

Chapter Fourteen

Plebeians, Citoyens and Aristocrats or Where is the Bottom of Bottom-up? The Case of Hungary

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During the global financial crisis a number of peripheral populist parties became major players. Hungary was, however, the only country where parties often described as populist, Fidesz and Jobbik¹, managed to receive about two thirds of the vote and where one such party, Fidesz, obtained the constitutional majority in two consecutive elections. This chapter investigates the ideology of Fidesz and Jobbik by referring to programmes, interviews, speeches, legislative and governmental initiatives and public gestures. Party ideologies are analysed as narratives that account for the status quo, identify the faults of the opponents, suggest ways of improvements, mobilise supporters and link political decisions to values. This chapter identifies ideological and practical responses given by these two parties to the crisis ranging from the outright rejection of liberal democracy to the advocacy of ‘workfare-society’. The chapter also highlights the non-populist features of the examined parties and demonstrates the existence of factors that constrain the emergence of populism in its pure form.

Conceptual network

Populism may coexist with various ideological orientations. This chapter focuses on the combination of anti-globalism, nationalism and illiberalism as this ideological configuration defines what is often regarded as the most fundamental attitudinal cleavage of the twenty-first century (Kriesi *et al.* 2006).

As is the case throughout the volume, the term ‘populism’ refers to a thin ideology that regards the elite and the people as two separate, antagonistic and homogenous groups, considers the people as pure and the elite as corrupt, and evaluates the political system against the standards of popular sovereignty (Canovan 1999, Kriesi and Pappas 2015, Mudde 2007, Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009, Stanley 2008, Ucen 2007, Pelinka 2013, etc.). Additionally, populists are also expected to elevate the ‘true interest’ of the people above formal, indirect political institutions, to reject compromise-based politics and to

1. Anti-establishment sentiments were also central to the discourse of another minor party, the LMP. But because LMP remained a strong defender of individual and minority rights, liberal democracy and constitutionalism, the chapter does not cover it.

object to the preferential treatment of minority interests. The most obvious anti-populist orientations include elitism, technocracy, liberalism and pluralism. Anti-populists (or a-populists) disparage the common men, argue for the superiority of the elites (whether defined in intellectual, economic, traditional or moral terms), defend the interests of (unpopular) minorities, support the established decision-making procedures of liberal democracy, or have a business-like attitude to pacts and compromises. While the existing literature is often satisfied by counting the statements that can be classified as populist, the current chapter is based on the logic that one needs to take into account the presence of both populist and anti-populist aspects in a party's discourse and actions in order to arrive at a balanced assessment.

The analysis below will also consider a number of further features which may not be part of the core definition of populist ideology, but which characterise a supporting mentality. These features include a tendency towards disregarding long-term costs and feasibility concerns and ideological flexibility, meaning a lack of traditional ideological constraints. An opposition to public opinion that is based on values or on cost-benefit analyses, signals a non-populist mentality. Populists are also expected to portray their politics as the common-sense-based representation of the self-interest of the people and to question the legitimacy of their political opponents. While nowadays multi-party competition is rarely rejected explicitly, populists are characterised by gestures of disrespect towards their opponents, towards the institutions of dialogue and towards party-based democracy. They call for unity, but this call also justifies the shunning of those who are seen to disturb the social harmony.

The crises

Pre-crisis Hungary had a consensus-oriented liberal institutional framework and a relatively consolidated party system. But these features could not counterbalance the deep and increasing divisions within the country. Left and right routinely questioned the other's legitimacy. The fear of political annihilation by the other side, was, most probably, one of the main factors behind the support within the political elite for financially reckless policies during the early 2000s. These policies included the introduction of thirteenth month pensions, and at one point even a fourteenth month pension was promised to the voters. Under the socialist-led 2002–06 government the balance of the budget radically deteriorated, the government deficit went above 9 per cent, the national sovereign debt increased above 60 per cent. In order to avoid a financial catastrophe austerity measures were required, but the government postponed them until after the 2006 election. The incumbent socialists (MSZP) won the election, but as soon as the public learned about the planned austerity measures the popularity of the government collapsed. A few weeks later parts of the capital city was in flames.

Note that the Hungarian crisis differed from the 2008 world crisis not only in terms of timing, but also in terms of its origin and configuration. The trigger for the September 2006 riots was a political event: the leaked speech of the Prime Minister to socialist MPs in which he claimed that prior to the election his government

lied to the people about the actual state of economy. The political authority of the government was further eroded by, first, the timidity, and then, the brutality of the police *vis-à-vis* the protesters. The freefall of the government's popularity could have been followed, in principle, by a recovery, but the 2008 financial crisis, that hit Hungary particularly hard, made such developments all but impossible. In October 2008 Hungary was the first European country to accept a guarantee package from the IMF, worth twenty-five billion dollars. The ensuing second wave of austerity measures exacerbated public discontent and did nothing to address unemployment. In 2009 the GDP fell by 6.8 per cent, public debt reached 80 per cent of the GDP, and the country's economic prospects looked worse than ever since the regime change (*see* Figure 1.1).

The ensuing alienation and anti-elite sentiments were major factors behind the fact that in 2008 Hungarians voted on referendums against the newly introduced healthcare and university tuition fees (less than one fifth of the citizens supported the government's position), that in the 2010 elections they voted two established parties, SZDSZ and MDF, out, and two new protest parties, LMP and Jobbik, into parliament. But contrary to many other countries in the region, the main beneficiary of this anti-establishment mood was an 'old' party, the Fidesz. While all Hungarian parties experimented with populist gestures, only in case of Fidesz did populism become central to the party's strategy. This was, however, a rather peculiar form of populism, as the next paragraphs will demonstrate.

The discourse of Fidesz

Fidesz was launched as an anti-communist and liberal initiative in 1988. The party's ideological repertoire even included a considerable dose of anti-populism. For example, in 1992 Fidesz was the only party opposed to raising pensions. But the party fared badly at the subsequent election and afterwards the resolute anti-populist stance has been abandoned once and for all.

The nationalist and anti-liberal turn of the party was sealed in 1997 by a major speech of Viktor Orbán, the party leader, in which he characterised the activities of the left-wing government with the following words:

At the end of this road one finds an 'open society', weakened, bled, shaken in its morals, confused in its self-awareness, tormented by guilt-feeling, and deprived of self-confidence. An 'open society' where there is no country any more, only habitat, there is no homeland any more, only an investment-site. Where no nation, only population exists. Where progress equals assimilation into world-wide processes. Where progress does not serve the interests of the nation but simply satisfies the ambition of the narrow power elite to become world citizens. (Debreczeni 2009: 120)

The speaker contrasted 'open society' with the 'rising nation', attacked cosmopolitans and those who expect Hungarians to feel guilt for alleged historical crimes, and claimed that the left wing government is 'foreign-minded', not under the influence of the Hungarian nation.

While the new identity of the party contained important ingredients of right-wing populism, nationalism and conservatism prevailed over the populist aspects. The leaders of the party have actually embraced a number of rather unpopular positions. In this period the party became clerical in a largely secular country and promoted the cult of little-known conservative politicians from the turn of the century. Its rhetoric appealed explicitly to the middle classes, showing little interest in attracting working-class voters. It added to its name *Magyar Polgári Párt*, which is officially translated as Hungarian Civic Party, but the Hungarian term ‘*polgári*’ means not only civic (citoyen) but also bourgeois. In the coming years all major Fidesz speeches were given on behalf of the *polgári Magyarország* (i.e. civic/bourgeois Hungary). After winning the 1998 election the party continued to elaborate further its conservative identity, exemplified by the removal of the Holy Crown from the National Museum to parliament and by a multitude of gestures towards the ‘historical churches’.

After the narrowly lost 2002 election Fidesz again modified its strategy and discourse. It turned towards more radical forms of populism, nationalism and anti-communism. In the subsequently delivered speeches the nation was identified with the right, the foreigners with the left. After the lost election, on 7th May 2002, Orbán announced:

The homeland doesn’t cease to exist when it is under foreign domination, neither when it plundered by Turks or Tatars...It doesn’t cease to exist when the responsibility of governing is not with us...It may well be that our parties and representatives are in opposition in the Parliament, but those of us who are present on this square are not, and cannot be, in opposition, because the homeland cannot be in opposition. (Debreczeni 2009: 196)

While many of Orbán’s speeches implied that the nation is one, the context of the lost election forced him to use more elitist formulations. These references identified the right not with the entire nation but only with its core, or its avant-garde. On 23rd October 2002 Orbán declared:

...A larger part of Hungarians from Hungary² have decided to follow a different path...We have decided to stay on the same road...One cannot get on this road simply by chance. One needs to choose it with clear mind and pure heart...We can count on ourselves only... (Debreczeni 2009: 187)

During the 2002–04 period, the party’s populism was more spectacular in organisational matters than in rhetoric. Orbán initiated the so called Civic Circles, a loose network of largely informal clubs, initiatives and associations. The movement provided an ideal frame for populist politics because its amorphous structure served the prevailing anti-party sentiments well and because it lacked internal formal

2. That is, not within the entire nation, which includes co-ethnics living outside of the borders.

procedures for accountability. Orbán, like Berlusconi, was the initiator, the leader and the only relevant politician of the movement.

The year 2002 was also the starting year of engagement with social (i.e. left-wing) populism. On 8th April, after the first round of the election Orbán declared that the government of socialists will be a government of big business and of financial capital. In 2004 two new developments pushed Fidesz further on this path. First, a wealthy entrepreneur became the new socialist prime minister. A negative campaign focusing on his background promised working class defectors to Fidesz. Then, on 5th December 2004, the referendum initiative to extend citizenship to Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries was defeated due to low turnout, indicating that solidarity with co-ethnics across the border is not, in itself, a winning strategy. On the very same day citizens also voted on the issue of the privatisation of hospitals. The outcome revealed that the voters are more enthusiastic about preserving welfare provisions than about the right-wing version of national identity.

As a result, after 2004 the concept of '*polgár*' was dropped from the party's rhetoric and replaced by the simple '*emberek*' (people) and by the somewhat more specific '*plebejus*' (plebeian) adjective. Opponents were increasingly attacked as aristocrats. Consider the following excerpt: 'Those new aristocrats, good-for-nothing fellows, who have never worked, have never struggled for something, who feel secure only in an artificial environment, are averse from the reality, because confrontation with reality shows how weak and helpless they are'. The discourse increasingly acquired a non-political tone, right and left became contrasted as opposition between strong and healthy, on the one hand, and weak and sick, on the other. The 'clique of aristocrats, opulent millionaires' was contrasted with 'the new majority':

Those who work hard, raise children, take care of each other, try to survive with dignity get less and less, while ever more goes to loafers, the lying millionaire swindlers, comen protected by the state. ...everything people worked for is taken away, everything that was the common property of people is sold ... a privileged group treats people as fools... the people fare ill, while those in power gather ever more fancy, ever more wealth, ever more privilege.
(Debreczeni 2009: 241)

The voice of ordinary people was interpreted as a generic criticism of pluralistic political arenas. When Orbán rejected calls for electoral debates (he stayed away from campaign debates both in 2010 and in 2014) he argued:

No policy-specific debates are needed now, the alternatives in front of us are obvious...I am sure you have seen what happens when a tree falls over a road and many people gather around it. There you always have two kinds of people. Those who have great ideas how to remove the tree, and share with others their wonderful theories, and give advice. Others realise that the best is to start pulling the tree from the road. Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to understand that for rebuilding economy not theories are needed but, let us say,

thirty robust lads who start working and implement what we all know needs to be done. (Orbán 2010)

The previous enthusiasm for conservative elite traditions was pushed into background. At the 17th June 2005 party congress Orbán said ‘for politics everything is more important than the personal life of people. Liberal, social-democratic and conservative politicians are loudly arguing whose worldview is the better one. And nobody thinks of human lives, everyday difficulties, personal lives of people’ (Debreczeni 2009: 240). Direct democracy was increasingly considered superior to the cumbersome mechanisms of representative democracy. The party organised a number of petition-drives and claimed that its party-programme was based on the opinions collected from more than 1.6 million people. Two years later the party initiated a set of referendums aimed, among other things, at the abolishment of tuition fees in higher education, of fees paid by patients in hospitals and fees paid when visiting state doctors. The specific issues on the ballot were secondary; as the initiators admitted, the meaning of the referendum was to demonstrate that the government does not have the support of the public. In Orbán’s words:

The indirect or parliamentary democracy has deprived us from the possibility to take the fate of the country into our hands. In such situations people should turn to direct democracy... In a democracy people have two choices. One is to go and elect representatives and then to trust them. But in Hungary people were misled, deceived, they cannot trust indirect democracy, therefore I wouldn’t recommend this to Hungarians. The other option is to turn to the tools of direct democracy, instead of indirect democracy. This is the referendum, where I, as the people, can decide for myself on a number of issues. Not through politicians. (Debreczeni 2009: 336)

In line with the new strategy, Fidesz also promised to half the political class by drastically reducing the number of MPs and local councillors.

The populist demands did not completely crowd out elitist cultural views, although the top politicians largely avoided expressing them. But for example a close associate of Orbán, who was after 2010 appointed to be the special envoy of the Prime Minister, claimed that: ‘MSZP and SZDSZ are anti-Hungarian. If they win the election then we need to start a revolution. We, *the historical ruling class*, need to re-seize power’ (Piros 2006).

To conclude, prior to the crisis, Fidesz increasingly embraced populism. But even in its most populist phase the party refrained from condemning the entire elite and elements of elitist conservatism have never completely disappeared from the party’s discourse.

The discourse of Jobbik



Jobbik was established in 2002. Many of its leaders were activists of the then declining extreme right party, MIÉP, but some of them, including Gábor Vona,

the leader of the party, came from the Orbán-led Civic Circles. Until 2009, Jobbik remained a marginal force. After 2006, however, the clashes between anti-government demonstrators and the police, the corruption scandals, the economic malaise and finally the humiliating IMF agreement created a more fertile ground for radical right wing propaganda. In the subsequent years several highly publicised conflicts between the Roma minority and the majority population served as final triggers (Karácsony and Róna 2010). After a high-profile lynching of a teacher by a group of Roma villagers and after Vona had formed a (weaponless) paramilitary organisation, the Hungarian Guard, Jobbik's popularity skyrocketed, reaching 15 per cent at the 2009 EP election. Demands for tougher law-and-order measures were in the centre of the party propaganda, but the party also demanded a halt to the demographic increase of the Roma, the move of Roma children to boarding schools, and the withdrawal of welfare subsidies from the relatives of the criminals.

In line with the anti-establishment rhetoric, Vona claimed that Jobbik is the only 'bottom-up' organisation among the 'multinational'³ parties (Vona 2012: 48). He called for a challenge of 'cartel-democracy, or rather cartel dictatorship' (Vona 2012: 76). The party programme (Jobbik 2010) devoted much larger space to economic issues (poverty, unemployment, issue of flexible employment of women, and other practical-material conditions) than MIÉP, the previous radical right-wing force, had ever done. But among the leading issues of the party one finds the exclusion of foreigners from land ownership, the rejection of the Lisbon treaty, and the punishment of corrupt politicians. The party popularised the concepts of 'politician-crime' and 'Gypsy-crime' in parallel to each other.

The world-view expressed in party magazines and in various speeches, as opposed to the one expressed in the party programmes and campaign videos, has been unmistakably extremist. The world is seen as dominated by an international, largely Jewish,⁴ network, spearheaded by multinational companies. This network benefits from the decline of nation states in general, and from the decline of Hungary in particular. The local representatives of the colonisers are the liberals, who govern the country even if their party has no public support (Vona 2009). In fact the entire current, inorganic, ruling elite is in the service of foreign interests, and uses its power to consciously corrupt the nation. Jobbik politicians repeatedly claimed that the growth of the Roma population is part of a sinister plan: 'What is Gypsy-crime? Lets not deceive ourselves: it is a biological weapon in the hands of Zionism' (Bíber 2009). Western forces use the country as market, as source of cheap labour and as terrain for waste disposal (Vona 2012:188) and intend to bankrupt it in order to create space for future immigrants (Vona 2012: 148). The austerity policies, the privatisation of healthcare, the downsizing of the armed forces or the state registration of same sex couples are not simply

3. Note the dichotomy.

4. Antisemitism is often framed as an anti-Israeli attitude. As Vona said 'Hungary is a country that Israel wants to occupy or it has already occupied'.

erroneous policies but conscious steps towards depriving the nation of its self-defence so that it can be freely robbed and occupied. Hungarians are second rate citizens in their own country, threatened by a demographic decline, exploitation by multinational companies, moral decay, and destroyed environment. The remedies include tougher law-and-order policies, prioritisation of Hungarian entrepreneurs, restriction of abortion, support for large (but decent) families, nationalisation of key industries, and patriotic education.

Under a Jobbik government liberal democracy, ‘a refuse imported from abroad’ (Vona 2012: 94), would be replaced by a ‘value-based democracy’. The constitution would be based on the sacred, supernatural institution of the Holy Crown. Merit would come first, rights later (Vona 2013: 82). Citizens would get the right to elect the president and recall their MPs. The members of the government would be legally responsible for their decisions, the MPs’ immunity would be abolished (Jobbik 2010). Direct democracy would be complemented with elements of corporatist order to the extent that churches and civic organisations would constitute a second chamber. Jobbik endorses multipartism (e.g. Vona 2012: 152), but it expects all parties to accept the fundamental national doctrines of the Holy Crown.

In spite of the anti-liberal, anti-establishment, and pro-direct democracy claims, the core of the party’s ideology is dominated by elitism rather than populism. Vona lists among his favourite authors Nietzsche and Julius Evola, regards himself as ‘traditionalist’, and mourns the advance of renaissance, rationalism, positivism, humanism, enlightenment, and finally, of liberalism (Vona 2012: 190, 2013: 35). The role of the state is to show direction to the national community, and therefore it cannot be ideologically neutral (Vona 2012: 131). The party would also establish a national board with the task of scrutinising the mass media from moral standpoints.

Jobbik considers liberalism and liberal democracy, together with fascism, communism and national-socialism, as part of the corrupting modern mentality (Vona 2013: 64). This mentality made humans lose touch with transcendence and become similar to animals (Vona 2012: 187, 197). Somewhat surprisingly from an avowedly Christian party leader, Vona sees Islam as the last bastion of traditionalism (Vona 2012: 190). He acknowledged with disdain that the public opinion cherishes freedom and democracy above everything else. His preferred values are: ‘tradition, faith, order, natural hierarchy, monarchy, universal values, honour, chivalry, the heroic ideal, harmony between community and individual’ (Vona 2013: 188, 193), and ‘true’ freedom, based on all these. Jobbik’s rhetoric (not unlike Orbán’s) has been organised around such concepts as ‘fight’, ‘strength’, ‘faith’, ‘will’, ‘order’ and ‘nation’.⁵

The party discourse often expresses nostalgia for the rule of traditional elites. These elites were thinned down in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and destroyed between 1945 and 1956 (‘the head of the nation was cut off’,

5. The title of the series of articles written by Jobbik’s president in 2010 was ‘Order, Welfare, Awakening’, with the motto: ‘I believe we need nothing else but faith, strength and will’.

Vona 2012: 77). The task is to recreate the elite, at least in spiritual terms (Vona 2012: 210). In line with this spirit, consumerism and mass media are regular targets of criticism, the preferences of the median voter are often treated with indifference. The party is ready to go against the public opinion on the issues of abortion, military service or foreign policy. In the latter arena the party's positions are particularly off the mainstream: Jobbik is not only strongly anti-Israel, pro-Palestine and anti-American, as all radical-right Hungarian movements are, but it also supports Russia, Kazakhstan and Iran. Even the decrease of the numbers of local councillors was rejected by Vona as a populist move, one that decreases transparency (Vona 2012: 57).

The conclusion of this section must be that while Jobbik uses an antagonistic language directed against the corrupt establishment, on a number of dimensions it is even more elitist than Fidesz. Its propaganda directed to voters (and subsequently its electoral success) is anchored in populist ideas and gestures, but many elements of its core ideology are in tension with populism.

Framing the crisis and developing populist policies

The results of the first post-2008 national election revealed a new balance of forces (*see* Table 14.1). The MSZP-Fidesz two-party system that prevailed during the 2000s was replaced by a three party system. Fidesz and Jobbik received two-thirds of the vote, the left-wing government parties collapsed. But the financial crisis was more a facilitating than a causal factor behind these outcomes as Fidesz was leading in the opinion polls already in the summer of 2006 and Jobbik's rise in 2009 had more to do with the Roma issue than with the economic conditions. The protest-atmosphere fuelled by the financial situation helped both parties, but the fact that four years later, in 2014, they achieved virtually the same results, indicated that their success was a symptom of a deeper transformation of Hungarian politics than simply an expression of protest against austerity measures.

Nevertheless the success of these parties is closely related to the fact that their ideological and discursive formula fitted the crisis very well. Jobbik promptly identified the US and Israel behind the difficulties of the euro (Vona 2013: 130, 168, 176). It has regarded the crisis as a perfect illustration of the fact that globalisation is increasingly uncontrollable, destroying state, constitutional order and human norms (Vona 2012: 218), and, eventually, undermining its own existence.

The angle of Fidesz had to be different, as the party moved from opposition to government and even managed to win more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament. The party was forced to engage with the actual management of the crisis. The next section therefore discusses mainly the ideological and policy-responses of Fidesz, and it will investigate whether the governmental status changed the party ideology. The following paragraphs will show that the combination between populism and governmental power is inherently unstable: Many of the populist components of the party ideology were phased out after the electoral victory.

Table 14.1: Percentage of list-votes at parliamentary elections in Hungary (2006–14)

Party	2006	2010	2014
Fidesz	42.0	52.7	44.9
Jobbik [1]	2.2	16.7	20.2
MDF	5.0	2.7	-
SZDSZ	6.5	-	-
LMP	-	7.5	5.3
MSZP [2]	43.2	19.3	25.6
others	1.1	1.1	4
Total	100	100	100

Notes: [1]2006: Joint list with MIÉP. [2]2014: Joint list with Együtt, DK, PM and MLP.

Other decisions, however, demonstrate how populist ideas can be translated into institutional solutions.

Prior to 2010, Fidesz, as the government-in-waiting, toned down its criticism of representative democracy. But the new tone did not imply more pluralistic views. In 2009 Orbán spoke of the eclipse of political dualism, the forthcoming rule of Fidesz for fifteen to twenty years, and claimed that in the coming period his party will define the national interest ‘not in constant debates but in its natural way’.

While the clear bourgeois identification of the 1994–2002 period has not returned, the financial crisis and the impending victory pushed Fidesz towards a traditional right wing direction. It has concluded that the age of welfare-state is irrevocably over, the solution is a ‘workfarist’ state that provides work but also demands work from everyone and reduces welfare expenditure to the minimum. In line with this approach the government reduced the personal income tax, abolished progressive taxation and replaced social benefits to large families with tax breaks.

Yet the position of the party on economic issues has not become wholly rightist: it actually stepped up its criticism of the markets, particularly of the financial markets, and introduced a massive expansion of state regulation of almost all economic sectors. Prior to the 2014 election it reduced utility prices and the prices of communal services (energy, waste-collection, etc). The governmental rhetoric treated this decision as the very essence of its policies as it hurt few monopolistic and mainly foreign, non-productive, business groups, while it helped ordinary Hungarians.

Actual physical work, producing tangible products, has occupied a central role in Orbán’s rhetoric already prior to the crisis. After 2010 this attitude was channelled into a sharp distinction between the productive and the speculative sectors of the economy. Resources from the latter were siphoned away through extraordinary taxes and hefty penalties.

The criticisms from Brussels strengthened further the image of a government of ordinary people. The conflicts with banks, multinationals and Brussels contributed to the re-election of the government in 2014.

While the left-wing opposition also tried to capitalise on anti-elitist sentiments (pointing out, for example, that the reduction of utility prices benefits the owners of heated swimming pools more than the poor), for most of the time it presented a classical anti-populist position, claiming that the governmental solutions are not prudent, create a volatile business environment, lead to the loss of confidence of investors, etc. The government dismissed the critics as spokespersons of foreign financial circles and argued that there can be no policy realms that are beyond the orbit of democracy (i.e. majority). Thereby the debate acquired a populist versus anti-populist format.

Popular sovereignty continued to be a major Fidesz slogan, but it became even more clearly interpreted as the sovereignty of those with Hungarian culture and descent. This interpretation led to the extension of citizenship and voting rights to Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries and to discrimination against foreign companies, particularly in the service, financial and retail sectors. The government even bought a large share of private companies, particularly in the energy sector. The attempts to challenge the logic of globalisation went beyond economy. For example the government confronted brain-drain by demanding the return of scholarships from those who work abroad.

The 2010 victory was interpreted in the most radical terms. Orbán labelled it 'revolution' and 'regime change', comparable to the fall of communism, and announced the establishment of the Regime of National Cooperation. Within a few months a completely new constitution was adopted, without any input from the opposition parties. In less than four years the political community was extended with more than half a million new citizens. At the same time Fidesz also made an attempt towards narrowing the active citizenry with the help of new electoral regulations. The law, accepted by the parliament but finally rejected by the Constitutional Court, would have demanded citizens to pre-register to vote. This new institutional barrier would have reduced the size of the electorate, excluding primarily the least educated social strata. Interestingly this initiative followed up on a similar, but more radical initiative of Jobbik according to which the completion of primary school would be a precondition for voting at the parliamentary elections. The argument used by the two parties was the classical nineteenth century conservative justification: voting is a serious matter, those who lack basic cognitive abilities and who can be easily influenced should not be able to decide the fate of the government. Both initiatives would have affected the Roma disproportionately. But it is remarkable that both parties were ready to move into the direction of basing the government on significantly smaller electorates, excluding many of the ethnic Hungarian citizens too.

Under the new system of 'National Cooperation' the earlier existing convention that the opposition could set up select committees was not tolerated any longer and most of the legal initiatives were hurried through a fast track procedure. The rights of interest groups for consultation or co-decision were either abolished or altered so that only government-supporting organisations were allowed to sit around the table. The new approach to decision-making was justified with the claim that

the government must take responsibility for all major decisions, and blurring responsibility with consultations and veto rights would lead to less accountability.

In order to escape from the tutelage of international financial institutions some of the fiscal and monetary policies of Fidesz were rather conservative and this sense non-populist. The budget deficit was reduced below 3 per cent, and by 2014 inflation was practically eliminated. But the resources necessary for balancing the budget were partly provided by the nationalisation of private pension funds and the rigorous maintenance of financial discipline was counterbalanced by a host of popular/populist measures. The size of the local legislatures and of the parliament was cut to half, the '*cumul des mandats*' was forbidden, the severance payments given by the previous governments to state employees were taxed with a 98 per cent tax. The taxes on banks introduced in 2010, and then renewed during the subsequent years, were larger than anywhere else in Europe.

Although Fidesz changed its attitude towards referendums after the electoral victory, Orbán continued to communicate directly with the voters. The various waves of 'national consultation' were, however, rather one-sided, mainly involving letters sent to citizens about the achievements of the government. Before the acceptance of the new constitution Hungarians received a questionnaire. The replies (which were never made public) to this questionnaire were interpreted by the Prime Minister as indicating that people regard duties (duty to work, to care about family members, etc.) to be as important as rights and therefore the liberal constitution should be replaced with an illiberal one.

The architecture of parliamentarism remained essentially intact, but the autonomy of the judicial branch was curtailed. The legislative branch took over from the judiciary the right to decide which religious community is entitled for state support. The government forced more than 200 judges into retirement (the European Court of Justice later repelled the decision), replaced the president of the Supreme Court, increased the size of the Constitutional Court and packed it with its loyal supporters, including leading politicians. Within two years the new constitution was modified five times, and a number of legal initiatives that were rejected as unconstitutional by the Court were moved (in a somewhat modified form) into the constitution. In line with this revolutionary spirit, the coming years brought the takeover of all relevant decision-making positions. The government replaced the chief prosecutor and the members of the Election Commission with loyalists, its minister of economy became the Chairman of the Central Bank. Another new official, the head of the National Judicial Office (filled by the spouse of the Fidesz politician who drafted the constitution) was given the right to move cases from one court to another (due to the European pressure later the government had to compromise on the issue). According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index by 2014 Hungary became a 'defective democracy'.⁶

These policies and institutional reforms were supported by a majoritarian rhetoric, fitting well the stereotypes of a populist rule that undermines checks

6. <http://www.bti-project.org/reports/regional-reports/ecse/>

and balances. Parallel, however, to these developments, the new constitution also placed numerous constraints on the power of future majorities and it also restricted the room for a bottom-up input into decision-making. The requirement of supermajority was extended to new policy areas, including taxes, family subsidies or the boundaries of electoral districts. The terms of the office holders of independent agencies (media board, national judicial office, public prosecutor, state audit office, etc.) were increased to eight and twelve years. The threshold for valid referendums was increased. *Actio popularis*, the right of any citizen to turn to the constitutional court for the examination of the constitutionality of laws, was abolished. The Budget Council was given the right to veto budgets, and the president acquired the right to call for new election if the budget was not accepted in a timely fashion. While these changes benefited the current government, in long run they have the potential to function as elitist, non-majoritarian components of the political system.

These non-majoritarian institutions can be partly explained by the fact that they protect the interests of the current governments against future governments. But it is important to point out that they are also in line with public sentiments. As Daniel Smilov (2013) argued recently, in Eastern Central Europe populism and constitutionalism do not necessarily contradict each other, as populists need to satisfy the fear and mistrust of citizens against politics and therefore they often maintain or even expand the existing constitutional constraints on governments.

The enacted reforms had both elitist and populist aspects and in some instances the two aspects manifested themselves in the very same decisions. The ban on deficit-producing budgets and the authorisation of a specific council to veto the budget proposed by the parliament expressed the suspicion of ‘ordinary citizens’ against politicians while at the same time they increased the power of, largely non-elected, office holders. The idea that citizens’ full political rights should be based on merit (reflected by the emphasis in the new constitution on duties) has an equally paradoxical character: it is in line with the anti-liberal values of the majority but it also establishes an elite-defined standard.

In Fidesz’s ideology the interest of the nation must prevail over particularistic interests, but the people themselves cannot be left alone to rule, they need the help of the benevolent state. As the principal ideologue of the new regime, Gyula Tellér wrote in his manifesto, social decay, exemplified primarily by the contraction of the population paying taxes and raising children, went so far that the society could no longer reverse the negative processes by itself, and therefore a strong state had to step in (Tellér 2014: 353). In this discourse even the concept of society acquires state-like attributes: ‘...the society is a historically shaped organisation composed of people defined by culture and descent which defends its members against internal and external attacks and diversionary actions affecting their living space, personal matters, physical and intellectual properties, institutions, individual and community-based activities and their joint obligations in the world, it organises those activities that can be done only through joint actions or it teaches the members how to organise

themselves and provides them with the necessary tools' (Tellér 2014: 356). Obviously, such a state/society cannot behave in a neutral way towards its internal enemies.

Reflections on 'populism'

Populism is one of those terms of political science that are widely used by the politicians themselves. In 2012 Orbán explicitly addressed the populism-debate and placed it into a historical context. According to him the Western leaders after the WWII acted according to the logic of fear:

They feared not communism or fascism any more, but the masses, especially the politically active masses. Because of the fact that fascism won power democratically, today's Western European elite thinks that one should be cautious with the people, because the decisions of the people can cause big difficulties. So, democracy is regarded by them to be important but it is still better if power is not exercised by the people. This is how one can summarise the attitude of contemporary Western-European elite towards the people, towards its own people.

Then he went on tapping into the role of institutions. 'This approach gave rise to a politics – still prevailing – in which the power of principles and of institutions need to be achieved, and not the power of people'. He admitted that up to a point he also believed that:

...institutions and principles are more important than the actual power relations among people and that if the institutions and principles are strong then one can expect them to protect us against dictatorship. But by today we must realise that this is a false thought. The idea implanted into the public opinion that the European community should not be governed by people but by impersonal principles and institutions, leads to crisis. To condemn decisions made by people and stemming from personal will as dangerous is a dead-end for European politics.

The media and the Western elite condemns populism, but in fact 'the term "populist leaders" refers to politicians who simply say what people talk at home. Expressions such as populism embody the rejection of popular passions, sentiments, observations and desires. Europe should accept that historical decisions, good ones or bad ones, are made by people and persons, never by principles and institutions'. (Orbán 2007)

Not accidentally, in the cited speech the central term was not 'the people' ('*nép*'), but 'people' ('*emberek*') which can also be translated as 'individuals'. As a result, the sentences above can be simultaneously read as endorsing bottom-up and top-down logics of decision-making: as calls for the power to the masses and/or for the power to individual leaders. Even more likely the appropriate decoding

is the one that merges these two interpretations: a call for the rule of individuals who express the will of the masses.

Conclusions

Hungary is an extreme case as it was one of its major parties that engaged most deeply with populism and because this party subsequently managed to concentrate an unprecedented amount of power in its hands. It is an extreme case also because right wing critics of liberal democracy received two thirds of the votes both in 2010 and in 2014. There are few corners of Europe where democratic illiberalism represents a significant ideological alternative to the liberal status quo. In the West liberalism is too deeply entrenched, while in most Eastern European countries the social consensus behind the project of catching up with the West marginalises the explicitly illiberal ideologies. In Hungary, and to some extent in Poland, the cultural and institutional preconditions are present for challenging the prevailing norms of modern democracies. The global crisis provided an opportunity for such a challenge.

One can read the Hungarian story as an illustration of the claim that populism thrives on political crisis. But even more importantly, the case reminds us of another claim: that political crises are, by definition, constructed, and populists can have an important role in the framing-process.

Most of the answers of the analysed parties to the global crisis were ready well before 2008. Their core of these answers lay in ‘the recreation of national sovereignty’. In the case of Jobbik, this position was embedded into an outright rejection of liberal democracy. As far as Fidesz is concerned, national sovereignty was combined with the replacement of the welfare logic of distribution with the ‘workfarist’ one.

This chapter also demonstrated that populism characterised the analysed parties only to a limited extent. In Hungary illiberalism and nationalism have deeper roots than populism. The former two support the latter but they can also constrain it.

The leaders of Jobbik had particularly many reservations about the ‘empirically existing people’. Fidesz shifted to a ‘people’s party’ strategy after 2002, but its anti-establishment rhetoric has always been moderated by the fact that it functioned as a government-in-waiting. Both of these parties treated formal, indirect political institutions with reservation, but they embraced direct democracy only partially, and in the case of Fidesz, clearly strategically. Both parties rejected compromise-based politics and questioned or attacked liberal and constitutional provisions. Both argued against legal, economic, technical or bureaucratic limitations of the scope of democratic politics and, at the same time, presented themselves as being motivated by non-political values and principles, such as family, strength, faith or will. Fidesz was more opportunistic, but throughout the analysed period stayed loyal to a set of traditionalist conservative values.

In Hungary, there has been no serious attempt at establishing centrist or leftist populist forces. Both of the major populist projects were firmly anchored on the right, and the culprit of the crisis was not the undifferentiated elite but specifically

the governing left. Having said that, one must emphasise that Fidesz displayed signs of both leftist and right-wing populism. The party's trajectory could be well interpreted as movements between these two faces of populism and as a series of efforts to synthesise them. While new institutional structures set in government were designed following a majoritarian, power-concentration logic, they also incorporated a number of constraints on future majorities, satisfying both the interests of the party and the demands of the public.

The present study showed not only that parties may have both elitist and populist ideas, but also that ideas and policies exist that have an ambivalent character. While contrasting the (politically correct) world of liberal and multinational elites with the honest ambitions of ordinary people, as most populist movements do, the parties analysed also rejected the bottom of the society. Some of their initiatives simultaneously constrained the political elite and reduced the possibilities for a bottom-up input. The key to understand this ambiguity lies in the fact that the 'people' often meant a select group of people. In the references to ordinary citizens, 'ordinary' implied decent and virtuous citizens, who deserve more say than others.

The exclusionary feature of right-wing populism is of course much discussed in literature, but the phenomenon described here is slightly different from that. The analysed discourses and policies indicated not only that collective interests trump the rights of individuals and of minorities, but that they may even restrict the room for manoeuvre of the majority.

The interpretation of this phenomenon takes us back to the very concept of populism. A number of studies reflected on the flexibility and on the constructed nature of the category 'the people' (Laclau 2005, Canovan 1999, etc.). Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013:151) call categories like 'people' and 'elite' empty vessels filled in different ways by different actors. But can the terms 'people' and 'elite' indeed mean anything? While this question may need to be treated in depth elsewhere, it is important to emphasise that in the reviewed cases the references to the 'people' went together with attempts at reducing the voice of the uneducated and the political underclass. Both of the analysed parties emphasised the duties of the citizens, implying that one needs to fulfil them in order to be considered as equal. Such views have strong popular backing but they link the concept of full membership in the community as something that is not 'a given', like citizenship or ethnicity, but is related to performance. One could argue that the expected performance is minimal and that in the Hungarian case the would-be-excluded overlap to some degree with the Roma population, and therefore this phenomenon can be absorbed into the standard formula of right wing populism. But conceptually what matters is that a performance-standard is applied, one that leaves the concept of the 'people' open upwards and closed downwards.

Finally, the Hungarian case revealed that the scope of populism as a governmental force can be larger than usually assumed. Prevailing conventions and international constraints, widely regarded to render populist and nationalist demands, especially within the EU illusionary, can be, at least for a certain amount of time, circumvented. Liberal democracy can be defeated. This lesson is even more relevant as it comes from one of the ten most globalised countries of the world.