (and private) life. Although public support was high before EU accession, detailed information about integration was lacking and concrete knowledge about the EU was low. Expectations mainly concerned a quick increase of life standards and economic subventions [Hegedűs 2006]. The 2004 festive atmosphere of accession was quickly followed by deception or, at best, indifference.

The 2009 EP campaign in Hungary took place in this deeply divided political arena. The campaign itself was regarded by all parties as an internal political struggle, even as the final rehearsal for gauging electoral preferences in view of the upcoming general elections in 2010. Not only the debated topics in the public sphere tackled problems of home politics, all the participating parties explicitly thematised in their campaign that the main stake was the struggle for supporting populations. The EP campaign, dominated by internal political problems, rarely involved any EU-related topics and the political candidates were primarily concentrating on negative campaigning against their opponents. At the time of the EP elections, Hungary had experienced two consecutive terms of a socialist government that was marked by a lack of reforms, mainly due to obstructions from the right-wing opposition, and by a serious public disillusionment reinforced by cases of political corruption. The public dissatisfaction was thus easily mobilized by rightist parties and even extremist groups that strongly criticized the political elite in power for "*political criminality*" as well as for the declining economic situation and living standards. Left-wing and liberal parties warned against growing radicalism and extremism (especially in response to street violence and mass mobilization against governmental reforms since 2006) and condemned the opposition for having impeded any social and institutional reforms proposed by the government ("social referendum" against reforms in the health care system and education – 2008) Every political party involved in the struggle referred to the growing public protest and presented the EP elections as a poll of the upcoming parliamentary elections. In the merciless struggle for public support, adversary discourse accused

the ruling Socialist Party of tackling EU affairs only in order to divert public attention from actual concrete internal problems.

In contrast to the overall European previsions, the forecasts for Hungary did not predict a left-wing success. British pollsters forecasted 13 mandates for Fidesz-KDNP<sup>4</sup>, 7 for the then ruling MSZP, 1 for SZDSZ and 1 for MDF and Hungarian polling institutions expected similar results. The outcome of the elections was startling: 14 for Fidesz, 4 for MSZP, 3 for the new extreme right-wing Jobbik and 1 for MDF. The turnout was lower than EU average (both in 2004 and in 2009; see Table 2.)

Table 1 shows the political affiliation of the 22 Hungarian MEPs at the national and the European level (2009).

Table 1. Affiliation of the 22 Hungarian MEPS in 2009

Parties	%	Seats	EPP	S&D	ALDE	GREENS/ EFA	ECR	GUE/ NGL	EFD	NA
<b>FIDESZ-KDNP</b>	56.36	14	14							
<b>MSZP</b>	17.37	4		4						
<b>JOBBIK</b>	14.77	3								3
<b>MDF</b>	5.31	1					1			
<b>LMP-HP</b>	2.61	0								
<b>SZDSZ</b>	2.16	0								
<b>Munkás-párt</b>	0.96	0								
<b>MCF ROMA</b>	0.46	0								
<b>Others</b>	0	0								
<b>Total</b>	100	22	14	4	0	0	1	0	0	3

Source: European Parliament<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> FIDESZ - KDNP: Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian conservative nationalist right-wing coalition between Fidesz and a quasi non-existent Christian-democratic party)

MSZP: Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)

JOBBIK: Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary: extreme right-wing, nationalist, xenophobic party)

SZDSZ: Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats. liberal party)

MDF: Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum: Centre-right wing conservative party)

MUNKÁSPÁRT: Magyar Kommunista Munkáspárt (Hungarian Communist Workers' Party)

LMP-HP: Lehet Más a Politika - Humanista Párt (Politics Can be Different – Humanist Party green antiglobalist coalition)

MCF ROMA: MCF roma összefogás Párt (Hungarian Gypsy Forum: roma coalition)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?id=212&pageRank=17&language=EN>

Table 2. Turnout at the EP elections (2004, 2009)

Election year	National turnout (%)	European turnout (%)
2004	38,5	45,47
2009	36,31	43

Source: European Parliament

The results clearly show a strong decay of the left and liberal parties. The EP elections marked a historical turning point in the Hungarian political arena: the two main system-changing parties (MDF and SZDSZ) were significantly weakened, the left-wing was defected by most of its supporters, and the supremacy of the right-wing allowed the conservative and nationalist parties to dictate the political agenda. The conservative nationalist right-wing mobilized large masses by populist discourse while a new far-right party emerged and gained much strength and support. Civil movements stayed weak but a small group of young green activist was able to form a new party addressing mainly former liberal electors.

In the following, we will analyse party by party the 2009 EP election campaign in Hungary, in order to investigate the dominant values, the transformation of political identities reflected in political discourses and the emergence of Eurosceptic attitudes and discourses in all segments of the political arena. We will analyse the communication strategies of the parties and their discursive constructions about the EU and about the MEPs' missions. Attention will be paid to the various forms and expressions of collective identity, conceptualizations of the nation and the political programmes of the parties. The first part of our paper presents the failure of liberal left wing politics; the second part discusses two small political alternatives: the conservative liberal and green parties, the third part focuses on the success of right-wing populism and extremism as a new emerging political force; and we will also concentrate on Eurosceptic and Eurocritic voices coming from the mainstream right-wing, the ultra-left and the far-right parties.

### 3. The fall of left-wing liberalism

#### 3. 1. The stunning defeat of the Socialist alternative

MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party was created in the turmoil preceding the system-change in 1989. It was founded by active politicians and young technocrats who had left the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (the communists) in the late 1980s. Although they had been active in the former Communist party, they constituted a more and more visible divergent orientation from the hardliners of the Party in the late 80s. "Perestroika" and especially "glasnost", the changes directed by Michail Gorbachev in the USSR strongly influenced their political aspirations and expectations. In creating the new Socialist Party, the new socialists attempted to openly reject the heritage of the fallen communist party and constitute a more European type of socialist alternative.

After their first electoral defeat in 1990 in the strong system-changing context, the socialists became victorious in 1994 and transformed into the strongest left-wing party in Hungary. They formed a coalition government with the liberal party (SZDSZ) but lost the next elections in 1998 due to a severely restrictive financial policy on state expenditures and also because of cases of corruption. They regained majority in 2002 after the first Fidesz coalition government caused strong disillusionment in the population with its non-kept promises. MSZP formed a coalition government again with SZDSZ and won also in 2006. This last governing

period became a strong failure as the Prime Minister's hearty and outspoken discourse in favour of reforms pronounced in a private party meeting was leaked. The consequences of this cathartic speech were disastrous: regular right-wing and far-right protest movements, street violence and *ad hominem* attacks impeded all reform plans. The socialist party lost its credibility also because it could never get rid of some members of the nomenclature of the former communist party among which politicians who were able to profiteer from privatization of former state industries.

Being in line with Western socialist parties, MSZP took a pro-EU standpoint and played a significant role in Hungary's NATO and EU accessions both through negotiations and through the two corresponding referenda in 1997 and 2003, respectively. It gained 9 seats in the European Parliament in 2004 but only 4 seats in the 2009 EP elections.

Following its former commitment, MSZP continued to occupy a pro-EU standpoint in the 2009 campaign. But like all other Hungarian parties, the campaign of the Socialists was primarily based on internal political topics. During the EP campaign, the party's slogan was "*With New Force*", attempting to suggest a possible electoral victory in the 2010 general elections and a new socialist government. The whole campaign proves that in the hard national political context, with its radically decreasing popularity and credibility, the party's main stake was to regain its former voters' confidence and reaffirm its role and place in the Hungarian political arena.

Though the *explicit stake* of the campaign centred on political and ideological representation of Hungary in the EP, the *implicit stakes* of MSZP were manifold, the most important aim being the mobilization of their supporters. As the EP elections took place in the last year of a period of 7 years of socialist rule, the campaign discourse had to clear the party of all the accusations made by the opposition: the militant far-right and especially the antagonistic Fidesz. This latter party directed a strongly negative campaign partly as a retaliating process for its previous staggering defeats (2002 and 2006). Therefore, MSZP discourse aimed at putting the burden of the bad economic situation on external (global) conditions.

*"The economic crisis was not generated in Hungary, it did not start out from here, we are not its causes, but exactly because we are living in a globalized world, it affects us, as well."*<sup>6</sup>

Although during the whole campaign period, political discourse scarcely focused on EU topics, MSZP tried to introduce some European issues in the political arena. First of all, it called for high electoral turnout claiming that the EU concerned all citizens and a high turnout at the EP elections would suggest a higher legitimacy for internal as well as EU political activities. Socialists also supported liberal SZDSZ candidates explaining that their presence in the EP would contribute to a stronger alliance policy within the European Parliament. In this respect, even the importance of the Hungarian representation in the main EP parties was referred to. Lastly, a high turnout was also deemed important in order to weaken Eurosceptics and extremists, who, although able to threaten Fidesz, but also menaced to take votes from the working class, traditional supporters of the socialists.

The party published a 12 page document comparing its work in the EP during the 2004-2009 term to the work and (non-)activity of Fidesz MEPs (e.g. statistics about

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<sup>6</sup> Kinga Göncz, In: Közbeszéd, Duna TV, 5 June 2009.

taking the floor in the EP). But as internal and EU affairs were often intertwined, this document also contained analyses proposing a positive evaluation of the socialist governments' achievements in Hungary. MSZP's uneasy discursive stance can be detected from its various double-bind discourses. Its programme-designers and candidates had to face the difficult choice to thematise European values and tasks while being obliged to enter into the nation-wide debate where national and populist arguments and goals prevailed. Thus the motto of MSZP published on their website well indicated the attempt to harmonise EU and national interests: *"For Hungarian values in Europe and for European values at home"*.

MSZP's programme mainly concentrated on internal national issues: tackling the economic crisis, defending workplaces, restructuring national economy. The programme contained a long list of tasks which could only be accomplished with the help of EU subsidies. The main points of the programme dealt with the economic development of SMEs, RD development, energy security, nature preservation, etc. and it defined which sectors of the economy should be developed with EU Structural Funds. It is also important to stress that a thorough discursive analysis of the programme indicates that most of the tasks were related to *"shielding"*, *"protection"* or *"defence"* against various *"dangers"*: defence of the internal labour market, defence against the economic crisis, defence of consumers, defence of the Hungarian agriculture and most of all: defence of national interests in the EU.

*"Europe is a protecting shield for us, and for two reasons. First it is an economic protective umbrella, but at least as much it is a community of values, and it is equally important that European values should be taken home to Hungary – because there is massive shortage of these values."*<sup>7</sup>

On the MSZP website the party also defined the tasks of its MEPs in 15 points. It affirmed that the Hungarian MEPs had to work for consolidating Hungary's equal position in the EU, to ensure that the country can participate in decision-making and profit from its membership. It also stressed the goal that Hungarian interests were to be defended in the EU.



1. *"Why Kinga Göncz? Because she represents Hungarian values in Europe."* (MSZP billboard, EP campaign 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Kinga Göncz In: Közbeszéd, Duna TV 5 June 2009.



Other, more EU-conform tasks were also defined in rather general terms: like European social security and welfare, contribution to the structural reform of the EU and preparation for the 2011 Hungarian EU presidency. MSZP backed further enlargement of the EU and considered the creation of a “minority-friendly” Europe as an important goal. It also stressed the importance of entering the EURO-zone and wanted to elaborate methods to drive the EU closer to Hungarian citizens. The programme also mentioned a popular topic: enhancing young people’s opportunities for travelling and studying abroad.

*“MSZP’s EP representatives attempt to bring the Union closer to the Hungarian citizens; they undertake to make the EU more comprehensible, more transparent and in order to achieve this goal, they propose that all Hungarian MEPs accept to report on their activities twice a year in the Hungarian Parliament in a compulsory process.”<sup>8</sup>*

The MSZP campaign presented only few candidates personally and in detail, but it centred on three well-known party figures (three female politicians), whose professional expertise was emphasized on billboards with regards to some accentuated EU tasks. Kinga Göncz, former minister of foreign affairs, was presented as an expert in international relations with skills to defend Hungarian interests in Brussels because of her prevailing diplomatic experience and good professional connections. Edit Herczog was presented as a specialist in energy policy (important in the context of the January 2009 gas crisis). For Zita Gurmai, her expertise in human rights was emphasised. She was depicted as a politician fighting for the equality of Hungarian women.



2. „Why vote for Zita Gurmai? Because she fights for Hungarian women’s equality” (MSZP billboard, EP campaign 2009)

*“... whether we can send 22 representatives to Brussels who have some expertise in any concrete field of policy, and what is even more important whether they can not only explain their opinion but also find 353 other agreeing MPs, because this is what you need for majority”<sup>9</sup>. (Edit Herczog)*

<sup>8</sup> MSZP’s EP candidates’ proposals in 15 points (leaflet and <http://www.mszp.hu> (last viewed: 21 June 2009)

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Edit Herczog in MTV, Napkelte, 2 June 2009

The presentation of the candidates' expertise was also combined with subtle allusions to their female sensitivity and calm and friendly personalities, trying to bring them closer to the ordinary voter. The choice of women politicians is an interesting one in a country which has the lowest rate of female MPs in the national parliament and relatively few women in politics. In contrast, their percentage among the Hungarian MEPs was relatively high between 2004 and 2009. In general, Hungary is known for its rather conservative male centred attitude with regards to gender role and equal representation in politics. Even MSZP that put special emphasis on presenting female candidates (it set a 20% quota for women candidates [Várnagy 2010]) used stereotypical male chauvinistic discourse about women:

*"Three women. Grandmothers, mothers, housewives – and politicians. Combative but conflict setting women, persistent, tenacious women, able to argument and debate cleverly. They are exactly the persons needed in today's overturned world. We will not be disappointed by them: they can realise whatever goals they have set. As all men should know by personal experience whatever a woman really wants, she will reach by all means. And the three of them know what they really want."*<sup>10</sup>

Simple language used during their campaigns also aimed at expressing their close relationship to everyday electors. MSZP discourse also tackled the deep left / right rivalry in the country and encouraged electors to take an ideological stance by advocating governmental policy and rejecting the negative campaign of adversary parties.

Discourse analysis of the MSZP campaign shows that the most-often cited pro-EU arguments were financial: both government parties (MSZP and SZDSZ) mentioned projects in the country realized with EU financial support (e.g. "New Hungary", an economic and infrastructural development programme). EU financial solidarity was also presented as an important positive example as opposed to the financial crisis of a non-EU member, Iceland.

But the discourse did not only rely on instrumental arguments (EU funds), the value system promoted by the EU was also addressed. The party tried to turn down the growing negative attitude towards the EU. In explaining the issue of the EU being "too distant" from everyday citizens, the campaign tried to explain the role and functioning of the European Parliament by pointing to the technical and expert nature of the negotiations and decision-making processes. "Equality" was cited as a strong EU commitment with the argumentative value that all member-states' interests have to be taken into account, and not only the Hungarian ones. Interestingly enough, a typical left-liberal topos also appeared: the civilizing and value-setting role of the EU, considered as an important progress-enhancing factor and a strong defence barrier against extremisms and political and social disorder [Heller and Rényi 2003a, b].

MSZP used TV and Internet clips, as well. These short films directly addressed large layers of the population as can be detected by their form, content and language use. They featured (lower) middle class people with strong representational value<sup>11</sup> and were portrayed in scenes discussing political topics together, weighing political arguments and reflecting on political alternatives. These ads attempted to

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mszp.hu> (21 June 2009)

<sup>11</sup> The main figures were a father and his daughter with good and solid family ties between them.

exemplify ideological consistency and thoughtful, reflective electoral choice in messages accessible for the large public.



3. Father and daughter discussing about voting intentions<sup>12</sup> (MSZP campaign clip, EP campaign 2009)

The campaign of MSZP was characterised by diverging processes: it contributed to the general tendency in Hungary of considering EP elections as an arena for internal political struggle. It also aimed at exempting the Party of the failures of government policy and explicitly promised to defend Hungarian interests in the EU. But it also aimed at thematising EU topics and values in the Hungarian public sphere, it complimented meritorious EU policies and contributed to the debate by tackling important community issues. The campaign was addressed to large layers of the population as could be detected from the everyday language use, “retro” typographic style on billboards, and the featuring of ordinary people in clips.

The socialist campaign suggested that the party would continue to be in power after the general elections and it represented the economic crisis as a great danger against which large cooperation and joint efforts were needed. Against this necessity, the opposition, especially Fidesz was represented as a passive and destructive force: passive in the sense that it had no propositions to solve problems and destructive because it hindered reforms and its economic pessimism gave a negative image of the country abroad



4. “I vote for the left because they represent my interests in Europe”. (MSZP billboard, EP campaign 2009)

<sup>12</sup> MSZP TV campaign clip 2009

### 3. 2. The failure to redefine liberal ideology and identity

The liberal party gradually lost its electorate throughout the years and 2009 constituted their final defeat. As the second most successful party in 1990 and 1994, the popularity of SZDSZ, the liberal party, had been due to its most prominent members' consistent courageous oppositional activities during state-socialism. In 1994, liberals and socialists created a governmental "coalition-of-convenience": the socialists expected to get rid of the communist legacy, while the liberals intended to live up to their social engagements and to take part in decision-making. Although this move was condemned by SZDSZ's anti-communist electorate, the coalition government was recreated in 2002 and also in 2006. However, the inter-party clashes escalated so that in 2008 the liberals left the government. The failure of the second Gyurcsány government and the failed reform policies advocated by SZDSZ put the liberals into a difficult position by 2009. The party tried to reformulate its identity based on political liberalism, tolerance, and human rights but these orientations were not very popular among disillusioned Hungarians, leading to a gradual decline of SZDSZ throughout the 2000s. Decline was only reinforced by the withdrawal from the party of some well-known prominent intellectuals who went back to academia without having reared reliable young "inheritors". Their move created a vacuum in the party that was further shaken by some internal disputes, all of which alienated their liberal electorate. In 2004, SZDSZ gained two seats in the EP. SZDSZ's success in the early years of the system change was due to aspirations of freedom but also its strong anti-communist standpoint. Throughout its history SZDSZ represented liberalism, free market, human rights Western type modernization, progress and Euro-Atlantic integration. For all these it was often labelled as alien serving foreign interests, being anti-Hungarian or simply Jewish party. In the declining context the values and political vision of liberalism lost most of its appeal.

The party's goal for 2009 was to ensure at least one mandate to strengthen the position of the party for next year's national elections. It is worth mentioning that the decline of SZDSZ, a party the values of which were the closest to the EU's universal values, went parallel with the decreasing popularity of the EU: the disillusionment of the Hungarian population concerning the quick achievability of European living standards had its effect on the messages of SZDSZ, promoting basic universal values.

For the 2009 campaign, SZDSZ opted for a strong campaign framed around equality, tolerance, universal and European values: their campaign messages were close to shared European principles [Heller and Rényi 2007]. The EP campaign was the last effort of the liberals to explicitly define their political credo and identity although the quickly deteriorating political atmosphere was not receptive of their message. Again, the main topics of the SZDSZ campaign also concentrated on internal politics with the aim of preserving a place on the domestic political scene. The party organised inventive and colourful campaign events in public spaces where the main message was: "*We are all different but all equal*".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. '*Tarka Magyar*' ('Colourful Hungarian', with a linguistic joke) were paper dolls representing Roma, gay, physically disabled people, etc. <http://galeria.fn.hu/3/18615/0/1>



##### 5. Liberal demonstration

Paradoxically, the choice to invoke universal values shared by the EU was one of the mistakes of the campaign: the public became used to internal political issues and thus the EU values seemed to stay outside of the scope of the public competition. And the same values seemed to be sheer “ideological discourse” compared to other parties’ populist promises. The most considerable mistake was that SZDSZ constructed most of its messages on warning against a fearful enemy: the racist extreme right. SZDSZ itself, its candidates and its symbols were hardly shown in the ads due to the decreasing popularity of the party; the emphasis was placed on the presented values. The ads contrasted liberal values and nationalist, extremist, exclusionist “counter-values” of Jobbik. Not only was it a miscalculation regarding the electorate’s receptivity, but it also strongly increased the visibility of its worst opponent, the far-right, xenophobic Jobbik.

In this campaign SZDSZ tried to stay faithful to its basic value commitments hoping that these values would be understood and appreciated by the public. The campaign attempted to thematise human rights, equality between ethnic groups and between the sexes and emphasised the value of diversity and difference.



##### 6. Picture of an SZDSZ campaign clip representing three Gypsy children with frequent and popular Hungarian names

But under the actual conditions of the very negative and pessimistic Hungarian general public opinion, amidst the deep economic crisis the public was not at all receptive of basic universal human values. In addition, the relationship between the EU and the universal values was left implicit in the campaign: it was left to the public to work it out. It has to be realized *post festa* that a politically

unknowledgeable, unprepared, and disabused population was simply unable to decode the liberals' messages about values of tolerance, solidarity, equality, etc. Moreover, the campaign was designed with some severe discursive mistakes – the strongest rhetorical, as well as visual error was that most messages of comparison between SZDSZ and the far-right party were put in an interrogative form leaving to the receiver an open choice between the compared values and solutions. The ads contained visual comparisons, too: between an intentionally positive and a negative picture representing the rational, pleasurable and agreeable voters of SZDSZ and the savage, uncultured, frightful supporters of Jobbik (respectively).



7. "Who should decide about Hungary's future? Who will be the third force?" (SZDSZ billboard, EP campaign 2009)

The advertising strategy behind this campaign was that the choice is evident between positive and negative images, persons, values or solutions. But the who-questions left the discursive situation open and the yes-no questions often got a "No" answer:

*"Who should decide about the future of Hungary?"*

*"Who should decide about the economy?"*

*"Who will be the third force?"*

*"Are there 200001 electors who think a joint is a medical matter and not a case for the police?"* Judging after the graffiti on the billboards, the answer was often the unintended one.

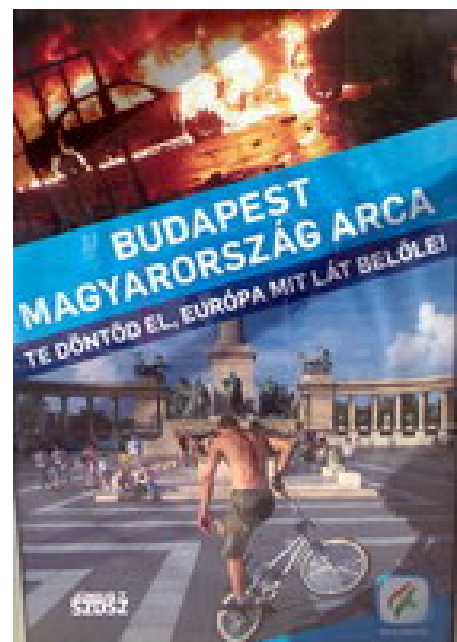


8. „Who will be the third force? Who should decide about the laws?” (SZDSZ billboard, EP campaign 2009)



9. "Are there 100001 free, democratic voters in Budapest who do not want the extreme right to decide about the fate of the country?" (SZDSZ campaign poster, EP campaign 2009)

Billboards on display in Budapest (a traditional stronghold of SZDSZ) illustrated peaceful images of Budapest contrasted with street riots organized by the far-right. The slogan addressed the voters with reference to Europe: "*Budapest is Hungary's face. It's up to you what Europe will see in it*". This conception of Europe as a severe outside judge fits well into the familiar asymmetric relationship between Hungary and Europe where Europe is often conceptualized as a severe teacher or a judge with Hungary in the position of the schoolchild or the suspect to be judged [Heller and Rényi 2003a, b; Heller and Kriza 2010].



10 and 11. "*Budapest is Hungary's face. . It's up to you what Europe will see in it.*" (SZDSZ billboards, EP campaign 2009)

The fact that SZDSZ in former years often used humour, irony, and even self-irony in their campaigns must have procured the overall feeling that this party was simply not “serious” enough. The SZDSZ campaign designers did not count with the increased possibilities of Web 2.0 and the strong digital activity of the followers of Jobbik and other extremist groups. The ads of SZDSZ became easy targets of various Internet-based mocking campaigns: a far-right website organized a competition for travestyng the party spots and campaign posters. Ultimately, this served the extreme-right much better than the liberals. Thus, on many levels, with its slogan “*Who will be the third force?*” comparing liberals and extremists, SZDSZ contributed to legitimizing the far-right party’s political existence and elevated Jobbik to the position of a real political opponent.



12. Extreme right reshuffling of an SZDSZ campaign idea: “*Who should own Hungarian land?*”



13. Extreme right reshuffling of an SZDSZ campaign idea: “*Who is extremist?*”

## 4. Attempts to represent old and new political ideologies

### 4.1. A chance for classical conservative politics: the last success of MDF

Perceived as the last refuge for moderate right-wing voters, MDF ran at the EP elections with relative success: after receiving 5,3% of the votes they were able to send a MEP to Brussels. Their candidate Lajos Bokros, the liberal economist, former minister of finance in a Socialist government chose to sit in the Eurosceptic faction of the European Parliament (European Conservatives and Reformists).

As an oppositional party to state-socialism, MDF was formed before the political changes of 1989 on the basis of the „unity of three core ideas” recurrent in the



history of the Hungarian right-wing: Christian-conservative, national liberal and national-populist. MDF was the winner of the first free elections and acted as the leading party of the right-wing government in the first period. Since their fall in the 1994 elections, MDF has been struggling to stay in the political arena, at some point it could only achieve this goal by running on a joint list with Fidesz (and they also got posts in the Fidesz-led government in 1998). In the 2004 EP elections MDF was able to get one mandate and in 2006 they succeeded entering the national Parliament with their own party list.

Their popularity was somewhat higher between 2006 and 2009, thus they were hoping to get good results both in the 2009 EP and 2010 legislative elections. In 2009 they were able to pass the threshold of 5%, in 2010 due to several internal fights, incoherent political standpoint and their problematic relationship with Fidesz, they could not get parliamentary seats and that led to the fall of the other largest party of the system change besides the liberal SZDSZ.

The EP campaign of MDF focused on the three leading figures: Lajos Bokros, economist, György Habsburg, son of Otto Habsburg from the Austrian Habsburg royal family and Ibolya Dávid, the head of the Party. The campaign was organised so that Bokros represented expertise while Habsburg symbolised conservatism but also Hungarian historical ties to Europe, as Hungary had been part of the “Western”, “European” Habsburg empire for more than two centuries.



14. “Sincerely, honestly for the homeland” (MDF billboard, EP campaign 2009)

Their slogan, “Sincerely, honestly for the homeland” tried to convey the message of being clear from corruption assimilated to Hungarian politics, and the homeland being a reference to national conservative values. In contrast to the prevailing populist politics based on passion and emotion in the campaign, MDF emphasised rationality and expertise symbolised by the slogan “More brain” from the saying (similar in Hungarian) “More brain than brawn”. MDF also tended to appear in between the left and right, using the same “bridging the gap” strategy as LMP (see below), and came up with the slogan “New Compromise<sup>14</sup>” accompanied by the picture of György Habsburg. MDF used this term with a special connotation to the actual divided Hungarian political context.

<sup>14</sup> The term “compromise” referred to the historical agreement (“The Compromise”) between Austria and Hungary in 1867 after the failed 1848 national revolution and war of liberation.



15. "New compromise! Vote for György Habsburg and the list of MDF!" (MDFposter, EP campaign 2009)

In its campaign MDF mixed traditional national conservatism, liberal economic views and also progressive reformist ideas. The uncertainty about the party's own identity was reflected by its results at the polls. MDF, the former anti-communist party that played an important role in the system-change got probably the last opportunity in the 2009 EP elections to remain a decisive force in Hungarian politics. Although it tried to counterbalance the populist voices of the competing right-wing parties, it was unable to show a clear-cut alternative. It could however get some votes from conservatives who refused the Orbán-led Fidesz or found Jobbik too extreme. Although Bokros got a seat in the EP, the 2010 elections saw MDF fall out of the national Parliament.

#### 4.2. The new "ecological" alternative: Politics Can Be Different (LMP)

LMP was formed in February 2009 by mostly young people with previous activist background in ecological and human rights movements. LMP was genuinely new in the Hungarian arena, as no serious green party could succeed since the 1990 political changes. Their motivation was to create a political formation that could not be discredited by previous political participation and could bridge the deepening old left / right divide in Hungarian politics. They tried to attract young people abandoned by mainstream parties, and to take sympathizers of the urban liberal SZDSZ that was in crisis and lost most of its voters. Their ideological conviction was (and still is) quite heterogeneous: left-wing in their critique of globalization and promoting social justice, liberal in protecting human rights, conservative in promoting collectivist values and community traditions. The ecological thinking is very important but not an exclusive credo of the party.

At the 2009 EP elections, LMP ran together with the Humanist Party (a small movement formed on the basis of the international Humanist Movement) and rejected cooperation with all other "discredited" parties. They portrayed themselves as the combination of the "expert with foreign experiences", the "politician working for the countryside" and the "green activist". Throughout the campaign they had to make special effort to define themselves differently from the liberals but also

remain capable of attracting liberal voters. Their offer of a new green left-wing identity seemed to be a success: they got 2,6 % (approx. 75 thousand votes) that was above of what the liberal SZDSZ could get but neither of them was able to get a mandate in the EP.<sup>15</sup>

In many respects LMP is “cosmopolitan” or at least not national-protectionist, the party is embedded in the international green, alter-globalist movements. Among others, they joined the European initiative of “Green New Deal” (promoting the creation of “green” employment) and they have close ties with the European Greens, especially with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who campaigned for them in Hungary. It was the only Hungarian party (together with the liberal SZDSZ) that did not insist on “protecting national interests in the European Parliament” but claimed that it would deal with issues (employment, salary, agriculture) that seriously affected Hungarians. They did make an effort to combine national, domestic political proposals with European agenda. The four pillars of their concept were (1) increasing employment, promoting social security, (2) safety of food products, (3) rural development and support for small and midsize land properties, (4) reinforcing transparency and democratic participation.

There is however, a mixture of social populism, anti-capitalism and anti-globalism in their rhetoric. Tímea Szabó, a human rights expert heading the EP party list said: *“Hungary’s EU membership had brought poverty and social differences, so far.” “We are not afraid to confront the devastating power of the capital”*<sup>16</sup> They attacked multinational companies, big land owners, and the corrupt political elite. They had a strong programme: how to make politics transparent, their campaign was financed entirely by sympathizers’ private supports and the financing was published on their website.

In their campaign strategy they tried to confront the general political disillusionment and apathy and mobilise previously passive young people. For this reason, they organised special public events and happenings (light-painting on the building of the Parliament, etc.) Their discourse deliberately conveyed a happy, relaxed and sentimental lifestyle. Besides green they used yellow (sun) colour on posters and leaflets, and the important graphic element was a little green heart printed on stickers posted in Budapest streets during the campaign. Opposing the rather negative general mood they promised a positive alternative with sentimental optimistic feelings. The messages were phrased in the form of questions: *“Can you feel...?”*

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<sup>15</sup> In 2010, LMP could pass the threshold of 5% and entered the Hungarian Parliament as the third oppositional party.

<sup>16</sup> Tímea Szabó Duna TV, 5 June 2009.

Érzed,  
hogy jobbat érdemel?



**Lehet más a politika!**



16. "Can you feel that he deserves better?" (LMP campaign poster, EP campaign 2009)

or on other posters: "Can you feel that it is not free?" (under a picture of red traffic lights – with several possible interpretations). Later on in the campaign, the positive answer: "I can feel it" also appeared on the posters and stickers:



17. "I can feel it!" (LMP campaign sticker, EP campaign 2009)

## 5. The Rise of anti-liberalism and populism

In the actual Hungarian political context, two parties represent the ideas that challenge liberal democratic values, and the EP elections resulted in a breakthrough for these parties: the Viktor Orbán-led Fidesz is usually labelled as moderate right-wing and Jobbik is a genuine far-right party.

In this part of our paper we will present the elements of the discourse used by these two parties in the campaign. Regarding the forms and content of their

discourse we will investigate in what way these two parties used anti-liberal rhetoric, as well as provide some explanatory factors for their success.

Fidesz and Jobbik took different positions within the Hungarian political space: Fidesz was established as a liberal movement before the change-over (Bozóki 1991), but radically changed political orientation in the early 1990s to occupy the emptying space in the political right after MDF lost its popularity (Petőcz 2001). Fidesz played a decisive role in Hungarian politics, including a spell in government between 1998 and 2002. The defeat in 2002 pushed the leadership to adopt strong offensive action and increasingly critical discourse. Fidesz succeeded in reaching strong public support by approaching various disillusioned layers of the population with very different discourses, the most staggering strategy being a "disguise-game": continual more or less implicit use of extreme right-wing topics, issues and language. Between 2002 and 2009, in its position as the strongest oppositional party, Fidesz was able to shape most political themes. On several occasions it successfully mobilised people (e.g. street rallies in 2006, or a populist "social referendum" in 2008 against reforms proposed by the government). Fidesz successfully built its own image as the only alternative to the governing socialists. Since 2006, the popularity of the party has continually risen. Due to these factors, Fidesz behaved in the 2009 EP campaign as the "winner" and considered the campaign as a test for the parliamentary elections of 2010. Fidesz (in coalition with Christian Democrats) got 56 % of the votes: 14 seats out of the 22 Hungarian EP mandates.

As a newly emerging formation, Jobbik was aware of the opportunity that had occurred in Hungarian politics: previous events (riots in 2006, formation of the xenophobic Hungarian Guard closely connected to the party and the serial attacks and killing against Roma people) brought them increasing popularity. Jobbik ran in the elections as a party outside Parliament, which is a handicap in the Hungarian system (restricted resources, less media coverage, etc). The challenge of the EP elections for Jobbik was how to convert the radicalising public mood into votes. Surpassing all predictions, Jobbik got 15 % of the votes and thus gained 3 EP mandates.

### **5.1 Fidesz: Right-wing populism and politics of denial**

Being the party likely to win the EP elections, the main strategy of Fidesz was not to communicate anything that could damage its popularity. The tactics were simple: minimize the concrete messages actually delivered during the campaign, avoid policy proposals, hide fundamental ideological convictions, refuse potentially risky debates, criticize and attack all measures and politics made by their opponents: the governing liberals and socialists. This unilateral communication also meant refusing public debate. Due to this reluctance of Fidesz, the whole campaign took place without any confrontation of political agendas. Only one TV debate was aired in which six candidates from parties presenting EP lists participated. No Fidesz candidate attended this event, either.<sup>17</sup>

As a continuation of their political attitude since 2002, they also aimed to systematically discredit the politicians of the government parties. This strategy was based on the deep-rooted anti-government sentiments which existed in Hungary. Their campaign was of "denial" or "protest" with just a few solution-oriented elements. The few political agenda points actually articulated were, however, very close to ones offered by Jobbik and concerned the topics of anti-elitism, social

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<sup>17</sup> Debate of 6 parties, 5 June 2009. [http://www.dunatv.hu/itthon/listavezetok\\_vitaja.html](http://www.dunatv.hu/itthon/listavezetok_vitaja.html)

populism, "law and order", "strong state - strong power", and national protectionism.

The slogan of "strength" is a recurrent element of Fidesz discourse. (Later on, it was used in the 2010 campaign, and also during the Hungarian EU presidency in 2011 where the official slogan was "*Strong Europe*".) This discourse of "strength" appears not just in the context of Europe: "*Europe should unify national strengths in order to become one of the leading world powers*"<sup>18</sup>, but also to justify a planned fundamental transformation of the Hungarian political system after the planned Fidesz victory in the 2010 elections. A centralized, protectionist, strong state seems ideal for Orbán envisaging his future agenda when becoming Prime Minister:

*" 'The Hungarian state has to be renewed' claimed Viktor Orbán, and for this it is necessary to create a strong state, to reinforce the economy owned by Hungarians, to give respect to work, to establish strong public security and political responsibility. (...) it is possible to set up a strong government only after general elections with strong social support."*<sup>19</sup>

Fidesz chose a very simplified language in its campaign materials, using short, one word messages that did not leave space for debate but tried instead to incite general dissatisfaction and anti-government emotions. Their main slogan "*Enough*", was a good catchword for this purpose.

*"Hungary says: it is enough of the Gyurcsány - Bajnai<sup>20</sup> era, enough of the economic and political swindling and of MSZP, said Viktor Obán."*

The other communicational tool that largely poisoned the public sphere was the demarcation and stigmatization of the "other", the political opponent. Fidesz was very efficient in dividing the political sphere with the "us / them" dichotomy, which they had used in their political communication since the late 1990s.<sup>21</sup> With the escalation of the political divide in their rhetoric, the opponent (mainly the socialists but also the liberals) soon became the diabolized "enemy". In their EP campaign Fidesz was shown as representing national unity, the people's will and togetherness while in contrast, socialists were depicted by Fidesz as related to and corrupted by business circles. A very simplified discourse tried to discredit the socialists by focusing on a number of populist messages: lies, corruption, tax rises and unemployment.

*"The president of Fidesz pointed out: the Hungarian people say that this several year-long period must end, when the spirit of robbery became dominant ideology brought to the country by swindle billionaires. Viktor Orbán claimed these speculators brought the country into bankruptcy. These people got rich at the expense of the others; therefore the whole country became the victim of the Gyurcsány - Bajnai era."*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Tamás Deustch, Fidesz EP candidate, short campaign video, 2009 EP campaign [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRF\\_V7t2xjM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRF_V7t2xjM&feature=related)

<sup>19</sup> A vidék Európája [Europe of the Countryside] 27 March 2009. news article on the official website of Fidesz: [www.fidesz.hu](http://www.fidesz.hu)

<sup>20</sup> Ferenc Gyurcsány was the Prime Minister of the Socialist party until April 2009, then Gordon Bajnai took over and remained head of government till the 2010 elections.

<sup>21</sup> In the 1998 general elections one of their leaflets said: "*MSZP represents the past, the civic future is represented by Fidesz. In fact, we have to take our choice between two forms of life, two ways of thinking, two personal value systems.*"

<sup>22</sup> Elég a Gyurcsány - Bajnai-korszakból! (Enough of the Gyurcsány - Bajnai era!) 5 May 2009 news article on the official website of Fidesz: [www.fidesz.hu](http://www.fidesz.hu)

Sentiment-driven messages were conveyed using very simple graphic images with just some human figures symbolising various social groups (pensioners, families with small children, certain – mainly middle-class professions, etc.).



18. "A country says: enough! Vote!" (Fidesz campaign billboard, EP campaign 2009)

By the end of the campaign, just one word remained on the billboards: "Enough!", with the orange colour of the party in the background<sup>23</sup>. Numerous campaign meetings and the aforementioned communication tactics were able to incite almost hysterical expectations of Fidesz rule among Fidesz supporters.



20. "Enough! Vote!" Fidesz poster, 2009 EP campaign

In a period where the serial killing of Roma people, the rise of anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy party and the regular marches of the racist Hungarian Guard dominated the Hungarian public sphere, Fidesz used a non-explicit way of talking about the Roma or tried to diminish the problem. One of the Hungarian Fidesz MEPs (Zsolt Becsey) even called on the European Commission not to propagate statements

<sup>23</sup> In smaller font types it was added: "a country says", as well as "Vote", written on the Hungarian tricolour.

about Roma people being victims of racist crimes, because such statements would incite against Hungary.<sup>24</sup>

Unwilling to deal with the social causes and consequences of the economic crisis and the escalating ethnic tensions, Fidesz gave priority to a populist "law and order" policy and promised several strict measures against growing criminality and a prevailing sense of insecurity. The issue of security was raised in a letter written by one of the leading figures of Fidesz and sent to every citizen as part of the party's direct marketing strategy. This letter promised that Fidesz would introduce the so called "three-strike law" i.e. a law that would sentence for life imprisonment criminals who commit serious crime three times. *"In the previous months serious crimes committed in our country - murders, armed robberies, arson – proved that the government is unable to guarantee public security."*<sup>25</sup> The idea of the three-strike law was an implicit message that Roma<sup>26</sup> people are the cause of increasing insecurity and the response should be harsher "law and order" politics. Physical insecurity was easy to be used as an election slogan parallel to social insecurity that characterised the general public mood as a result of the deepening economic crisis. The populist claim: *"We want security instead of fear"* was a well received slogan.

### 5.1.1. Fidesz and the EU

Since the late 1990s Fidesz maintained a rather controversial attitude towards the European Union. In their nationalistic, protectionist stance they emphasised their engagement of defending national interests from the "dominant supranational entity" and based their rhetoric on the well known image of "a proud little nation facing a great external power". Viktor Orbán's Eurosceptic phrase from 2000 became famous: *"There is life outside the European Union, as well."*

Besides catchphrases targeting general disillusionment (*"Enough"*, *"Hungary deserves more"*), Fidesz focused its messages on six very general and rather empty issues that had domestic resonance although presented as European. The first issue concerned the necessity of economic growth (*"Europe of Growth"*); the second was energy policy, and sustainable development including the protection of environment (*"Europe of Responsibility"*); third was the politics of the countryside, which targeted the rural population and agriculture (*"Europe of the Countryside"*); the fourth issue was regional development and EU support (*"Europe of Catching Up"*), while the fifth was centred on politics of the nation and demographic concerns regarding the decreasing number of Hungarians (*"Europe of Togetherness"*) targeting ethnic Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries. Later on, a sixth topic was also included that emphasized the rights of handicapped people (*"Europe of Creating Chance"*). These issues implied some policy ideas including protectionism preventing Hungarian land to be bought by foreign investors (Europe of the Countryside). Some ideas concerned economic policy and mentioned measures that would target growth as the only condition of economic prosperity (Europe of Growth). Nonetheless, these messages were usually devoid of real content and stayed unelaborated during the campaign. Instead, it seemed that Fidesz used them rather as a "mandatory assignment" in order to maintain the image of a party that has something to say about the EU.

<sup>24</sup> Hannes Swoboda: az európai romák egyre jobban félnek. [Hannes Swoboda: The European Romas are more and more scared] Népszabadság. 9 March, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> A public letter mailed to the Hungarian population by János Lázár head of the FIDESZ working group on security problems.

<sup>26</sup> In this text we use Roma and Gypsy as synonyms.



Indifference towards basic European values, like solidarity or integration becomes evident if we examine how the issue of "Europe of Togetherness" is used in the rhetoric of Fidesz: the term "togetherness" refers to no more than Hungarian ethnic solidarity within the EU. This attitude profoundly contradicts the European idea, i.e. that Europeans should have equal solidarity with all nations of the Union<sup>27</sup>. In 2009, after the 2007 accession of Romania to the EU, Hungarians living in Transylvania were able to elect MEPs for the first time. According to the Hungarian right-wing discourse where nation and state are regularly confronted, this was a major occasion after the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920 (when Hungary lost considerable parts of its territory): *"the European Parliament will be the first common legislative body where Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin can send MEPs"*<sup>28</sup>. In 2009, in a campaign rally held in Esztergom,<sup>29</sup> Orbán was even more explicit, he said the key issue of the EP elections was how many Hungarians would be elected in the EP, meaning that if ethnic Hungarian politicians from neighbouring countries (Slovakia and Romania where ethnic Hungarian minorities live) gain mandates, Hungarian interests would get stronger representation in the EU.<sup>30</sup> Orbán's speech was received with outrage by Slovakian politicians (Heller - Kohut - Kriza in press). National protectionism and ethnic preference advocated by Fidesz reflects a strong Eurosceptic attitude. The ethnic dimension in Fidesz politics was also emphasized by the fact that Orbán often campaigned together with Hungarian politicians from Romania (László Tőkés) or Slovakia (Miklós Duray).

EU was used by Fidesz as a pretext in various forms to legitimise its own political domestic goals. The party represented itself as the only promoter of European norms and values in Hungarian politics and the only party that protects human and minority rights (meaning the rights of Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries) in contrast to the unreliable, corrupt and non-democratic socialists. As one Fidesz candidate, Kinga Gál said, *"only the EU is able to protect Hungarian people against their government"*<sup>31</sup>.

According to Fidesz arguments, unlike the Hungarian government, the EU is the guarantor for rational economic functioning. They claimed that the European economic solidarity represented by the Cohesion Funds could not be implemented in Hungary because of the bad practices of the government and the dysfunctional Hungarian institutions working like "in state-socialism", reluctant to help small enterprises to successfully apply for European funds.

## 5. 2. Jobbik: Legitimizing ultra-nationalism

With its success in the EP elections, Jobbik managed to legitimize right-wing extremism and anti-liberal discourse. The party successfully became medium-sized in the Hungarian political arena by using a well organized campaign machine supported by new media (especially through the Internet: blogs, websites, video clips, etc.) and its civil society organizations including very active far-right

<sup>27</sup> Consider e.g. that the European Parliament is organized according to ideological factions to exclude the representation of national or ethnic interests.

<sup>28</sup> Tamás Deustch, Fidesz EP candidate, short campaign video, 2009 EP campaign [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRF\\_V7t2xjM&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRF_V7t2xjM&feature=related)

<sup>29</sup> A small Hungarian town by the Slovakian border.

<sup>30</sup> *Uszításnak tartja Fico Orbán kampánybeszédét.* (Fico considers Orbán's campaign speech as an incitement.) Origo.hu. 25 May, 2009.

<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090525-uszitasnak-tartja-fico-orban-kampanybeszedet.html>

<sup>31</sup> *Áder János és Deutsch Tamás is távozna a magyar parlamentből.* (János Áder and Tamás Deutsch would resign from the Hungarian Parliament.) Info Rádió. 17 January 2009. <http://inforadio.hu/hir/belfold/hir-251567>

sympathizers. The party also based its campaign on a popular extremist female politician, Krisztina Morvai, head of the party list.

The campaign exploited the general dissatisfaction exacerbated by deepening economic and social crisis, cases of corruption and failed political reforms. In addition, the mood of disillusionment was aggravated by the apocalyptic rhetoric about chaos and decay, repeated by right-wing politicians since 2002. This atmosphere provided fertile soil for scape-goating and gibbeting enemies in different social groups. Social populism and "law and order" rhetoric (used not only by Fidesz but also by Jobbik) was able to increase its popularity throughout the country and mobilize different layers of the society.

According to the results, Jobbik was able to gain votes in the most crisis-stricken regions: in the former heavy-industrial regions of North-East Hungary, as well as in the poorer rural areas in the East of the country, regions where previously the Socialist Party had dominated. Jobbik was the first political party that used the most common stereotypes against Roma people. It broke established taboos and overtly used extremist slogans regarding Jews and Gypsies introducing, among others, the term "Gypsy criminality".

The unpopular political elite were an easy target for Jobbik, which at the time was still outside of the Hungarian Parliament. The elite (including the whole political class) were blamed for corruption and other abuses of power. Jobbik successfully introduced a term "political criminality" (parallel to "Gypsy criminality"). In its "enemy construction", two discernible groups were formed: at the top an exploiting, corrupt elite and at the bottom the pauper Roma who live on social benefits: "Should the criminals be packed up with social benefits?" asked a Jobbik leaflet. In the far-right discourse "poor criminal" became synonym of Roma. The means by which Jobbik constructed its enemies and its ideological points were very similar to those employed by MIEP (a former extreme right-wing party) in the 1990s (Krizsa 2002, Bozóki – Kriza 2006).

**Debetővék, hogy holdus lesz saját hazájában?  
Bírogatja, hogy Gyurcsányék megússzák a börtönt?  
Kérje, hogy cigányekkel töltsék a cigánybörtönöket?**

Legyen végre rend ebben az országban!  
Sem az MSZP, sem a Fidesz nem foglalkozik ezekkel a problémákkal.  
Őket nem érdekli az Ön gondja.  
Ők képviselik majd hazánkat az Európai Parlamentben? Ugyan már.  
Ha elege van az elmúlt húsz évből, ha igazságot és biztonságot szeretne magának és szeretteinek, ha úgy gondolja, hogy **Magyarország a magyaroké**, akkor egy megoldás maradt.

**JOBBIK**  
HUNGÁRSZÁGÉRT

**Szavazzon a rend pártjára: a Jobbikra!**

Itt keresse a Jobbik Magyarországi Mozgalomról szóló híreket:  
**barikád.hu** **KARPATIA** **Nemzetőr**  
**Küruc** **Magyar Jelen** **KORONASZÉC** **HUNGARIAN**

**Jobbik Magyarországi Mozgalom**  
1133 Bp., Vilányi út 20/A  
06-1-345-14-46, 06-70-379-97-01  
jobbikajobbik.hu, www.jobbik.hu  
Bankzámlaszám: OTP 11705008-20485643

**JOBBIK**  
HUNGÁRSZÁGÉRT

21. "Do you accept that you will be beggar in your own country?  
Do you accept that Gyurcsány and his company avoid prison?  
Do you let Gypsy criminals to be poured with social supports?  
Vote for the party of order: Jobbik!"

The new force. Hungary is for the Hungarians!" Jobbik leaflet, 2009 EP campaign

As for political criminality, the party promised accountability and intended to send politicians to prison: *"Do you accept that Gyurcsány and his band should avoid prison?"*<sup>32</sup> Similar to Fidesz and the leftist MKMP, it addressed the deprived social groups: *"Will you be a beggar in your own country?"* asked one of its leaflets, and used strong anti-elitist and anti-capitalist rhetoric which proved to be attractive, especially for people living in poor rural areas or unemployment-stricken townships. They also promised to *"protect rural life"* and ban the sale of land:

*"The actual political elite almost entirely sold our factories, our energy sector, our waters and, of course, our markets to foreigners. In 2011 land would be the next – if we let it. Jobbik will not let it, one of the most important elements of our agenda is that we, Hungarians, cannot compete for our own lands with those benefiting from five as much income as Hungarians. This is not the free circulation of capitals, but colonisation and we will not allow it! We must achieve that the Hungarian lands remain Hungarian property."*<sup>33</sup>

As a "classical" social populist party they also addressed the "working class" and blamed the "exploiting" economic elite for poverty. In many of the party leaflets, the issues of workers' general demands emerge, and the strong regulatory and sovereign state is praised as a solution against the excesses of post-transitional "wild-capitalism".

*"The worker is not a profit making machine in the service of a narrow, rich and spoiled elite but a person with human dignity and also with rights to a dignifying salary, leisure time, respect for the legal working hours, vacation and protection of interest by trade unions. He also has right to live in a strong state that does not flatter the international capital, does not serve profit but the man, the public good and human dignity."*<sup>34</sup>

It is also clear that in Jobbik's discourses anti-capitalism is often intertwined with xenophobic standpoints. They also attacked *"robber privatisation"* (presumed unlawful privatisation of former state-owned goods), and the activities of the multinational companies (*"alien capital"* with more or less disguised anti-Semitic allusions) that led to the poverty of the people.

*"...[you] have achieved that almost the entire Hungarian economy is in foreign hands and almost all the profit made in the country is taken abroad. According to your<sup>35</sup> recipe the capitalists and banks privatise the profit while the damages are nationalized, they are delegated to Our kind of people<sup>36</sup> and thus the pensioners and the people with low salary have to pay for them. As a consequence of the deliberate destruction of the Hungarian economy and its selling out to foreigners, but also independently from this, they constantly take loans from international organisations, foreign banks who in exchange claim*

<sup>32</sup> Jobbik leaflet, 2009 EP campaign

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Morvai Krisztina válasza Gusztos Péternek. (Krisztina Morvai's answer to Péter Gusztos, a Hungarian liberal politician) 07.05.2009 [http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/publicisztika/dr\\_morvai\\_krisztina\\_valasza\\_gusztos\\_peternek](http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/publicisztika/dr_morvai_krisztina_valasza_gusztos_peternek)

<sup>34</sup> Morvai Krisztina nyílt levele a jelenlegi parlamenti pártok politikusaihoz. (Krisztina Morvai's open letter to the current politicians of the Hungarian Parliament.) 05.06.2009 [http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/ep-valasztasi\\_hirek/morvai\\_krisztina\\_nyilt\\_levele\\_a\\_jelenlegi\\_parlamenti\\_partok\\_politikusaihoz](http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/ep-valasztasi_hirek/morvai_krisztina_nyilt_levele_a_jelenlegi_parlamenti_partok_politikusaihoz)

<sup>35</sup> Left-wing liberal (She is addressing socialist and liberal politicians in her letter)

<sup>36</sup> This differentiation between 'our kind of people' and 'your kind of people' is coded anti-Semitism, where the term 'your kind of people' refers to Jews. See Morvai's letter to the American Jews later in this article.

*the right to rule Hungary as colonisers. The state subsidies and tax benefits go to the foreign "investors" instead of the Hungarian entrepreneurs and farmers. Jobbik would and will immediately abolish all these abnormal rules. We will revise the outrageous privatisation contracts since "the stolen goods must be returned" and the responsables will be taken to court. We will end Hungary's and the Hungarians' debt slavery since the "loans" have been paid back more than once."*<sup>37</sup>

Jobbik's central campaign focused on the economic crisis and rising poverty and a perceived increase in crime rates, especially in underdeveloped regions. Petty crimes often committed by poor Gypsies irritated the similarly poor rural population, and no state agents were able to handle the growing tensions. The underpaid, badly organised and trained, and often corrupt local police was unable to guarantee security that was challenged by several incidents perpetrated by Gypsies and non-Gypsies alike. The population experienced growing sense of insecurity and logically, growing frustration raised the expectations of "*strong hands*" that would restore order. This mood was exploited by Jobbik, which promised to re-establish the institution of the Hungarian gendarmerie ("*csendőrség*") that functioned in interwar Hungary (and which was active in the deportations of the Hungarian Jews in 1944).

In 2007 Jobbik formed its own paramilitary organisation, the Hungarian Guard that regularly marched in uniform (similar to what Hungarian Nazis used during World War 2) in villages populated by Roma people, it held rallies using racist slogans and increased the already high tensions between Roma and non-Roma. Since 2007, several violent incidents have taken place throughout the country. Since 2008, a series of attacks against Gypsies have been carried out, including the murder of six people. Later the alleged perpetrators were arrested and it turned out that the attacks were racially motivated, as well as carefully planned and executed.

Jobbik tried to diminish the salience of this racist series of attack emphasising "Gypsy criminality": it regularly brought up stories about violent conflicts initiated by Gypsies against non-Gypsies to prove and reinforce the general and highly distorted view about the dangers Gypsies mean to the non-Gypsy population, deepening the divide between majority and minority groups.

*"While the left-wing liberal media blares in the whole country that racist attacks take place against the »poor, innocent Roma people«, the Gypsy criminality had a new victim. This time, our comrade, Attila Szabó, the vice-president of Jobbik in Vecsés<sup>38</sup>, one of the 56 first Guard members and his family became the targets and victims of an incident by the criminal horde. Jobbik insists on its view that in our country there is only one type of racism: the raging anti-Hungarian hatred. Jobbik is the only party that is ready to clean Budapest and the entire Hungary from the Gypsy criminality using constitutional and legal means."*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. Morvai Krisztina válasza Gusztos Péternek. [Krisztina Morvai's answer to Péter Gusztos, a Hungarian liberal politician], 7 May 2009 .  
[http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/publicisztika/dr\\_morvai\\_krisztina\\_valasza\\_gusztos\\_peternek](http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/publicisztika/dr_morvai_krisztina_valasza_gusztos_peternek)

<sup>38</sup> Small town close to Budapest

<sup>39</sup> A cigánybűnözéstől is megtisztítaná hazánkat a Jobbik. [Jobbik would clean Hungary from Gypsy criminality], Press release by Csanád Szegedi MEP candidate, future MEP. 17 December 2008.

“Gypsy criminality” became the key word of the EP campaign concerning the Roma, and by extending the criminality to the whole Roma community and by explaining it as a culturally and socially rooted phenomenon, Jobbik could successfully indoctrinate a racist dogma among voters. In the following text (an excerpt of Jobbik’s EP agenda) they consciously try to avoid receiving the label “racist” while they provide explanation and definition of Gypsy criminality:

*“There exists a peculiar form of criminality, the Gypsy criminality that differs in character and proportion from the criminality of those belonging to the majority society. Affirming and documenting this phenomenon does not mean racism or the collective stigmatisation of the Gypsies, since behind the phenomenon we do not designate genetic determination but a particular socio-cultural background.”<sup>40</sup>*



22. “VII. Don’t steal! Orbán Kolompár.”<sup>41</sup> Jobbik leaflet, 2009 EP campaign

According to the election results, Jobbik’s success was above the national average in areas where the Hungarian Guard had showed up or where any sort of conflict between Roma and non-Roma had occurred. In general, Jobbik performed well where unemployment rates, level of poverty, and the size of the Roma population were higher.<sup>42</sup> In several rural places, people even believed that the law was represented by the Hungarian Guard that “was able to stand up to Gypsy criminality”. The police was also discredited by Jobbik during and after the riots in 2006 when rioters (mainly football hooligans and other far-right sympathizers) regularly attacked policemen. The far-right party together with Fidesz had introduced a special rhetoric: the “terror of the police” and launched a campaign

<sup>40</sup> Jobbik 2009 EP agenda

<sup>41</sup> Orbán Kolompár is an elected head of the National Gypsy Minority Self-government who got involved in embezzlement and other financial criminal cases. The “VII. Don’t steal” and the stone on the picture is also a reference to the Moses’ ten commandments.

<sup>42</sup>A büntető szavazás iskolapéldája. A 2009-es EP-választás eredményének főbb tanulságai. [The example of the punishing vote. Lessons of the 2009 EP elections results] Republikon Intézet, 2009.

[http://www.republikon.hu/upload/5000038/republikon\\_elemzes\\_20090714.pdf](http://www.republikon.hu/upload/5000038/republikon_elemzes_20090714.pdf)

against the police (and minister of interior) claiming that the police used disproportionate violence during the street riots.<sup>43</sup>

Jobbik's discursive strategy aimed at attracting public attention with deliberately scandalous racist or anti-Semitic statements. In Hungarian far-right rhetoric, Jews often appear as rich colonizers, usually meaning American or Israeli investors. In the campaign, Jobbik promised to "take back" the country from the colonizers. Krisztina Morvai, leading figure of Jobbik's EP list excelled in divisive discursive methods: she called Jews "your kind of people" in contrast to "our kind of people", and added "we would no longer stand the terror of your kind of people". In the same public letter, she also wrote the following obscene message: "I would be glad if the so-called proud Hungarian Jews would go back to playing with their tiny little circumcised willies instead of vilifying me."<sup>44</sup>



23. "Because our kind of people have only one homeland" with Krisztina Morvai's picture, Jobbik poster, EP Campaign 2009

### 5.2.1. Jobbik and the EU

Jobbik as a far-right party has been anti-EU for many years, even boycotting the first EP elections. In 2009 it emphasized the loss of national sovereignty among its main concerns referring to the EU perceived as a liberal, capitalist thus "alien" entity. In its discourse the EU was presented as a danger to national, cultural and economic autonomy.

This perception of the EU as an external "colonizing" power, endangering national sovereignty appears in their call to fight against the Lisbon Treaty. It also criticized the left-wing government for not organizing a referendum to ratify the Treaty, therefore they claimed that the decision was undemocratic and exclusively served foreign interests.

<sup>43</sup> All this was wrapped in a human rights activist discourse, the main advocate of which was Krisztina Morvai, Jobbik candidate who after being elected MEP continued to keep alive this issue in the EP. See e.g. Morvai's first plenary speech at the European Parliament: <http://www.jobbik.com/europe/3092.html>

<sup>44</sup> Morvai levele az amerikai zsidóknak a metélt farkincákról. [Morvai's letter to the American Jews on the circumcised willies] Népszabadság 4 June 2009. [http://www.nol.hu/belfold/morvai\\_obszcen\\_levele\\_az\\_amerikai\\_zsidoknak](http://www.nol.hu/belfold/morvai_obszcen_levele_az_amerikai_zsidoknak)



24. "One can say: NO!" Movement for a Free Hungary<sup>45</sup>, EU accession referendum campaign 2003.

*Jobbik sustains the fight against the Lisbon Treaty that is pulling down national sovereignty as one of the most important foreign policy principles (...). Jobbik organizes the Hungarian campaign against the Lisbon Treaty, also because for the first time in the EU, the Hungarian Parliament decided obsequiously about this historic law, in a dictatorial way, without asking the Hungarian people's opinion.*<sup>46</sup>

Similarly to Fidesz, Jobbik's main goal was to represent Hungarian interests in the EP as one of their leaflets claimed: *"In protection of Hungarian interests and to create a Europe of the nations"*. Jobbik emphasized the widely shared idea that the European Union is nothing but a(n) (economic) forum, a "lobby centre", where different nations delegate representatives to promote their own national interests:

*"It is necessary to have an economic federation in Europe and it is important for us to be part of this federation, but we do not need another oppressive power that deprives us of our national sovereignty. Brussels is a lobby centre where Poles represent Polish interests, the Italians represent Italian interests."*<sup>47</sup>

It considered the EU as a global, supranational power and strongly criticized EU bureaucracy, its anti-democratic character and corruption, and blamed it for its neoliberalism similar to the American version. It also accused the EU of not being able to counterbalance the USA but rather representing American interests.

<sup>45</sup> Movement for a Free Hungary (Szabad Magyarországért Mozgalom) is a far right (anti-Gypsy, anti-Semitic, anti-capitalist, anti-American and anti-EU) civil society organisation, active in the anti-EU campaign around the EU accession referendum held in 2003 in Hungary. [www.szmm.hu](http://www.szmm.hu)

<sup>46</sup> Új erővel a Lisszaboni Szerződés ellen! [With new forces against the Lisbon Treaty], 6 February 2009. | Béla Kovács, president of Jobbik's Committee for foreign Affairs

<sup>47</sup> "Mozgósítás, mozgósítás és mozgósítás - ez a siker kulcsa!" - exkluzív interjú Szegedi Csanáddal. ["Mobilization mobilization and mobilization – this is the key for success!" – exclusive interview with Csanád Szegedi] 2 June.2009.

<http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/ep-valasztasi-hirek/%E2%80%9Emozgositas-mozgositas-es-mozgositas-%E2%80%93-ez-a-siker-kulcsa%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-exkluziv-interju-szegedi-csanaddal>

*"We can affirm about the currently existing EU that it is a creature standing above nations, undemocratic, bureaucratic, burdened with corruption and indorsing neoliberal interests."*<sup>48</sup>

*"The EU (...) is the mediator of US centred globalist interests."*<sup>49</sup>

The main slogan of Jobbik for the EP elections was extremely provocative and in contradiction with core European values: *"Hungary is for the Hungarians"*. This ultra-nationalist slogan assuming an ethnic definition of national belonging reflected the party's extremely restrictive ideology concerning the nation, excluding from it minorities and migrants.

For Hungarian nationalists, the "historic injustice" of the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920<sup>50</sup> is on the top of the political agenda, especially in public discourses: far right political statements vary in respect of providing solutions for healing the *"collective Trianon trauma"*. Moderate voices emphasize protecting minority rights of the Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries, some would argue for more ethnic autonomy for these minority Hungarians and reinforcing national identity, the most radical view, however, is the revision of the Peace Treaty, meaning reattachment of the lost territories. This, obviously, provokes great tensions with the neighbouring countries and ultimately contradicts the basic treaties ratified by Hungary and its neighbours. Nonetheless, Trianon and the lost *"Greater Hungary"* remain a strong symbol of all Hungarian far-right movements: many references, as well as subcultural products (songs, books, flags etc.) deal with this issue. During the EP campaign, one of the most radical figures of Jobbik, Csanád Szegedi (MEP candidate and later MEP), one of the founders of the Hungarian Guard expressed overtly the need of the revision of the Trianon Treaty:

*"My grandparents and parents educated me and I will also educate my little son with the idea that in a lucky historic situation Hungarians must reoccupy the Carpathian Basin. Unfortunately today even keeping this remaining territory of 93 square-kilometres causes problem. Hungarians are in a phase of awakening and I firmly believe that we can protect our homeland and the unjust Treaty dictated in Trianon can be changed."*<sup>51</sup>

As for the policy regarding the Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries, Jobbik was also in favour of the extension of the notion and definition of "nation" and similarly to Fidesz, it voiced a strongly ethnocentric view concerning representation in the EU. They advocated future collaboration within the European Parliament with the ethnic Hungarians and this alliance was designed against

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<sup>48</sup> Jobbik 2009 EP agenda p. 18

<sup>49</sup> Jobbik 2009 EP agenda p. 14

<sup>50</sup> In 1920, the Versailles Peace Treaty signed in the Palace of Trianon (therefore Trianon is the term in public use in Hungary) decided about the fate of Austria-Hungary. Historical Hungary (also referred to as "Greater Hungary") lost two thirds of its territories that were attached to neighbouring Czechoslovakia (today Slovakia and Ukraine), Romania, Yugoslavia (today Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia) and Austria. The interwar semi-fascist Horthy regime built its ultra right-wing nationalist politics on the revision of the Trianon Treaty and the reconquering of the lost territories. This policy was provisionally successful as Horthy agreed with Hitler in 1938 and large parts of these territories were reoccupied by the Hungarian army.

<sup>51</sup> "Mozgósítás, mozgósítás és mozgósítás - ez a siker kulcsa!" - exkluzív interjú Szegedi Csanáddal. ["Mobilization mobilization and mobilization – this is the key for success!" – exclusive interview Csanád Szegedi] (see footnote 45.)



different perceived enemies including globalization or neighbouring countries. Neighbouring countries were also blamed for expansionist politics.

*"(T)he interdependence<sup>52</sup> is easily foreseeable: Hungarians can resist with greater force to the process of globalization, a drive destroying nations if they do not let lose the millions sharing the same blood, mother tongue, history and habits. We should keep in mind that neighbouring people rewarded at our expense after the two wars have been aiming for centuries at diminishing the living space of the Hungarians and expanding the influence of their states in the Carpathian Basin."<sup>53</sup>*

*"In the European Parliament Jobbik will not only represent the interests of the citizens of the Hungarian Republic, but also those of all the Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin in cooperation with the Hungarian MEPs from the neighbouring countries also fighting for Hungarian interests."<sup>54</sup>*

In far-right mythology (a core element in extremist nationalist ideology), Hungary – with its legendary leaders – used to be a great power that conquered Europe and whose power was feared and respected by many nations. This narrative construction is well reflected in Jobbik's slogan: *"We will re-conquer Europe!"* The fact that Europe should be "re-conquered" was a good sign as to what the party expected from the European Union.



25. *"We will re-conquer Europe! Hungary is for the Hungarians!"* (on the left of the picture)  
*"The new force. Hungary is for the Hungarians!"* (on the right of the picture Jobbik posters, 2009 EP campaign)

## 6. Ultra-left-wing Eurosceptic voices

In the Hungarian context, Eurosceptic voices were mainly concentrated on the political edges (Heller 2010). Small political parties, not being able to achieve 5 % of voices at parliamentary elections and thus not present in Parliament, as well as civil society movements of various ideologies are the main actors expressing various discursive constructions of Eurosceptic, Eurocritic or plainly anti-EU discourses.

<sup>52</sup> with ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring countries

<sup>53</sup> Jobbik 2009 EP agenda p. 22

<sup>54</sup> Jobbik 2009 EP agenda p. 23

On the extreme left of the political spectrum, we find two small parties and some civil movements competing for leftist protest votes.

### 6.1. Communist hardliners

The Hungarian Communist Workers Party (MKMP) was created on the ruins of the former monolithic state-party after its dissolution in 1989, in the midst of the political changes when the young, reformists quit and founded MSZP. Former Muscovite politicians of the old state-party gathered in this new but old-fashioned Communist party with the presidency of a "professional communist politician" from the younger generation. The party has never been able to attain the 5% threshold in national elections: its scores have not ceased to decrease<sup>55</sup> (from 4.08 % in 1998 to 0.41 % in 2006).

According to its programme, the party represents traditional working-class people, smallholders, and employees; but its audience is very narrow and consists mainly of disillusioned pensioners, former factory workers who lost their jobs after the change-over, i.e. the losers of the political and economic changes.

In 1997, before the NATO-referendum, the party campaigned against Hungary's NATO alliance arguing against NATO's presumed imperialist policy and interests. They also affirmed that Hungary had no reason to join the military treaty because the country was not threatened by any enemies or foreign forces. They praised international workers' solidarity, friendship with former socialist countries, including Russia. Their anti-capitalist discourse, however, gradually incorporated populist argumentation, claiming the protection of national interests. Although this might be a surprising development in a communist party, MKMP just followed the unfolding agenda of growing nationalism in the country.

Before EU accession, MKMP took a pro-EU stand arguing that *"the rights of the workers are better regulated in the EU countries than in the actual wild-capitalism prevailing in Hungary"*<sup>56</sup>. In the campaign preceding the 2003 EU-referendum, the party took an ambiguous stand by expressing positive, as well as critical arguments. Among the positive arguments they mentioned the common economic policy with its common market and tax system, the development of Hungarian infrastructure and research capacities, the increasing possibilities of citizens' mobility for working, travelling and studying. The EU's institutions capable of settling international conflicts and providing defence against the influence of globalism and Americanism were also mentioned. Their negative expectations and doubts concerned employment, agricultural production and prices that would negatively be affected by EU membership. Their main criticism, however, concerned the presumed role and reign of international capital in the EU and they blamed the neoliberal economic policy that struck a strong blow on welfare achievements of the European workers. But in the same time the party also objected to the loss of the country's sovereignty and its foreseeable economic dependence of the EU. The party had good opinion about the EU's main values and democratic principles but had some fears that neoliberal capitalism would cramp the position of the European left.

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<sup>55</sup> As a result of internal debates, the party split up and had to face another leftist party – Munkáspárt 2006 (Workers' Party 2006), the members of which mainly came from MKMP, including its former vice-president.

<sup>56</sup> Gyula Thürmer Index: 7 November 2002. <http://index.hu/politika/belhirek/108703>

During the 2004 EP elections, the party, however, hoped to be able to participate in and “strengthen” the European left. Their campaign was weak (lack of finances) and concentrated mainly on internal politics, just like most parties in the country. In EU politics, they planned to fight for the 35 hour working week, the creation of new jobs and for lowering the age for pensions, Their score in 2004 was 1,83%.

In the 2009 EP campaign, MKMP's campaign (0.96%) also mainly centred on domestic politics attacking the ruling MSZP. Yet the party became more Eurosceptic compared to 2004. Their criticism became stronger, emphasizing especially the bureaucratic nature of the EU that gets further away from the ideas of the founding fathers. The discourse became also more ideological in the sense that they focused on *“the capitalist oppression of the working people, of the poor”* and that *“instead of integration, the class struggle of the working masses was repressed”* in the Union. They also blamed the EU that only the strong and big countries' interests are taken into consideration. Their criticism of internal and external issues was often interwoven: they blamed all Hungarian political elites (both left and right) for serving foreign interests and having sold out the country to foreign capitalist groups, instead of defending Hungarian interests in the EU.

*“Since the change-over, the Hungarian elite did not represent Hungary in Brussels, but instead represented the EU in Hungary”<sup>57</sup> (Gy. Thürmer, leader of the party).*

The discourse of MKMP is a strange mixture of several outdated discourses: it has taken many stable constructions of the former state-socialist ideological discursive constructions (e.g. imperialists and international capital oppressing the working class, etc.) but in the new political context, it also adopted nationalist discursive elements. It is true that a certain hidden shy nationalism was already present during the Kádár-regime (proudly comparing the *“happiest barrack of the camp”* with neighbouring countries), but at that time the ideological discourse was able to hide this type of populist nationalism behind phrases of communist fraternity. Recently, arguments based on national priorities and the defence of national identity emerged in all topics of public discourse and on various sides of the political arena. MKMP also adopted elements of popular and populist nationalist discourse. E.g. *“Hungarian land should stay in Hungarian possession”*.

The main arguments of MKMP in the 2009 campaign can be related to political, ideological, economic, and social topics. Political arguments were related to basic principles: MKMP criticized the EU's inner structure, the realization of its democratic values, as well as the principle of representation. *“We like Europe but would like a different Europe.” “It is not democracy that we would like to change. We would like to implement a society, a Europe where ordinary people feel well.”*

But in the same discourses the interest-based utilitarian aspect of the EU is also criticized: the party blames the negative balance of interests and benefits imparted to the country since accession. They claim having backed the country's membership in 2004 because they liked the *“idea of cooperation between European countries”* but now they blame the EU saying that the Hungarian workers live in misery because certain EU member-states together with other Western countries and the USA exploit Hungary through their multinational trusts and the Hungarian millionaire political elite *“lies down subserviently”*. They also find that EU representation is biased, ordinary workers, everyday people should become MEPs.

<sup>57</sup> Gy. Thürmer May 2009. [http://www.kommunista.net/hir/thurmer-a-rendszervaltas-ota-az-elit-nem-magyarorszagot-kepviselte-brusszelben-hanem-az-europai-. 21](http://www.kommunista.net/hir/thurmer-a-rendszervaltas-ota-az-elit-nem-magyarorszagot-kepviselte-brusszelben-hanem-az-europai-.)

*„The stake of June 7 is whether we can introduce the Hungarian worker to the European Parliament.“<sup>58</sup> This claim is widely shared by extreme-right wing parties, as well, who require a “new change”: the “changing of the elite.”*

MKMP claimed that the EU is too concentrated and too bureaucratic and promoted the idea of turning back to a loose association of countries. In the 2009 campaign it became clear how MKMP meant the cooperation of countries: expecting a strong redistribution of wealth among member-states to help a quick catching up of the poorer countries. This expectation was also very popular in lay discourses.

Similarly to the far-right Jobbik, MKMP asked for electoral support to reverse selling out the country and to make Hungary more independent. MKMP blamed both the EU and the Hungarian elite for having “sold out” the country, and claimed that both the system-change and EU integration contributed to the downfall of the country.

*“One of the main reasons of the economic crisis is that everything was sold. This is a Hungarian speciality. There is foreign propriety in every country but Hungary is the only country where the whole economy was sold out to foreigners.”<sup>59</sup>*

They affirmed their will to collaborate with the EU if only membership would ensure more benefits; otherwise they would be ready to renegotiate the country's membership and its conditions or even withdrawal.

MKMP's strongest Eurosceptic ideological arguments are widely used (not only in Hungary and not only against the EU). International capitalism, multinational companies and global “wild” imperialism are pinpointed as the merciless exploiters of peoples or as the careless corruptors of world economy and peaceful coexistence. These arguments re-emerge from former communist texts and reappear in the discourses of various protest (anti- or alter-globalist) movements (ATTAC, Greenpeace, etc.) but have also been borrowed by radical right-wing movements or parties. These same accusations when used by the extreme right-wing, however, go further: the wrong-doings of international capital are not just the results of the functioning of a complex economic system, but are part of the ill will of hidden conspiring groups (Jews, in general).

Eurosceptic economic arguments were often intertwined with ideological arguments, blaming capitalism in general. Economic arguments by their nature were mainly interest-based arguments, used in discourses that try to measure the relative weight of interests. The role of these discourses was to define and defend the interests of the “we” group (Wodak 1991): they were always considered more important than others' interests and should therefore be protected.

*“Most of the Hungarian people do not have any information about how much money we are paying in, what we get back and what it is spent on.”<sup>60</sup> “We should regain the country's economic independence.”*

MKMP campaign discourses target an allegedly strong imbalance among EU countries not only in their economic and welfare situation but also in their influence on economic procedures and EU decision making. MKMP promised in the campaign to reverse this situation by revoking various decisions or signed contracts (“some

<sup>58</sup> Gy. Thürmer, Duna TV, 5 June 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Gy. Thürmer, MTV, 15 May 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Gy. Thürmer, MTV, 27 May 2009.

companies should be re-nationalized") to "regain the country's economic independence" and create more viable and safer life for Hungarian workers. MKMP declared that they "would not spend on military adventures" and that "the country is buried in an international debt-trap and our death penalty will be pronounced by the banks" (Gy. Thürmer). MKMP (quite similarly to Jobbik) claimed that a protectionist economic policy should be introduced and affirmed that Hungary was entitled to financial compensation for the losses it had to endure by entering the EU (sic!).

MKMP's Eurosceptic social arguments thematize in various manners the social problems that have been reinforced by the economic crisis. These discourses tackled the problems of the health care system, unemployment, poverty or the disastrous situation of the Hungarian Roma, real social problems causing much tension. But these topics were treated in discourses mixed with nationalist and xenophobic connotations, blaming the rich EU countries again together with the international capital for poverty in Hungary. They often made allusions to the pre-integration hopes that the "...wages of the Hungarian workers will increase to the level of their Western fellows", and they refused that "the rich make decisions about us".

MKMP proposed a renegotiation of Hungarian membership in the EU in order to attain better conditions, stronger influence and more important financial help. In order to convince or to compel the EU to renegotiate, some MKMP discourses were even brandishing social menaces:

*"The EU had not given any sources so far to ameliorate the situation of the Roma." "The Roma should get jobs and schooling; there is no money for that in Hungary. If Europe does not want to have a whole-European crisis out of that – like the problem of immigrants, which is a huge problem in Europe – than they should help."*<sup>61</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The 2009 European Parliamentary elections represent a clear political breaking point in the history of post-communist Hungary. The escalating economic and political crises gave floor to reinforcing nationalism, populism, and extremism. The socialist - liberal coalition government that had been in power for seven years lost its credibility and popularity. It was shaken by scandals of corruption and thus it was unable to overcome the economic crisis and the increasingly grouchy atmosphere. The social reforms were stopped by the deep political divide in the public arena, the heavy counter-propaganda of the oppositional parties, the impossibility to attain consensus in any issues but also because of the governing parties' internal debates and diminishing support.

The EP election campaigns were considered by the parties as a rehearsal before the upcoming general elections taking place in April 2010, thus were dominated by domestic issues. Only few European issues appeared during the campaign and their thematization often served internal political goals.

Although European values were not missing from the campaign, (represented mainly by socialists and liberals), these attempts were rather modest and pro-EU arguments did not manage to gain salience in the general domestic struggles. Left-wing and liberal parties were seriously marginalized in the campaign and this

<sup>61</sup> Gy. Thürmer, MTV, 20 May 2009.

resulted in the weakening of progressive, reformist political forces representing pro-European, universal values, sensitive to human rights and social solidarity. Tolerance, anti-racism, democracy, and anti-violence appearing in the liberal "identity-campaign" had no echo in the radicalizing populist atmosphere and political messages built on left-wing ideas were mostly rejected by disillusioned voters. The low popularity of these political forces even discredited their expressed European ideals. European topics were mainly successfully highlighted within Eurosceptic discourses portraying the EU in negative colours as over-bureaucratized superpower threatening national sovereignty, economic autonomy and cultural traditions. A small green party, LMP tried to take over the liberal votes and to bridge the gap between left and right, but was unsuccessful. Being too weak and ideologically heterogeneous, LMP was unable to convince masses of left-wing people.

On the other hand, winners of the EP elections were representatives of anti-liberal populist politics. Fidesz, the main oppositional party, eager to return to power, harvested the fruits of its politics of previous years that was built on a constant denial and refusal of consensus or deliberation. The strategy of continuous attacks against the governing left-wing parties and obstruction of their reforms by using populist discourse proved to be successful. The far-right, overtly racist extremist party, Jobbik earned unexpected success. Their breakthrough and the escalation of nationalist topics, scape-goating, hate-speech, and xenophobic discourse was due not only to wide disillusionment, the declining economic situation, and growing social tensions but also to the cynical discursive strategies of the mainstream right-wing Fidesz, using double-talk to attract voters from the most embittered layers of the population. The populist discourse promised simple solutions based on "law and order", "punishment of the guilty", putting the blame for the experienced difficulties on "internal traitors" and "external agents" (e.g. foreign banks and investors blamed for "debt-slavery"). Thus the illiberal negativist discursive strategy played an important role in the success in reaching poor rural people.

The campaign raised little public attention; it did not engender debates due to the anti-democratic attitude of Fidesz refusing to take part in public debates. It could hardly involve people except from the far-right that was able to mobilize a great amount of civil activism, and to some extent the "greenish" LMP that successfully attracted young sympathizers and activists. In parallel with the decreasing number of political programmes and the general tabloidization of the media, public interest was turning away from political issues. The lack of political debate further damaged the quality of political culture and contributed to the deterioration of the already feeble political public sphere, dominated by populist and unchallenged political ideas and colonized by "uncivil" society.

In recent years topics of national identity, the issue of the 1920 Trianon Treaty, and the fate of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries gained more space in the deeply divided political arena. It not only constituted the main issue of discord in the public sphere but it has become the most salient foreign political issue of the right and extreme right. Arguments based on national (ethnic) priorities emerged in all topics of public discourse constituting a constraint on the discourses of the various sides of the political arena. In the quickly multiplying nationalist and populist discourses of the public sphere, similar topic constructions and discursive methods appeared on both political extremes. The far-right and the far-left, although different in many points, often shared the same topics and arguments: emphasising national interests, Euroscepticism, social populism, anti-elitism, anti-cosmopolitanism and anti-globalism.

In the 2009 EP campaigns, parties preferred using simplified populist messages and often chose to create enemy images, falling in the “us/them” dichotomy, where besides political opponents, social groups were demonized (Roma, Jews). In this process, Jobbik’s anti-Roma “law and order” rhetoric and activities of the paramilitary Hungarian Guard, threatening Roma communities all over Hungary and raising tensions between Roma and non-Roma population played an important role.

Democratic civil society and the liberal intelligentsia (most of whom used to be active in pulling down the communist dictatorship) were shocked and paralyzed by the sneaking political radicalization and waited lethargically for the 2010 elections (that brought similar results). In April 2010, Fidesz attained a two-third majority in the Parliament and has since profited from this strong victory to reshape Hungarian democratic institutions transforming the country into a “constitutional dictatorship” by early 2011 (Stürmer 2010, Müller 2011).

Our analyses prove that a thorough and comprehensive critical discourse analysis of written, visual and media material and party campaign events can well detect the various standpoints and communicative strategies, as well as the main discursive trends of the actors of the political and the public arena. Our findings show how the EU campaign was used for domestic political power struggles. They provide a clear although deceiving portrait of the Hungarian political sphere and the state of Hungarian democracy.

The outcome of such domestic “warfare” highly influences the national representation in the European Parliament and thus it strongly affects European politics and the long-term fate of the European agenda by MEPs affiliation to European parties and possible alliances in the EP. Having taken Hungary as a case for in-depth qualitative research, out of the 22 MEPs, 17 belong to right-wing populist or far-right political formations with Eurosceptic or ethnic nationalist political programme and as representatives of one member-state, they can form but also deform European decision-making.

Having demonstrated the nature of the decaying Hungarian political setting reflected and forecast by the 2009 EP campaigns, we are faced with a serious dilemma: Although committed to democratic values, the EU hardly seems to have the means to intervene in a domestic situation where member-state parties leave the path of democracy and its political elite contributes to the misuse of European values, the deterioration of democratic institutions and the rule of law and, ultimately, the establishment of a “democratic dictatorship”.

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