

The impact of narratives on policy- making at the national level

The case of Hungary

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November 2023

BRIDGES Working Papers 22

This project has received funding from the
European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation
programme under grant agreement No 101004564



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Abstract

In order to identify the main narratives of migration and describing the structure into which the processes of producing and circulating them characterizes the contemporary Hungarian communicative and political segments, first we defined the type of political system of Hungary. The next step was demonstrating the production and circulation of migration related narratives since 2015 to prove that there is a rather sophisticated propaganda organization and technology (the moral panic button, MPB) which makes sure that these processes serve the operation of the political system.

Our analysis demonstrated that MPB used the production and circulation of migration narratives both in 2015 and in 2022 as a crucial aspect of building the Hungarian version of an authoritarian regime (the so called informational autocracy). We stressed that the capture of entire communication field was an inherent element of this de-democratization process, and that while several techniques of MPB exist in other countries as well, the unique mix of them and their high-inertia existence makes Hungary an outlier in the comparative analysis.

Keywords: migration, narratives, policy-making, Hungary, EU relocation scheme, Ukrainian Refugee Crisis, Hungarian NGOs, moral panic button (MPB), informational autocracy (IA)

1. Background and context

In contemporary Hungary when one analyzes the production and circulation of migration narratives, (s)he should take into consideration not only the public policies related to immigration, but also the changes in the Hungarian political system. Namely, the autocratic tendencies, taken so far that the European Parliament stated that Hungary's political system now is electoral authoritarianism (Delbos-Corfield 2022). Although these changes in the political system started as early as 2011, after Fidesz's landslide victory in the 2010 Parliamentary elections, they accelerated only after 2015 and were based heavily on the narration of the "refugee crisis". The emerging propaganda technology, labelled as the Moral Panic Button (MPB)¹ was used to push Hungary towards an informational autocracy (IA)², which means that the legitimacy of the regime significantly relies on the governmental hegemony of the information/media system. The topic of immigration plays a central role in building up this machinery of fearmongering (see, Bocskor 2018, Gerő-Sik 2020), thus the regime's characteristics and immigration narratives are closely related.

1.1 Main patterns of migration

The core migration-related characteristics of Hungary are as follows: it has a small number of immigrant population, and it is ethnically homogenous, the more so since on the one hand, immigration mainly consists of ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries, on the other, Hungary is only a transit country (Bocskor 2018). Although xenophobia has been relatively high in Hungary since the 1990s, prejudice against the Roma, the Jews, and other, "traditional" scapegoats were much more prevalent than against immigrants (Bognár et. al 2022)³.

Between the late 1980s and early 2010s, the main inflow of immigration was connected to the ethnic Hungarians living in the neighboring countries. The regime transformation in Hungary started with a then-large flow of asylum seekers (mostly ethnic Hungarians) from still-communist Romania in 1987 (Sik 1992). In the beginning certain fractions of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Party saw the opportunity to use the issue of immigration of ethnic Hungarians from the Carpathian Basin for political gains, the emerging refugee system was a relaxed and tolerant one – at least for ethnic Hungarians (Fullerton, 1996).

The newly emerging Hungarian refugee system was already ethnically biased (e.g., Hungary signed the Geneva Convention but maintained its geographical limitation until

¹ The moral panic button is a professional propaganda technology provided by an organization, a mix of think tanks and government departments operated by a core group at the prime ministers' office. The basic characteristics of MPB are (1) it has unlimited access to state funds, (2) it has hegemony in the media (but allows non-governmental echo-chambers), (3) it combines a wide range of technologies to reach the entire population (push polls, fake referendums and „information campaigns”), (4) it flexibly mixes various narratives and scapegoats to reach all social strata, (5) it applies strong and simple and send repetitive messages monotonously. (See the “history” of the pressings of MPB in Annex 3).

² According to the original concept (Guriev-Treisman, 2020), there are four main characteristics of informational autocracy, and our modified model modifies only one of these elements (see in the concluding chapter).

³ A good indication of this is that the rise of the extremer right party (Jobbik) in the 1990s was based on the anti-Roma sentiments of Hungarians, immigration did not play an important part in their narratives (see Tóth-Grajczár 2015).

1998) and later special legal status and double citizenship were given to ethnic Hungarians from the Carpathian Basin. The first migrant wave reached Hungary in the course of the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1992 when a large number of various ethnic groups crossed Hungary searching for asylum in EU countries. This transit migration process resulted in the developing of a new legal solution (temporary protection and the development of a sophisticated asylum system in Hungary) and xenophobia has increased sharply.

Neither before nor after 2015 was Hungary a target country for asylum seekers but during the summer of 2015 about 180 000 asylum seekers crossed Hungary. Though they did not intend to stay (proved by the extremely low number of those who applied for refugee status, protection or admission)⁴, due to their unexpected arrival and large number, they were considered as a threat to Hungary, and therefore in September 2015 a fence was built along the Serbian-Hungarian border (Bernát et al, 2019), and immigration and refugee policy was transformed to a police issue (Tóth, 2022).⁵

In the past years Hungary, while in principle is closed to asylum seekers, in practice large number of migrants cross the Hungarian border with the help of traffickers. Since 2016 there has been a continuous state emergency – renewed in every six months – due to the danger of mass migration.⁶ Immigration is happening through other frameworks such as guest workers, informal immigrant workers and students⁷ as well. The number of work permits issues increased significantly between 2017 and 2018 and according to state communiques, in the coming years Hungary would need an additional 500 000 guest workers.

1.1.1 Immigration policies and institutions before and after 2015

Until 2015, the Hungarian system for asylum seekers was based on the Geneva Convention. The system had its own flaws, but the rules complied with the rules of the European community and later the European Union (Tóth 2020, Kovács-Nagy 2022). In 2013 the government created Hungary's Migration Strategy,⁸ which provided the opportunity to access resources of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund between 2014 and 2020⁹. Since 2015 however, this strategy could be seen only as a historical document, preserving the pre-2015 policy approach of the Hungarian government. Although

⁴ https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0026.html

⁵ The process of the distortion of the legal basis of the Hungarian migration/refugee system is well demonstrated in Annex 2 (Kovács, 2022).

⁶ Moreover, there are additional state emergency laws (in 2020 and 2021 due to the threat of COVID and since early 2022 due to the war in Ukraine).

⁷ Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship provides scholarship for foreign students at Hungarian universities. Between the academic years 2015/2016 and 2022/2023 the number of Stipendium Hungaricum Students increased almost tenfold, from 1265 to 11712 (<https://tka.hu/palyazatok/7619/statisztikak> last accessed 2023.06.13.).

⁸ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/hungarys-migration-strategy-migracios-strategia_en

⁹ According to the Migration strategy, "Hungary should: • support all forms of regular migration; • honour its European and international undertakings and ensure international protection to asylum seekers; • contribute to the integration of regular migrants and persons afforded international protection; • provide effective help and protection to stateless people; • make a determined effort to eliminate illegal migration and abuses regarding residency; and • ensure the availability of credible information about migration to the Hungarian public through effective communication aiming to decrease prejudice and stereotypes (Government Decree 1698/2013. (X.4): 5)" (Juhász 2017:38)

the document points out the importance of integration of refugees and asylum seekers, none of the steps named in the strategy¹⁰ happened. Already in 2011, the government accepted a decree to develop a solidarity program with countries facing a refugee crisis in North Africa (Tóth 2020). Instead, the government launched a wide-scale anti-immigration campaign at the beginning of 2015, linking terrorism and immigration, and changing the asylum-system of Hungary. As Tóth (2020:4) writes, between 2013 and 2019 “the Asylum Act was modified twenty, and its implementing regulation twenty-two times. The law on the entry and residence of third-country nationals, - which applies to asylum seekers and those who have been refused asylum - thirty-three, its implementing regulation has been amended thirty-two times”.

In general, these new legislations take the form of amendments to existing regulations, within the framework of so-called omnibus bills, “salátatörvények”, making it relatively easy for the government to divert the public attention from delicate or unpopular decisions. As a result, these laws often have only very general titles (e.g., “XII. Law about migration policy”¹¹), with the purpose of not attracting the attention of the media or the public.

The modifications not only led to the instability of the regulation related to immigration but substantially transformed the asylum system of Hungary as well. Instead of the earlier procedure, when asylum seekers were able to present their request for asylum upon arriving to the border, the government restricted this possibility to transit zones along the fence. Asylum seekers had to wait to present their application in these transit zones for an indefinite time, instead of a maximum of 4 weeks, as defined by EU directives. If asylum seekers decided to leave the zone (to Serbia), they would lose their right to apply for asylum. Furthermore, the Hungarian government ruled that Hungary consider Serbia and other countries considered unsafe by international law as safe third countries. Thus, people passing through these countries are not eligible for asylum in Hungary (Kovács-Nagy 2022, European Commission 2018). Parallel with this new, transit zone system, the government closed most of the existing facilities for asylum seekers such as reception stations, community accommodation, guarded reception centers (Kovács-Nagy 2022). The institutional framework also changed: The Office of Immigration and Nationality became the National Directorate-General for Alien Policing and became part of the Police’s work.

In 2020, when the European Court ruled that the existing asylum system of Hungary goes against European law, the Hungarian government closed the transit zones and created a new asylum system which basically eradicated the possibility to ask for asylum in Hungary (Helsinki 2021). Following the introduction of the new system, the number of applications remained the lowest in the EU due to the fact that this new system requires to apply for asylum prior to arrive at the border at Hungarian embassies.

According to Kovács and Nagy (2022), the current Hungarian migration policy is “ethnicist and utilitarian”, and the narratives in regard with guest-workers and students intentionally differ from the general discourse of immigration.

¹⁰ A sub-strategy for integration, establishment of an Integration Forum, and programs for intercultural education, and labour market integration of students, (see Gerő 2021)

¹¹ For example, the omnibus bill, titled “Modifications on Certain Migration-Related Laws” (passed by the House on September 26, 2017) includes general provisions related to the entry, residence, employment of immigrants, but it also has a paragraph addressing some social assistance for them.

In 2022, after the breakout of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the existing legislation was a major obstacle since it did not provide any possibility to enter Hungary as an asylum seeker, thus everyone (except Transcarpathians with double citizenship) arriving would have been treated as tourists (but from Ukraine a visa is required to enter Hungary) or as illegal immigrants. In case of double citizens, the problem arisen that since they are Hungarian citizens, they are not eligible to any kind of assistance as refugees or asylum seekers. Thus, the Hungarian government amended the legislation to include temporary protection for people fleeing Ukraine and introduced new services for double citizens (see Helsinki 2022)¹².

The story of changes in immigration policies highlights a change in policymaking in Hungary in general as well. This change occurred gradually from 2010 when Fidesz gained its first supermajority in the National elections. The earlier model, although it was far from perfect, involved elements of social dialogue through officially established channels of communication and forums. These forums were gradually dismantled, or emptied by the Fidesz government, and replaced with legislation processes without consultations, or with ad-hoc consultation (Arató-Mikecz 2015). The legislative process also changed: Fidesz prefers to make proposals through individual government representatives. By doing so, they can avoid ex ante impact assessments, often leading to the quick passage of their proposals within days or even hours, frequently without any changes (Boda and Patkós, 2018).

This situation became even more extreme after the so-called migration crisis in 2015: In the case of contested issues, such as human rights or immigration, not only the discourse promoted by the government became hostile (see Sik-Barlai 2017, Bocskor 2018, Nagy 2019) towards civil society organizations, but these organizations were excluded by any social dialogue, their domestic funding stopped and earlier contracts with state institutions were terminated by 2017-2018 (Gerő et al. 2020).¹³

Alongside with other modifications of the LXXX Act of 2007 on the Right of Asylum, in 2015 the Parliament included the term of “mass migration crisis” in the Act, to provide the opportunity to include the Police and the Army to handle any situation labelled as being in relation with the crisis, and a greater room for maneuver in some practical issues, such as deciding on constructions (Juhász 2017). The emergency situation related to mass migration is in effect since 2015 continuously, extended by the Parliament in every six months.

As a next step, during the COVID-19 pandemic, an emergency rule by decree was introduced, allowing the government to regulate policy areas through decrees without the involvement of the parliament. However, despite these tools offering a unique opportunity for the government to dominate the policy fields, they did not employ them in the case of migration.

In policymaking, or policy communication, the Fidesz government primarily uses their communication channels, particularly the media, to spread their propaganda and to

¹²<https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Tajekoztato-az-Ukrajnabol-menekulok-jogi-helyzeterol-ugyvedeknek.pdf>

¹³ In other cases, such as family issues, the government set up parallel and ad-hoc consultative forums, without any obligations to include their opinion in legislations. (see Fejős-Szikra 2020)

convince the public about the threats connected to immigration. The opposition parties are generally unable to utilize their opportunities to effectively influence the migration discourse and policymaking. For example, because of the parliamentary majority of the Fidesz-KDNP, legislative proposals of the opposition parties could not be passed in the House¹⁴. Furthermore, the possibility of decrees is exclusively held by the government parties for regulating the issues of migration policy, the opposition was totally excluded from it (Gajduchek-Sebők-Molnár, 2021). As a consequence, in Hungarian policymaking, it is rare to find background studies, surveys, or independent reports, risk analyses, or any other policy documents. If they exist, they are generally carried out by companies associated with the government, or Fidesz, and they are not made available for the public.

1.2 Key narratives

While before 2015 the topic of immigration was only occasionally used by mainstream political actors, after the Charlie Hebdo attack it became a central topic in Hungarian politics, due to the massive campaign initiated by the government already immediately as the alpha-test of MPB.

In 2015, the discourse of **deservingness and securitization** strengthened in the narratives, applied by pro-government actors (Nagy 2018). Instead of refugees, the government started to use the term migrant and introduced a new term (economic immigrant) claiming that migrants from Afghanistan or Syria are only coming to have a better life, thus they are 'not real refugees' since they passed many "safe" countries on the way. Moreover, the government tied immigration to terrorism, and argued that migrants are threatening the way of life in Hungary, thus using a securitization narrative and only the government can save the Hungarians from these hordes (Bocskor 2018, Messing-Bernáth 2015, Kovács-Nagy 2022). At first Jobbik, the main extreme right party at the time, fully agreed with this narrative but even the other factions of the opposition accepted elements of the securitization narrative (Messing-Bernáth 2015, 2016).

Connected to the securitization narrative, there is also a narrative on the **economic benefits and costs of immigrants**. These narratives discuss how much the process of integration costs, and what might be the benefit to have immigrants on the labor market. Furthermore, these narratives were turned into presenting the cheap migrant labor as a threat to Hungarian workers. The opposition, as a response started to apply a **humanitarian or solidarity narrative**, containing critical elements of the government's approach. A more neutral narrative was the **organizational/technological narrative**, identified by Bognár et al (2018) in the relocation quota debate: this narrative was focusing on the technical-administrative issues and used a relatively neutral language.

According to Bognár et al. (2018), besides the narratives described above, in relation with the relocation quota, a **power-struggle narrative** emerged as well, which presented migration as the issue of national sovereignty versus European influence.

¹⁴ After 2010, only 5 percent of the accepted proposals came from the opposition, however, none of them addressed migration-related issues (Pokorny and Sággy, 2021). Due to Fidesz's dominance in parliament, these parties generally do not attempt to propose laws related to migration, instead, they rely much more on media and social media platforms to influence this policy field.

In the government’s narrative, the 2015 crisis was not the result of the war in Syria or Afghanistan but a product of international actors. The main actors blamed by the government were “the West” who tried to export their democratic system. This narrative in the last years taken the form of a **conspiracy theory, or Soros narrative**.

In relation to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the dominant narrative is the **peace narrative**. Other narratives prevail as well, but this is the one, somewhat related to immigration, since it presents peace as the only viable solution. The main feature of this narrative, that it is very difficult to build a counter narrative, since everyone agrees with the necessity for peace. However, this narrative never specifies what peace means and what kind of agreement should precede such a peace agreement. Also, it presents Ukraine and Russia equally responsible for the breakout of the war but in fact the main actors presented are the US (and the NATO) and Russia, as if, the war would be a war between the United States and Russia.

Although these different narratives appear at different phases of the last eight years, they have a strong, continuous ideological basis, which will be illustrated in the case studies as well.

In order to understand the differences of the general public towards immigrants/refugees, it is worth making a detour by showing the few similarities and many differences of the two refugee crises (in 2015 and 2022):

Table 1. The main characteristics of the migrant/refugees and migration processes in 2015 and 2022

2015	2022
Migrants had no previous experience in Hungary	Previously existing networks of commuting between Ukraine and Hungary and labor migration of Ukrainians (Sik et al, 2014, Sik-Szeitl, 2015)
Mix of migrants and asylum seekers	Overwhelmingly war-related refugee
Mainly single young males ¹⁵	Mainly fragments of families, mostly women, elderly and children
Different cultural characteristics (religion, language) and often skin color	Similar cultural characteristics
The typical refugee was on the run for a long time, poor, un(or mis)informed, often exploited by smugglers	The first wave of refugees were relatively well off and needed only minimal help

¹⁵ As a pro-governmental politician described it: in 2015 “illegal migration was flowing across our southern borders... only males of working age or of military age, as they say, men in a closed formation, in mass groups, that obviously does not show the picture of those fleeing war, but of those going to war to any right-thinking person.”

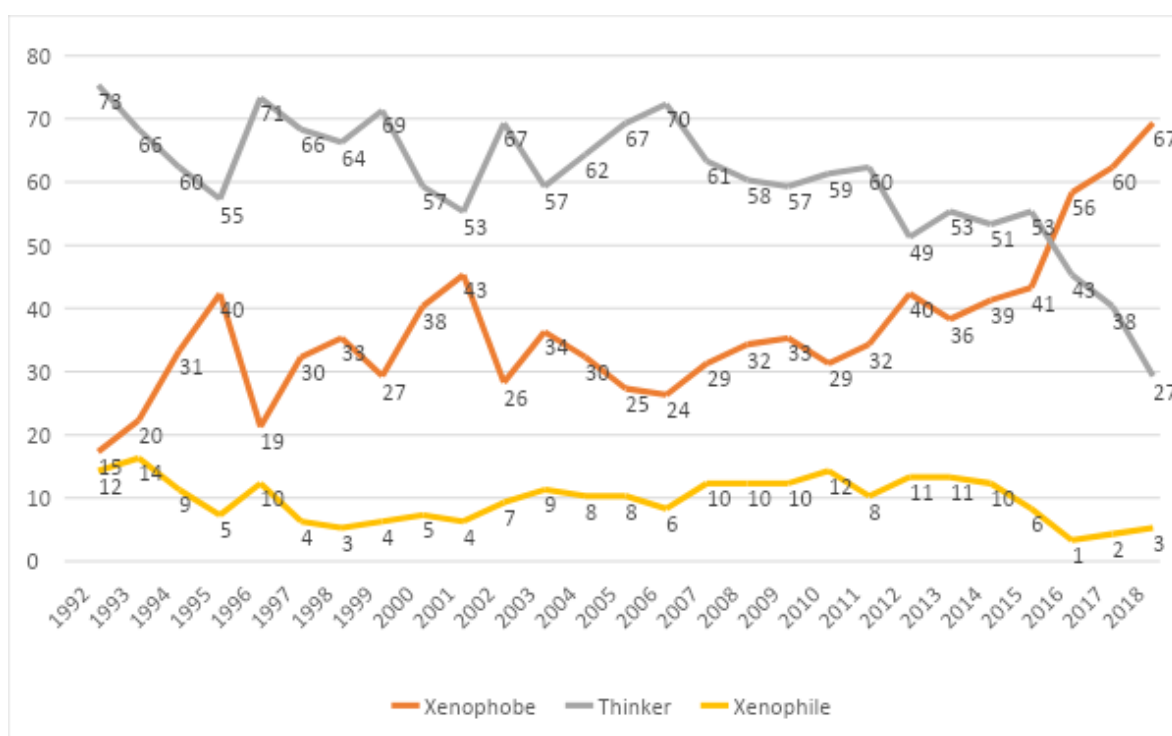
1.3 Public opinion & salience

To introduce the public opinion on immigration, we shortly discuss the trend of xenophobia in Hungary and comparisons with other European countries will follow.

1.3.1 Trend of the level of xenophobia in Hungary

The level of xenophobia was relatively stable between the early 1990s and 2010. The ratio of xenophile's (who would accept everyone) has always been low (yellow line). Until 2015 the majority of the population belonged to the category of "thinkers" (grey line, who would give asylum for those who deserve it). Since joining the EU (2004) there has been a mild increase of xenophobia (brown line) until 2015, however, since 2015 xenophobes dominate the Hungarian society (Figure 1).

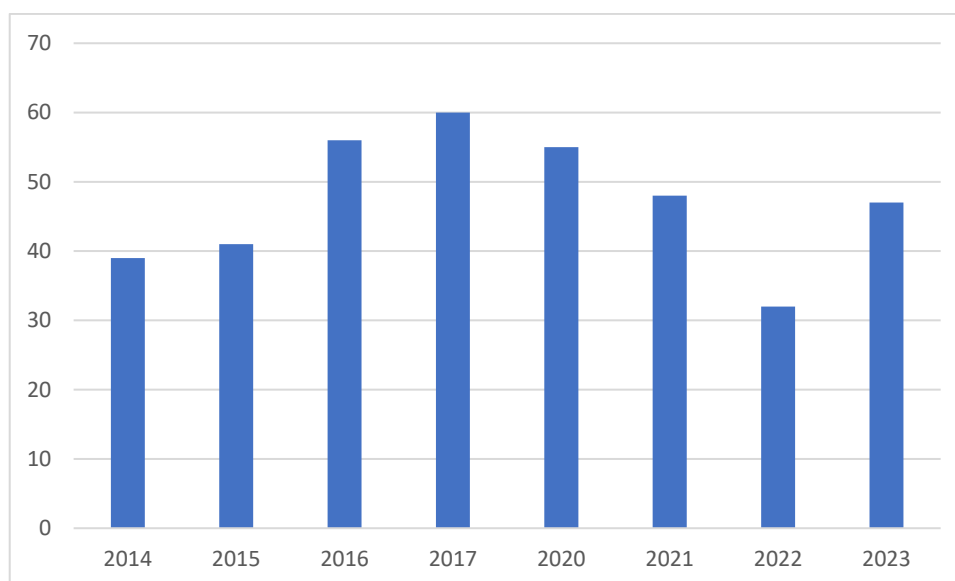
Figure 1. The level of xenophobia in Hungary (1990-2018, % of respondents)



Source: Gerő-Sik, 2020

According to a recent analysis (Pepinsky et al, 2022), however, as a result of MPB different framing of refugees from Ukraine ("proper" refugees) versus those coming from non-European poor countries ("improper" refugees), the Hungarian public opinion towards refugees became bifurcated. The level of overall xenophobia also decreased as Ipsos data lucidly demonstrates (Figure 2). MPB during the years of the COVID crisis put less emphasis on migration which resulted in the slow decrease of the level of xenophobia in 2020 and in 2021, and in 2022, with the coming of Ukrainian refugees, instead of increasing again, it has significantly decreased only to begin to increase again in 2023.

Figure 2. The level of xenophobia in Hungary (2014-2023, %)*



*Data for 2020-2023 is from Ipsos (2023). The question in the survey (We must close our borders to refugees entirely) was similar to that of the question in Figure 1.

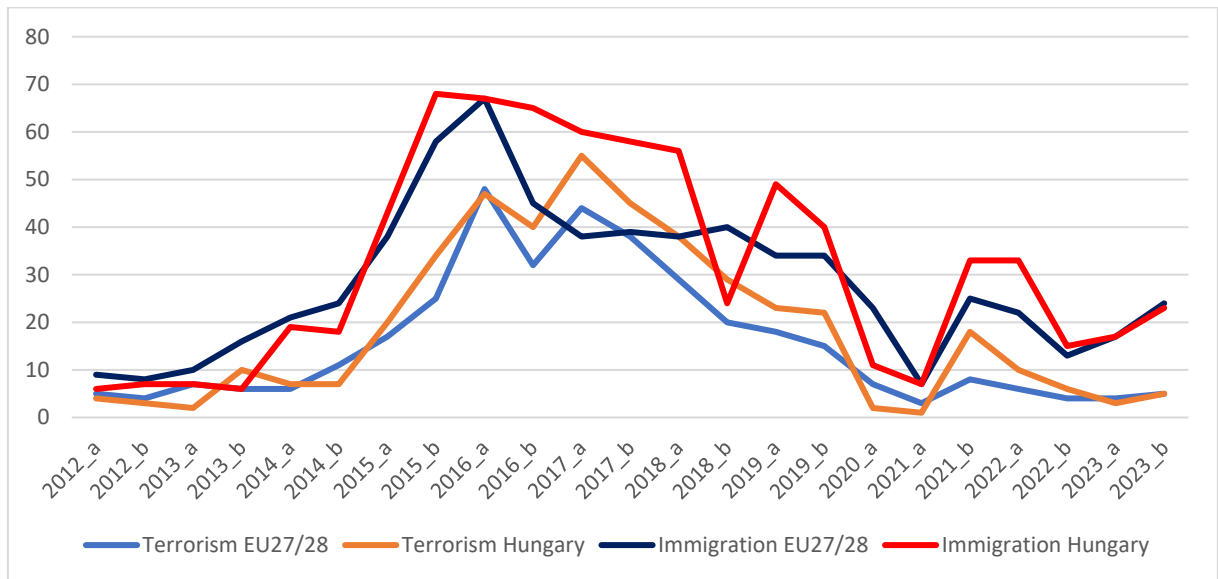
Other sources also confirmed that the majority of the Hungarian society think that Ukrainian refugees should be accepted at least for a limited period or until the war is over (Tóth-Bernát 2022). Political orientation also loses its defining characteristic: only the small blocks of right-wing voters (Jobbik and Mi Hazánk (the new radical right-wing party)) would reject refugees more than the other groups of the society (Zakarias et al. 2023).

1.3.2 Comparative trends

Compared to the other EU countries, while immigration became the major concern in all countries proper, Hungary is an outlier in keeping immigration as a crucial problem for the EU for much longer than anywhere else. As the data (Figure 3) on immigration and terrorism¹⁶ shows, both issues were the most salient ones in the EU countries in late 2015 and then started to decrease (except a temporary increase in case of terrorism in early 2017). In case of Hungary, however, immigration remained significantly more salient compared to the EU average until 2018 and became again higher when the first shock of pandemic was over. The difference between the proportion of those who consider terrorism as a major threat for the EU is minimal between Hungarians and EU citizens during the entire period.

¹⁶ We analyze these two issues simultaneously since they were handled as closely related topics since the first push poll in 2015 (see the title of the first national consultation in 2015 in Annex 3).

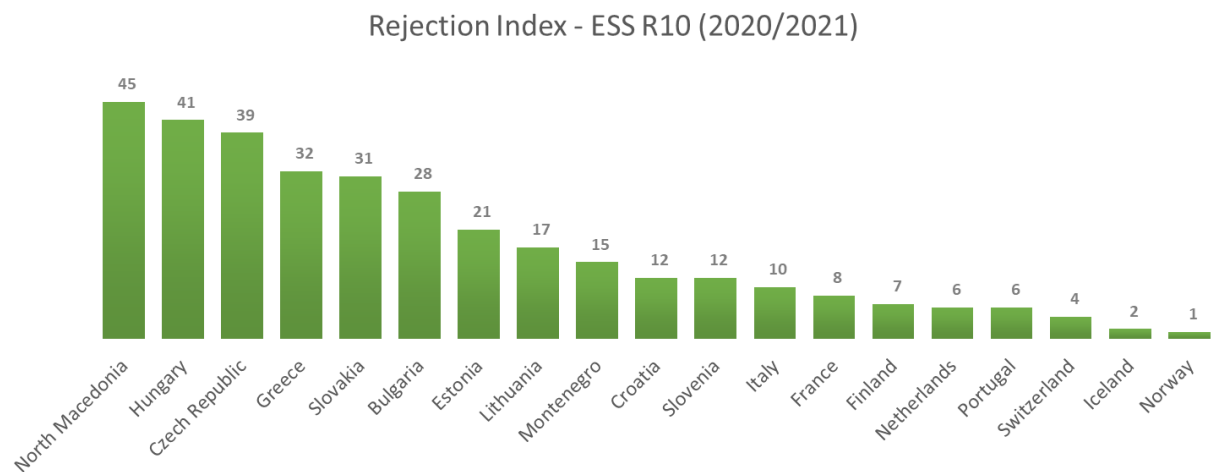
Figure 3. The importance of immigration and terrorism on EU level. Attitudes in Hungary and in the EU. 2012-2023, % of respondents selecting immigration and terrorism as one of the important issues.



Source: own editing based on <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052>

Data from ESS shows that in Hungary xenophobia has always been higher than in other EU countries¹⁷ (Messing-Ságvári, 2021). In 2020/21 the salience of the rejection index is still the second highest among the European countries, and the highest in the EU (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The rejection index in various European countries in 2020/21 (%)

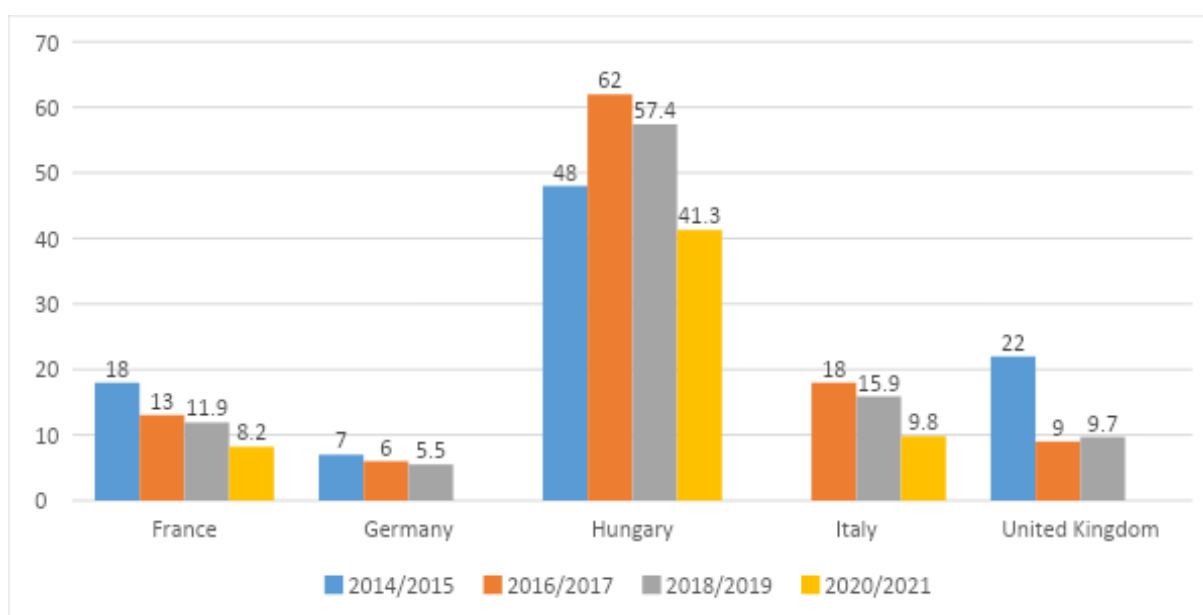


Source: Messing-Ságvári, 2021

The time series analysis of ESS in the selected countries (Figure 5) shows low and continuously decreasing level of xenophobia in Germany, France and Italy (as well as sharp drop of it in the UK.). In Hungary the level of xenophobia is significantly higher than in any of these countries, even after the drop of it between 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

¹⁷ Those who stated that nobody should be allowed to come and live to the respondent's country from poorer countries outside Europe. (Messing-Ságvári, 2021).

Figure 5. The rejection index in some EU countries (2014-2021, %)



Source: Messing-Ságvári, 2021. At the time of analysis data for 2014/2015 in Italy and for 2020/2021 in Germany and the UK was missing.

1.4 Politics and media

Fidesz¹⁸ has come to dominate Hungarian politics at the national and local level since its landslide victory in the 2010 national elections¹⁹, and efficiently dismantled the democratic checks and balances as well as solidified its grip on power (Orosz et al, 2022).

A key element of the success of the Fidesz government is that it managed to convince a substantial part of the population²⁰ that they are the only competent and public-spirited political alternative which can bring security, stability and wealth to the nation as well as defend its sovereignty and moral system.

Enyedi (2023) argues that the Orbán regime has always used various ideologies to establish its power, and in the past years applies a strong version of ideology-based autocracy mixing the following elements²¹:

- illiberal conservatism, which “promotes traditional family structures, social order, and religious (Christian) legacies, ... it is hostile to checks and balances, state neutrality, and the ability of the mass media and civil society to hold decision-

¹⁸ In coalition with the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) secured enough seats to achieve a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly in 2010, in 2014, in 2018 and again in 2022. In this study, Fidesz refers to the Fidesz–KDNP coalition.

¹⁹ Since 2010 Fidesz has won with a 2/3 majority in 3 of the 4 electoral periods.

²⁰ To have a two-third majority in the Parliament – using the properly designed election system – about 30-40% of the potential voters is enough to convert into a pro-Fidesz segment.

²¹ And is embedded into various socio-political and historic/cultural characteristics of contemporary Hungary such as anti-empire nationalism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism, irredentism, resentment towards the “West”, post-peasant (primordial) nationalism, etc. (Melegh, 2016, Sik-Melegh 2017).

makers accountable. ... It is particularly active on the cultural front, demanding formal compliance with official cultural norms from anyone..."; (p.12)

- civilizationist ethnocentrism, which "combines the anti-globalist idea of national sovereignty with loyalty to the circle of white Christian countries that are ready to defend themselves against migration and cosmopolitan discourse. The principal units are ethno-cultural with boundaries defined by lineage and certain attitudes, not citizenship. These units are expected to work together against the challenges coming from rival civilizations." (p.13), and
- paternalist populism, which is a form of etatism which „rejects elite-led political structures in favor of bottom-up, majoritarian, and in a very narrow sense, democratic mode of governance. The central principles of liberal democracy, like checks and balances, state neutrality, individual rights, and non-discrimination are of no value” to this „father-led” form of populism (p.13).

Fidesz is successful in strengthening the worldview it prefers and to enhance polarization and exploit fears through MPB (i.e., the organization that produces it and the technologies it applies), and it is the core tool of the informational element of the autocratic governance regime.

As to the current domination of the on- and off-line media, according to a report around the early 2020s 80% of the advertising revenue goes to government-friendly or state-owned media outlets (Kovács et al., 2021). After their second win Fidesz closed some critical media outlets, and some were turned into pro-government channel (Polyák 2019). Finally, the Central and Eastern European Media Foundation was established on the basis of pro-government entrepreneur's donation of their media assets to the foundation as a present for free. The foundation now owns hundreds of media outlets and controls the whole system of county-newspapers, providing a centralized political content (Kovács et al., 2021).

As the final step to control the media, Fidesz turned its attention to the social media. As a result, a network of influencers, political commentators were built, with their own social media accounts, mediating the centrally composed messages on various social media platforms (but mainly on Facebook).

1.5 The selection of the three cases

The selection of the first two case studies (on relocation quota and the Russian-Ukrainian war) was decided by the team and in case of Hungary both were well justified since in 2015 the EU-wide debate on relocation quota was used in Hungary as a pressing of the MPB (the quota referendum in 2016 and the fake news based "information campaigns" it was embedded into, see Annex 3, and Sik-Simonovits, 2019, Bognár et al, 2022), and the Russian-Ukrainian war started only a month before the Parliamentary elections in April 2022 while campaign (including the then-newest pressing of MPB focusing on gender) was almost at its heights.

As to the third case study, the narratives on NGOs and the civil society helping Ukrainian refugees became a hot issue from day one of the war in February 2022. This issue was especially central in the Hungarian public for two reasons: firstly, because Ukraine is not

only a neighbour, but it has a Hungarian Diaspora along the Hungarian border with an important role in the Hungarian Diaspora politics (Sik, 2000, Sik et al, 2014, Sik-Szeitl, 2015). Secondly, since the asylum-system of Hungary was basically eradicated since 2015, the first actors helping Ukrainian refugees were civil organizations and spontaneously emerging informal actors of the civil society (Tóth-Bernát, 2022).

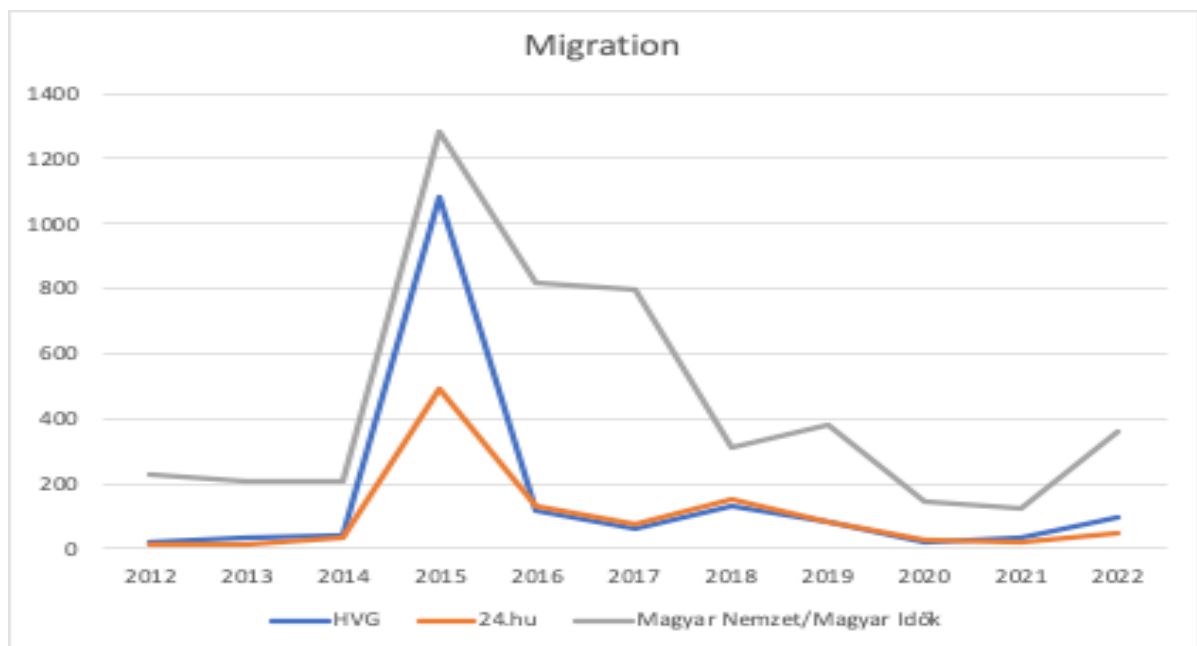
2. The production and circulation of migration related narratives

Before focusing on the three cases, first we introduce the main characteristics of the selected media and the general trend of migration related discourse in the media and in the Parliament. During the data analysis, we applied the concept of Boswell and Smellie (2023) and followed the and methodology agreed by the international team.

The database the Hungarian team constructed consisted of twelve articles from three different online newspapers: **Magyar Nemzet** as the pro-government media and the most important channel for the propaganda of the government, **24.hu** as the centrist media, a left-wing portal with a purpose to present an objective picture about the migration in Hungary, and **HVG.hu**, as the progressive media which regularly publish political essays criticizing the government.

As Figure 6 shows, the peak of migration related articles was in 2015 in all three online sources was 2015 but migration has always been the most frequently thematized in pro-government media outlet.

Figure 6. Number of migration related articles in the selected three Hungarian media outlets, 2012-2022 (online media platforms)



Sources: HVG.hu, 24.hu, Magyar Nemzet

However, as public attention on the quota debate decreased, migration policy receded into the background except in the MPB controlled Magyar Nemzet. In the media outlet migration-related narratives remained salient for two years, probably connected to the campaigns against Soros (there was a special push poll against Soros importing millions of migrants (the National Consultation on the Soros Plan), see Annex 3). The decreasing tendency was altered by the cases of the Russian-Ukrainian war and of the NGOs in Russian-Ukrainian war, which mildly increased again the frequency of migration-related publications.

The qualitative analysis of the three selected media was based on a data sheet into which we integrated 36 articles from the three online newspapers (12 in each case). As to the qualitative analysis of migration-related narratives in the political sphere, we focused on the Parliament. To handle the complexity of the work of the National Assembly, we investigated four types of parliamentary statements²²:

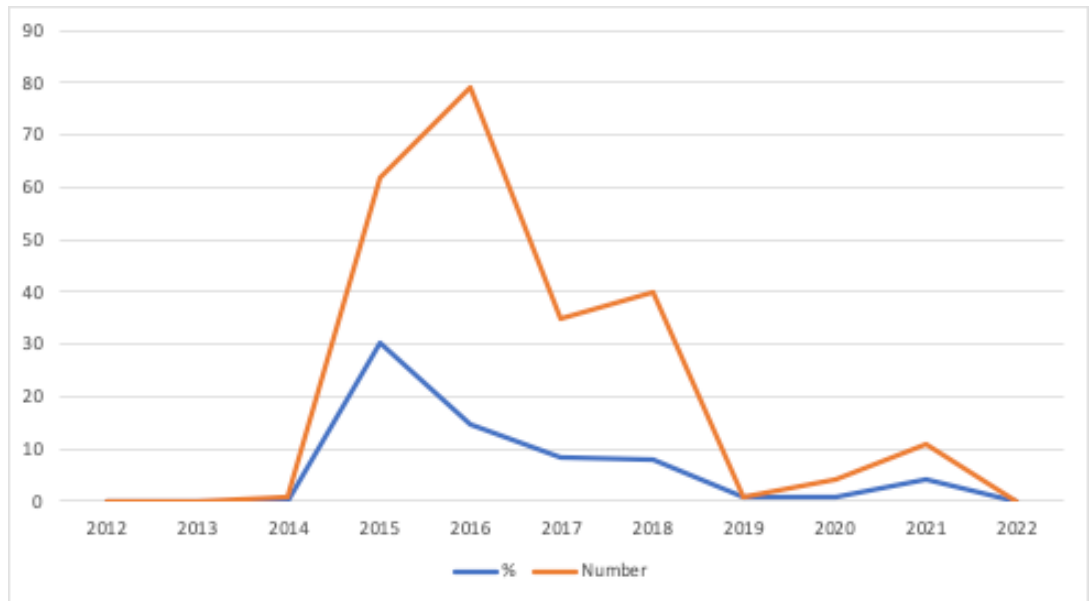
- We examined government narratives by the parliamentary speeches of the Prime Minister. As the head of the government, Orbán usually discusses only the most important topics, thus the narratives embedded in his speeches usually have the most significant impact on the agenda of the government (Pokornyi and Sághy, 2021, Pokornyi, Barczikay, and Bucholcz, 2022).

As Figure 7 shows, in Orbán's speeches migration-related narratives were the most frequent during and immediately after the "refugee crisis" in 2015. This trend has been extended in the following years²³ when MPB was the most active in combining Soros and the EU as the main scapegoats with the threat of mass migration.

²² We examined the parties' parliamentary communication using databases built by the Hungarian Team of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), which is a part of an international research network on public policy (<https://cap.tk.hu/en>). These databases include all parliamentary speeches, interpellations, and other questions from the past ten years and beyond.

²³ See the anti-relocation quota referendum and several national consultations with Soros in the focus between 2016 and 2018, Annex 3.

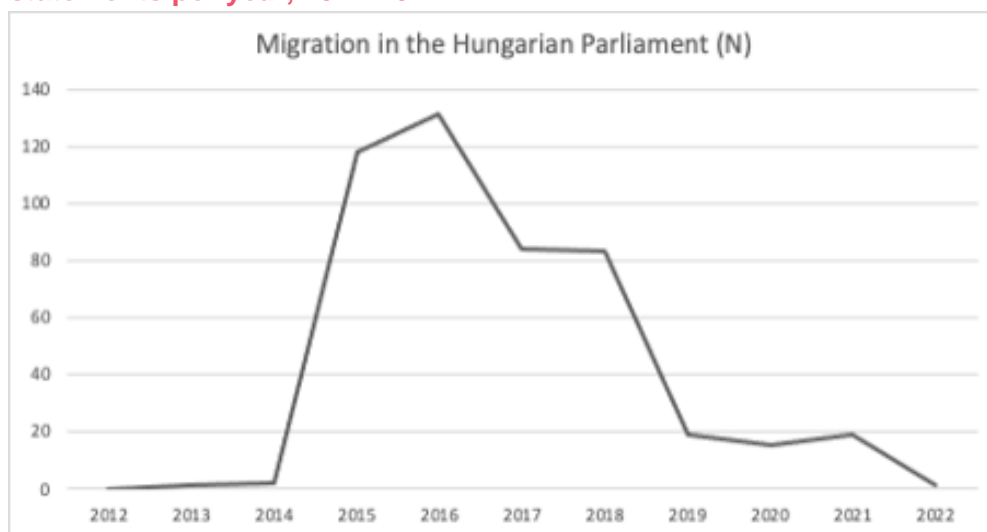
Figure 7. The number of migration-related parliamentary statements in PM Viktor Orbán's speeches, 2012-2022



Source: Speeches of the Prime Minister (% - migration related speeches of all speeches)

- As to the “voice” of the opposition, we analyzed three types of sources: interpellations, parliamentary speeches and parliamentary questions. As the most important parliamentary forums to present opposition messages, these types of actions are supposed to highlight the most relevant policy issues of the parties’ own agenda, and for criticizing the narratives of the government. The salience of migration related narratives in the parliamentary speeches (Figure 8) is rather similar to that of the pro-governmental media and Orbán’s narratives (grey line in Figure 6 and brown line in Figure 7).

Figure 8. The number of migration related themes in the Hungarian parliamentary statements per year, 2012-2022²⁴



Sources: Interpellations, parliamentary speeches, parliamentary questions

- Additionally, we examined the communication of the opposition, with a primary focus on speeches, interpellations, and other parliamentary questions, which generally serve to criticize the government's policies and bring attention to uncomfortable questions for Fidesz. We included 62 migration-related interpellations and other parliamentary questions from the opposition.²⁵

The venue in every case was the Hungarian National Assembly. The intended audience, both for the government and opposition parties, was primarily the public opinion and the media, which could present a shortened and simplified version of the most important points of the debates on legislation to the people. Unfortunately, when we tried to analyze policy-making documents we faced significant data gaps. On the one hand, since Fidesz-KDNP remained in power for the second time (2014), there have been only a very few policy documents and reports related to migration policy. The above-mentioned decrees been passed mostly in a quick pace, without much discussion and often as individual proposals from MPs belonging to the Fidesz or KDNP fractions. Instead of policy documents, political actors, and especially the government, relied heavily on communication platforms to present narratives and legitimize their messages on migration policy to the public. This also meant that the government did not substantially address the issue of migration policy in any legislative forum. Similar to the Parliament, the government did not communicate about migration policy through the ministries, neither in the form of background studies nor official statements. The primary channels for this were the media (see above), as well as the speeches of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who, however, largely discussed the issue in forums outside the parliament (Pokorny and Sággy, 2021).

²⁴ Altogether, we analyzed a total of 28 PM speeches 3 from 2012, 1 from 2013, 5 from 2014, 2 from 2015, 4 from 2016, 3 from 2017, 3 from 2018, 1 from 2019, 4 from 2020, and 2 from 2021.

²⁵ 1 from 2013, 1 from 2014, 8 from 2015, 17 from 2016, 8 from 2017, 6 from 2019, 2 from 2020, and 2 from 2021.

2.1 Case study 1: The European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme

From the beginning Fidesz declared that they are against any type of relocation quota from the beginning. To strengthen its position, the government initiated a referendum on the quota. The question was „Do you want the European Union to be entitled to prescribe the of the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the consent of the National Assembly?”²⁶ Naturally, Fidesz was on the “No side, along with Jobbik. The opposition parties and civil society actors called for the boycott of the referendum.” (Gessler 2017) The campaign against the quota took the form of the earlier communication: partly presenting immigration as a security and economic threat second, as part of the power struggle between the EU and Hungary.

2.1.1 Media narrative on relocation quota

In the articles examined²⁷, Magyar Nemzet presented mostly the **securitization** narrative and less often the **economic**, the **deservingness** and **power struggle** narratives. The securitization and power struggle narratives in case of Magyar Nemzet usually based on “proof” of the betrayals of opposition parties, NGOs, and the EU. These actors are presented as scapegoats and as puppets of Fidesz’ biggest enemy, George Soros.

As to the economic narrative, they emphasize the costs of immigrants: “*Just calculate what a disproportionate burden this would place on the Hungarian budget at a cost of HUF 130,000 per month per person.*”²⁸

Or that Hungary has other poor groups to spend this money on: “*We have enough people in need here, if we help, we must support them*”; “*We must find our way back to the young, give them a place, and take on board the new generations of national-minded, rural, talented people.*”²⁹

As for the “power struggle” narrative:

“This is the essence of Fidesz’ policy, we see everything through this lens”; “Make no mistake, we do not want to deepen integration further. From our point of view, the EU is primarily an economic community of values and interests, not a political one. And now they want to impose political values on us,”³⁰

Magyar Nemzet emphasized that the government has created a special budget as a financial shield for Hungarian jobs, and that was quickly passed by the House, thanks to the two-third majority of the government parties.

²⁶ https://static.valasztas.hu/dyn/onepsz201610/szavossz/en/eredind_e.html

²⁷ Twelve articles (4-4 articles from each of the investigated newspapers) published between November and December in 2015

²⁸ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold-archivum/2015/11/havi-130-ezer-forintba-kerul-egy-migrans>

²⁹ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold-archivum/2015/12/lazar-van-nalunk-is-eleg-raszorulo>

³⁰ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold-archivum/2015/12/lazar-van-nalunk-is-eleg-raszorulo>

To present Fidesz' relocation quota-related policy strategies, the focus is mainly on institutions, migrants were portrayed as active threats but almost never presented as speakers, they were mainly discussed by other actors.

Articles in Magyar Nemzet are in line with governmental communication, to treat migrants, opposition parties, and the European Union as villains: migrants bring the crisis, reinforced by the European Union's strategy which is supported by Hungarian left-wing political actors. The victims in every article are Hungarian citizens who have to suffer the dangers, while the hero is the Hungarian Government aiming to stop migration.

As emphasized by the Prime Minister in his statements and speeches of 2015-2016, the problem needs to be solved nationally therefore Hungary does not accept any migrants coming from outside of Europe. Every article stresses that the moral solution for Hungary should be to veto the EU's relocation decisions, therefore Fidesz does not have any other choice but to reject it, despite that it poses significant risks for Hungarians on behalf of hostile EU bureaucrats.

The **non-government (centrist and progressive) articles** show very similar features. First, the narratives they apply, is not necessarily the opposite of Fidesz' and certainly the non-government media does not function as a mouthpiece for opposition parties, its goal is not to convey the policy strategies and messages of these political actors. As a result, messages from opposition parties are rare, their voice is not loud enough to shape the migration discourse. Furthermore, the content of these articles is focused on Fidesz' policy, as they generally do not emphasize their own stance on migrants themselves— important migration-related topics are mostly discussed alongside the government acts (decisions, speeches or any other policy outputs from Fidesz). So, this segment of the media indirectly (often using irony as the expression of rejection) is also the source of government narratives. However, the non-governmental media tends to publish articles with a more objective tone (primarily 24.hu) or open criticism (primarily HVG.hu).

Regarding the setting, non-government media is similar to Magyar Nemzet: mostly news of the anti-migration campaigns of the government, budgeting defense and the economic interests of Hungarians.

The characters in the narratives are reversed: the government appears here as a villain who hinders the European Union's efforts to solve the migration crisis and denies its help to migrants who need support to avoid returning to war-torn homelands. The hero becomes the European Union which strives to alleviate the migration crisis by the relocation quota system. The victims, however, are the same (the Hungarian people) but they suffer not from EU's policies but rather the fearmongering campaigns of the Government which endangers the European unity.

In sum, in the **pro-government media** the prime sources were the MPB generated campaigns. This had two forms: first, in these articles journalists not only adopted the pro-government narratives but expressed firm support of Fidesz' migration messages. This can be interpreted as super-embracing the governmental narratives or as adapting these messages of those radical right-wing groups whom the government directly do not want to access. Secondly, in this newspaper no other political actor (such as opposition parties or international actors like the European Union) have a voice.

In the pro-government media, there is a strong nationalist critique of the European Union: thus, they apply the power-struggle narrative, and the journalists often emphasize that Fidesz is the defender of the Hungarian people (including ethnic Hungarians who live as minorities in the Carpathian Basin) and Hungary is the defender of Europe. They reject the concept of “Europeanization” and EU migration strategies.

2.1.2 Analysis of the Hungarian parliamentary discourse

In the government-dominated parliamentary discourse on the tone and topics are very similar to what we found in Magyar Nemzet. In his infrequent speeches, the Prime Minister exclusively focused on the risks of the quota system and portrayed the European Union as a puppet of George Soros who pursue its own political agenda that contradicts the interests of the Hungarian Government. Unsurprisingly, similar to the migration-related media discourse, the Prime Minister also regularly highlighted the risks of economic migration and emphasized the protection of Hungarian jobs, as the most important aim of the government, thus, the main narratives used were the securitization, economic and power-struggle narratives.

For example, Orbán starts his speech with implying, that the main challenge of the coming year will be mass migration:

“In summary, Ladies and Gentlemen, I can tell you that 2015 was a successful year, and we have laid the foundations for further economic success in 2016. The greatest challenge in 2016 will not be of an economic nature, but of a security nature. ... Let us remember that in 2015 Hungary was under siege from migrants. Every day thousands of people crossed the border illegally. Chaos, upheaval, crime, acts of terrorism and fear: this is what modern-day mass migration had brought to Europe; this is what the migrants have brought to Europe.” (Speech of the PM (1/02/2016))

Orbán employed various rhetorical tools to convince the public about the efficiency of the government’s migration policy. He generally framed Fidesz anti-quota policy as the only possible action to stop illegal migration and terrorism. In order to achieve this goal, Orbán called for unity among the Hungarians. Therefore, in addition to the nationalist frames, symbolic words and expressions (such as “fight” and “enemy”) were frequently used by Orbán in his speeches (see Soós and Körösi, 2013; Pokorny and Sággy, 2021).

Naturally, the hero is the Hungarian Government itself³¹, which protects the Hungarian people against the “enemy”, the European Union (along with George Soros, who pulls the strings behind the scenes), that supports migration and aggravates the crisis. The victims here are also the Hungarian people who have to suffer the pro-migration policy of the European Union and, thus, the illegal migration. The quota itself, is clearly discussed in the power-struggle narrative, which is showed nicely by the first and last speech of the PM in 2016.

“To this end we have mobilised Hungarian society; this is because the Government’s determination is important, and perhaps even worthy of recognition, but in itself it

³¹ See: the speech in 1/02/2016 “I can report to the House that Hungary managed to close ranks in time and succeeded in protecting the country. The Government acted and Parliament adopted the necessary legislation.”

will not be enough to counter the adoption of the compulsory resettlement quota, such is the pressure which Hungary has been subjected to in recent years and which it will continue to be subjected to in future". (Speech of the PM (1/02/2016))

The last speech in 2016 was a day after he announced the results of the referendum of the relocation quota,

"Who should decide on who may stay and who may live in the territory of Hungary? Who should decide on this: Brussels or Budapest? This was the question which had to be answered in the referendum. The decision will determine Hungary's fate for many years. If we acquiesce, we shall have one future, one Hungary; but if we rise to the challenge of the fight, we shall have a different future, a different Hungary. The referendum has clarified the position of the Hungarian people. Hungary has decided!.....We must prepare for further struggles. Now the ball is in Brussels' court. The question is whether Brussels – the democratic community of European States – can get away with imposing its will upon a Member State in opposition to more than ninety per cent of those who voted in a referendum; the question is also whether we Hungarian politicians will also be able to enforce the people's decision in the European arena."

The Prime Minister rarely discusses the role of Hungarian leftist/liberal parties, instead, he focuses more on the international institutions, NGOs and processes. This may indicate that Orbán does not want to give them a platform to amplify their voices, but it also shows that the Prime Minister does not consider opposition politicians as relevant actors who could have a significant influence on the migration-related communication and policy strategies in Hungary. Opposition parliamentary members do not present their own narratives (provided they have any) but rather reject the narratives and policies of Fidesz. Exceptions are when they stress that the EU should not identify Hungarian people with the Hungarian Government, as the government's anti-quota strategy, including portraying the EU and George Soros as the enemies of Hungary, does not reflect the general public opinion, but serves the political interests of Fidesz.

As to the relocation quota debate in the Parliament, compared to the salience of quota-related narratives in the media, in the Parliament it received much less attention. The 'refugee crisis' term was often framed as 'invasion' or 'flood'. Moreover, instead of using the term of relocation quota, an emotionally more loaded term ("mandatory quota system") was often used by MPB (original introduced by an MP of the right-wing opposition).

Another main narrative that was attached in the Parliament to the quota discourse was the economic narrative, speakers usually arguing that the quota should not be used to solve labor scarcity and population decline (aging) because these should be strictly national issues, and Hungary should invite ethnic Hungarians from neighboring countries only. The crime frame covered several different issues. In the case of immigrants, the discourse often referred to the securitization narrative, and its element such as terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal border crossing. However, these also mention a sort of criminalization. At the institutional level, it referred to the question of uselessness of the Dublin regulations, and the process of registration and return of immigrants in the framework of the Dublin regulation. The culture frame emerged either as cultural differences or as the preservation of the 'European identity'. It was argued that there is no successful integration model and,

referring to Merkel, that the multicultural model has failed in Germany and in Europe. By 'European identity', the MPs meant the ideal of a Christian Europe which is to be defended by the Hungarian government. An earlier less emphasized narrative appears here, the "demography narrative" referring to the threat of the rapid and large scale changing ethnic or religious characteristics of the population ("population replacement") as an existential threat.

The opposition parties apply different strategies: First they hardly mention the relocation quota and their interpellations. Instead, they talk about the anti-immigrant campaign, the fence erected at the Southern border and the so-called "residency bond", i.e., citizenship to those, who buy a certain amount of state bond, and this policy was attacked constantly by Jobbik and the Hungarian Socialist Party. However, while both the Socialist Party and Jobbik tried to apply a criminalization narrative to this type of immigration, Jobbik also contrasted it to the government stance on immigration. They emphasized their support of the migration policies of the government in general:

"Over the past year, the government's communications have-- quite rightly-- focused on defending against mass migration and on the dangers of immigration and multiculturalism. The often uncontrolled, mass influx of foreigners poses not only social and economic challenges, but also security challenges and an increased threat of terrorism (Márton Gyöngyösi, Jobbik).

"Protecting Hungary from migrants and the terrorists who come to Hungary with migrants is one of the most important national issues today. There can be no half-solutions in this matter. Not only do 98% of the people not want the migrants that Juncker wants to impose on us, but they do not want any other form of migrants coming to Hungary today, including those coming through Antal Rogán's resettlement business." (György Szilágyi, Jobbik)

2.1.3 Relationship between media narratives and political narratives

The media and political narratives are closely related, whether we are talking about pro- or non-government communication, as both are dominated by government narratives. Neither the media nor the politicians in the Parliament present any alternative to the government's anti-migration and anti-quota policy. Opposition politicians, as well as the non-government media, are also unable (or unwilling) to present any real alternative to the migration narratives of the government. The humanitarian narrative is more present in the media, than in the parliamentary interpellation of the opposition, not to mention, that Jobbik used the same narratives as the government. In sum, as both political actors and the media shape their migration narratives in line with government actions, the narrative style is absolutely lay, technocratic cannot prevail in Hungary at all.

2.1.4 Policy-making narrative on the relocation quota

The issue of relocation quota had only a minimal visible impact on policy-making narratives. On the one hand, the government focused only on the propaganda potential of it, i.e., accusing the EU trying to destroy the sovereignty of Hungary and convince the public about the dangers of the quota system. On the other hand, the opposition parties were unable (or again unwilling) to utilize this opportunity to influence policymaking since they were aware

of the fact that the parliamentary majority of the Fidesz-KDNP hinders any legislative proposals of the opposition parties and the possibility of passing decrees was exclusively held by the government parties as well (Gajduchek-Sebők-Molnár, 2021). In relation to the relocation quota, the narratives were similar to the narratives used in 2015. They did not serve to gain support for a specific policy, but to support the referendum and to support the anti- or pro-European stance of the political actors.

Another specific feature of Hungarian policymaking is that there were neither independent evaluation (let alone research) nor alternative policy-documents about the quota system (or as a matter of fact any other migration policy issues). If such documents existed, they were carried by MPB think tanks and not made available for the public, i.e., could not induce any discussion.

2.1.5 Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)

There is visible interaction between the communicative and the coordinative narratives in Hungary simply because both segments are dominated by the government and its propaganda machinery of the MPB. Consequently, if there is any circulation of narratives these occur within the organization of MPB and invisibly for the public. Since in case of the quota system there were no efforts to work out concrete policies (the EU proposition has never reached the form of a decree), the quota narratives were determined by the communicative sphere. Fidesz relegated the coordinative action to government departments and/or invisible think tanks, consequently non-government actors could not have any influence on the process. The only documents available, are the speeches, or statements, or the campaign advertisements of the referendum.

2.1.6 Conclusion

In sum, the narratives on the relocation quota were determined by the government. The articles usually served as platforms to provide an overview or react to the government's propaganda. In the case of the Parliament both the communicative and the coordinative spheres were dominated by messages of MPB as well.

Fidesz used all forms of MPB propaganda channels to underline its narratives and hardly allowed any role for Parliament in the process, i.e., the Parliament only served as secondary forum for the government.

Meanwhile, the non-government media, as well as the opposition in the parliament, rejected the Fidesz propaganda and anti-quota policy. Since the government did not consider these domestic political actors strong enough to be used as enemies in their anti-migration policy, they primarily directed public attention towards the European Union and George Soros.

These findings assert the analysis of Bognár et al (2022) who – using a large corpus— proved that the governmental narrative dominated the public discourse on the relocation quota, the messages of the MPB could not be effectively challenged by other actors. Frames

and narratives that challenge the narrative of the government were present, but were audible only in 'echo chambers', and they were not loud enough to influence the discourse.

2.2 Case study 2: The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis in 2022

The Russian-Ukrainian war started only months before the Parliamentary elections in April 2022 while the election campaign was already at its heights. Unsurprisingly, the war-related narrative ("they", the opposition wants war) "we" (your government) brings Peace (and Gas) immediately became the core of the discourse.

2.2.1 Media narratives on the Russian-Ukrainian war

In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war³² Magyar Nemzet had the most pronounced coverage of migration-related issues during the examined period³³, with nearly four hundred articles, while the 24.hu and HVG.hu, had less (about a hundred articles).

We identified three types of narratives: the **solidarity** narrative was frequent in all of the examined outlets. They report about the tens of thousands of refugees (using this word regardless whether they are pro- or non-governmental media outlets). The content of the articles about refugees from Ukraine was dominated by government messages but since the government and the opposition agreed on the necessity of helping the refugees, unlike in 2015, this did not cause any difference in the two segments. There was an agreement that refugees from Ukraine should be welcomed and helped in their temporary integration. The narratives often contain positive stories. For example, Magyar Nemzet published an article, in which they happily report, that:

Adrianna and Timur are two children from the nearly 800,000 people who fled their homeland through Hungary to escape the war, finding help or a temporary home here until they can return home. At the World Aquatics Championships in Budapest, they were among the first to receive the gold medals, bringing not only surprise but also great joy and touching moments to the Ukrainian team.³⁴

Despite the generally positive tone, this pro-government outlet continues referring to the pro-government **peace** narrative: "The fate of the two children is also a clear proof that peace is the only solution, that this war must end as soon as possible.", i.e. stating that the "only solution is peace" and Ukraine, and Russia should return to the table immediately.

Pro-government articles tend to focus more on the negative economic impacts of the war, such as energy prices rather than on migration policy. Similarly to the case of the narratives on EU relocation quota in 2015, the government usually connect the topic of migration to other important policy messages of Fidesz, such as international affairs (**sovereignty, or power struggle**) and defense (**security**). The issue of Ukrainian refugees was rarely

³² We analyzed again twelve articles (4 articles from each of the three newspapers) published between June and August in 2022.

³³ Imre and Kovács (2022) found, the topic of the war significantly influenced the structure of the articles in the pro-government media: while the number of articles per day increased (from 20 to 80 articles), their average length decreased.

³⁴ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2022/06/menekult-gyerekek-akasztottak-az-aranyermet-az-ukran-szinkronuszocsapat-nyakaba>

discussed in relation what is really happening in Hungary, as the focus remained on internationally focused government narratives.

Articles in the **Magyar Nemzet** were dominated by government messages, channeling and embracing the most important pro-government narratives and supporting arguments. This means that, in addition to the **humanistic** narratives, journalists occasionally adopted a critical tone towards international political actors (**sovereignty**). For example, in an article it was stressed that while Hungary is committed to help Ukrainian refugees, it should be done “on its own way”, and Ukraine should not dictate or pressure Hungary in terms of the level of help or how Fidesz should communicate about the Ukrainian situation. Several articles stressed that Hungary should support peace in Europe by helping those fleeing from another European country and are “real refugees”. Therefore, Hungary has a duty to help them, and they do not pose a threat to Hungarian jobs and families, unlike those coming from countries outside Europe.

These differences between refugees and migrants thus becomes an important characteristic of pro-government narrative: „A refugee is only a refugee until the first safe country, after that he is a tourist. And anyone who tries to enter the third country illegally, without papers and by force is a terrorist.”³⁵

The following excerpt from an article published in a pro-government newspaper³⁶ is a good example of this “double narrative”:

“Looking at the painful photos of the crisis in Ukraine, one can see what a real flood of refugees looks like. It's a revealing sight: women fleeing, small children, elderly men— but no head of household. How could there be? He stayed at home to fight, to resist. And how interesting, every refugee has papers, ID cards... even if in many places they are not asked for them. Let's remember these pictures! Real refugees.

This crowd is not made up of men in their twenties smoking cigarettes and using mobile phones, most of whom, when asked, claim to be eighteen years old (because they somehow ‘lost’ their documents while fleeing...). There are no young men with Soros bank cards and hundreds of Euros in their pockets...”

An interviewee³⁷ explained it in a sarcastic way:

“This is how a refugee should look like ... the man stays home, defending the house, and the child and the women come with blue eyes cried out, blondies and politely standing in queue at the border and very grateful for the help distributed to them. And we do everything we can to help etc.”

Orbán appears in these articles as a central actor who helps European people and in whom Hungarian should trust since the Prime Minister underlines that those coming from Ukraine do not increase the risk of terrorism or economic migration.

³⁵ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/tollhegyen/2022/02/igazi-menekultek>

³⁶ <https://magyarnemzet.hu/tollhegyen/2022/02/igazi-menekultek>

³⁷ A brief introduction of the interviewees, see in Annex 1.

As to the setting, the importance of the Hungarian border and the railway stations as meeting points are emphasized. Regarding the characters, the hero is the Hungarian Government, enabling help to Ukrainian refugees and coordinating support, while the villain is the war³⁸ which forces Ukrainians to flee, thus making them the victims. The government narrative stresses that it cannot stop the war but under its supervision and guidance (and not as prescribed by international actors), Hungarians have the possibility to help those living in the neighbouring country. In these articles (often reports about the arriving refugees) usually mentioned how many children arrives to Budapest. Also, the pictures accompanying these articles show women and children mainly. (Picture 1)

Picture 1. A typical picture from a pro-government article



Source: <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2022/08/ismet-tobb-mint-16-ezren-menekultek-ukrainabol-hazankba>

As to **non-government media**, we found hardly any difference compared to the narratives in the pro-government media. There is no disagreement between Fidesz and the opposition parties about the need of help for the Ukrainian refugees. The only difference is that non-government journalists do not argue that the Hungarian government should only help Ukrainians “on its own way”, i.e., avoid combining the solidarity and sovereignty narratives. Criticism is restricted to the government’s communication. For example, they argue that Fidesz distorts the number of refugees in various ways³⁹. This overreporting goes hand in hand with an important (but also unknown) level of underreporting as a consequence that refugees often were afraid to register at the Hungarian authorities. Non-government media, similarly to the pro-government articles, present the refugees as mainly women and children (Picture 2).

³⁸ It is important to note that in the pro-government the term they apply is not the „war” but the term used in the Russian official narratives „special military operation” (специальная военная операция).

³⁹ For example, reporting every bordercrossing as if it would mean always a different person (Тeczár, 2023).

Picture 2. A typical picture from a non-government article



Source: <https://24.hu/belfold/2022/06/15/orosz-ukran-haboru-menekultek-szama-nepszamlalas-helsinki/>

2.2.2 The parliamentary discourse on the Russian-Ukrainian war

The refugee issue had virtually no influence on the parliamentary discourse. Since there is agreement among the parties, regardless of their political affiliation, on the need to help refugees from Ukraine, therefore neither Fidesz nor other members of the parliament used this issue to strengthen their political positions in the National Assembly, consequently this question did not arise in the House at all. The war related discourse in the Parliament focused mostly on the impact of the war on energy and gas prices, issues in relation to Ukrainian refugees were hardly mentioned.

2.2.3. Policy narratives and the relationship between media and political narratives and between the communicative and coordinative spheres

The Ukrainian refugee crisis was perceived as a “**classic**” **refugee crisis** and this narrative was used politicians regardless of their political orientation or position as an interviewee argued:

- The Ukrainian refugee movement is built on previously existing commuting and migrant networks of between Ukraine and Hungary
- It is a war-related mass movement mainly composed of women, elderly and children.

Thus, in relation with the media narratives, refugees were perceived as mainly women and children.

The “classic” nature of the crisis allows the speakers not to talk about the origins of the crisis. This way, they do not have to take a clear political stance, or to open the debate, where Hungary stands in the conflict, and they can focus on what is happening in Hungary. The victims are the Ukrainian displaced people, who has to move because of the war, and Hungarians and the Hungarian government and local governments are unanimously willing to help.

According to the interviews there were two issues in regard with immigration policies discussed at the beginning of the War: How should the legal framework be modified to create a legal way to accept Ukrainian refugees? What would be the proper structure to coordinate helping them? The latter discourse was about how much the state should rely on civil society in handling the whole issue, and how the non-existing asylum system should change to work efficiently in such a crisis situation. The first issue was resolved already in February⁴⁰ partly at the request of civil society organizations. The second issue, namely the coordination of help remained an issue still in the summer, during the period in which we examined the parliamentary debates as well

In terms of the setting, both the pro- and non-government media focused on the Hungarian border and railway stations. The only difference was that while the narratives of the Magyar Nemzet emphasized the leading role of Fidesz in coordinating the Hungarian help, the non-government media highlighted the key role of the Hungarian people and NGOs in providing it.

Unsurprisingly, in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, there is no significant visible circulation of narratives on migration issues among the various segments. If there were any, they were not made public.

2.3 Case study 3: The role of Hungarian NGOs in the Russian-Ukrainian war

As mentioned earlier, the narratives on NGOs and the civil society helping Ukrainian refugees became a hot topic from day one of the war for two reasons. First, as it is mentioned above most of the asylum system was dismantled after 2015. Thus, there were no institutional background to tend to the needs of the large number of refugees. This called for the help of civil society, both formal organizations and informal networks. According to several studies, 7% of the Hungarian population volunteered, and altogether 40% of the society helped in some way, mostly with donations (Zakariás et al. 2023, Tóth-Bernát 2023).

Second, civil society has a controversial role in the public discourse: since 2014, NGOs are often identified in the government discourse as “liberal political activists”, allies of George Soros or the so-called “Soros army” (see Majtényi et al. 2019, Kopper et al. 2017). The unexpected re-activation in the Spring of 2022 of the remnants of networks of solidarity from 2015 and mushrooming of new civil initiatives to help asylum seekers (Tóth-Bernát, 2023) led to the temporary alliance of the two archenemies: NGOs and the government.

⁴⁰ <https://ukrajinci.hu/informacio-az-ukrajnabol-menekuloknek%EF%BF%BC/>

Immigration, of course was a focal point in this conflict. However, given the lack of institutional resources, the government needed these organizations and eventually, they ended up at least partially involved in the network (Tóth-Bernát 2022).

2.3.1 Media narrative on NGOs in the Russian-Ukrainian war

Regarding media narratives⁴¹, we found a close relationship between the narratives of the Russian-Ukrainian war and of the role of Hungarian NGOs in the war. Again, we found that regardless of their political affiliation all media outlets emphasized the importance of providing help to the Ukrainian people. The difference between pro- and non-governmental media is that the former emphasizes the role of organizations close to the government, especially the church related ones. As an interviewee emphasized: there are the so-called charity (government-supported) organizations and the others (in this quote they allegedly mean the Soros-related NGOs). In the pro-government media, they tried to put it sarcastically why the non-government media does not deal with the refugees (as opposed to the 2015 refugee crisis): „Interestingly, the photos of these white Christian people fleeing Ukraine somehow don't reach the threshold of the humanitarian 'civil' organizations.”⁴²

Another often mentioned topic is coordination between civil society and the government, or more precisely, the role of the government in coordinating the provision of help. Unlike the pro-government media, the non-government media outlets are more critical towards the government. For example, an interviewee working for a humanitarian organization said:

When everyone rushes to the scene and wants to help immediately, a kind of chaos is natural, because we almost bump into each other. Then there comes a point when the authorities in charge can see who's on the ground, who can do what, what skills they have, what they can do – and they allocate tasks. ... It takes about five to six days for coordinated action to become effective. By this time, the 'field arrangements' are in place, by which I mean that the informal division of labor is replaced by agreements between the parties.

The articles about NGOs focus more on the forms of providing help. They describe the contacts and the sources of information of the organizations and illustrate how the NGOs organize their work, for example fundraising at the Hungarian border.

The difference between the two media segments mainly is that compared to the pro-governmental news-oriented articles, the non-government narratives were more humanistic and gave detailed information about the NGOs. However, refugees are still almost never present as speakers – but – as an interviewee stressed – still more often than during the 2015 crisis (most likely due to linguistic reasons: because, she assumed, it was easier to find translators this time (from Ukrainian/Russian)). The NGOs are given voice mostly in the non-government articles (for example, there was a long article where the 24.hu journalist interviewed a representative of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta⁴³). The settings were primarily the locations of help. Regarding characters, although these are not

⁴¹ We analyzed twelve articles published in February and March 2022 by Magyar Nemzet, 24.hu, and HVG.hu.

⁴² <https://magyarnemzet.hu/tollhegyen/2022/02/igazi-menekultek>

⁴³ <https://24.hu/kozelet/2022/03/13/orosz-ukran-haboru-menekultek-maltai-szeretetszolgalat-gyori-dani-lajos-interju/>

explicitly stated, the articles suggest that the heroes are the NGOs and the Hungarians who provide help. The victims are the refugees fleeing from Ukraine, the villain is the war. The moral/policy solution is that by supporting the work of Hungarian NGOs, Hungarians can contribute directly to help the refugees. In this context, the pictures again suggest that most refugees are women and children. However, since humanitarian organizations are working at the border, sometimes the Transcarpathian Hungarians are mentioned as a target group of help.

2.3.2 Political narratives on the NGOs in the Russian-Ukrainian war

Similar to the previous two cases, here we also examined the government's and the opposition's parliamentary communication, focusing on the Prime Minister's speeches in the first case and speeches, interpellations and other questions in the second. As to the parliamentary discourse, we did not find any differing political narratives either. Unlike in 2014/2015 the political affiliations of NGOs (e.g., the role of Soros) did not arise at all, and they were not utilized to strengthen the own political goals and narratives of the parties.

For example, Boglárka Illés, an MP of Fidesz said on the summer of 2022 in a parliamentary speech:

In cooperation with aid organisations, we have set up assistance points on the border in Záhony, Beregsurány, Lónya, Barabás and Tiszabec. We also provide medical care for Ukrainian soldiers and children wounded in the war in Hungary. Students from Ukraine can continue their studies in Hungary, a humanitarian transit point is operating in the BOK hall, and the government is providing support to employers who employ Ukrainian citizens who arrive as refugees. Overall, Hungary has already spent more than HUF 40 billion on refugee assistance.

Both the government parties and opposition politicians emphasized to the public that the increase in utility prices and the disruption of peace in neighbouring countries pose the greatest danger to the Hungarian people, so they did not talk about the risks of terrorism and economic migration at all, i.e. arguing that refugees coming from Ukraine are not enemies of the Hungarians, and beyond discussing the necessity of providing help, highlighting their issues does not serve any political interests.

The interviewees argued, however that the role of NGOs during the 2022 crisis was significantly influenced by the split within the civil society, i.e., whether the organization is UN-supported or government-supported.

2.3.3 Policy narratives and the relationship between media and political narratives and between the communicative and coordinative spheres on the role of NGO-s

The main policy narrative was on the issue of coordination between NGO-s, informal groups, municipalities, and the government. The first question was whether the government will re-open asylum facilities, or not to provide accommodation to the refugees. Instead, the government decided to provide a fee for municipalities, which provide accommodation to the people with temporary protection. Since, this time there is an agreement of most of the actors, on helping, the narrative is close to the **organizational/technological** narrative.

One of the main consultative organizations was the Caritative Council (established in 2010, containing the Hungarian Malta Charity, Catholic Caritas, Hungarian Reformist Charity, Oecumenic Charity, Baptist. Charity and the Hungarian Red Cross). These large, church related humanitarian organizations became the hubs of the government-related coordination.

However, in the first months, the main issue was whether the government should take a more active role or not: while pro-government actors did not raise the issue or pointed out how fast the government reacted with new legislation, non-governmental actors raised questions, of how unprepared the government was in the beginning. Therefore, the narrative style is neither clearly lay nor technocratic, but due to the complete absence of the policy-making narratives our results lean more towards the lay style.

Due to the general consensus about providing assistance to refugees fleeing from the war, the organizations with different political affiliations acted rather similarly: presented technical information (how to contact the organization), and the details how to provide aid. Especially in the non-government media the narratives actively helped both the refugees and the helpers to find each other, for example giving the addresses and opening hours of the NGOs, where and when refugees can get help and citizens can offer their help for Ukrainian refugees.

3. Conclusion

In order to identify the main narratives of migration and describing the structure into which the processes of producing and circulating them characterizes the contemporary Hungarian communicative and political segments, first we defined the type of political system of Hungary. The next step was demonstrating the production and circulation of migration related narratives since 2015 to prove that there is a rather sophisticated propaganda organization and technology which makes sure that these processes serve the operation of the political system.

3.1 Hungary as an informational autocracy (IA) and the moral panic button (MPB) as its basic institution

To analyze the production and circulation of narratives among the communicative and political spheres, let alone in policymaking, is difficult in the Hungarian context since mostly only those information is available for discussion and deliberation in the media and the Parliament which the MPB propaganda machinery decides that is useful. In terms of accessibility, the Hungarian context can be described as a closed political opportunity structure (della Porta, 2013), which from our point of view means that the decision-making processes are difficult to access from outside of the MPB core. Both the governing political and media actors are strictly disciplined and monitored, and willingly follow the instructions received from the centralized decision and narrative- making system.

This context is lucidly demonstrated by Csanádi (2022) when she illustrated the backsliding from democracy to a centralized authoritarian system exploring more than 700

governmental decisions and events between 2010 and 2021. Her analysis shows the dynamic of the expansion,

“... first in the political subfield, then stretching out toward and occupying institutions of checks and balances, and further advancing to local and grassroots autonomies and the economic subsphere... how diffused political capture serves as channels of institutionalized corruption through politically selective (re)distribution, and uncontrolled accumulation of those most integrated into these channels.” (Csanádi et al., 2022, p. 13)

Our exercise demonstrates the result of this process in the course of the production and circulation of migration-related narratives. We argue that the creation and fine tuning of MPB is a crucial aspect of building the Hungarian version of an authoritarian regime. More precisely, we stress that the capture of entire communication field is an inherent element of the de-democratization process. This is why in the introduction of the Hungarian case study we emphasized the relevance of recognizing that Hungary is an informational autocracy which is using the moral panic button as its basic governance technology. We also stress that while several techniques of MPB exist in other countries as well, the unique mix of them and their high-inertia existence makes Hungary an outlier in the comparative analysis.

To illustrate why we see MPB as a crucial element of creating and maintaining informational autocracy, we quote the authors of the original IA model⁴⁴:

... to a world of open borders, international media, and knowledge-based economies. In the Peru of Alberto Fujimori, the Hungary of Viktor Orban, and the Russia of Vladimir Putin, illiberal leaders have managed to remove almost all constraints on their power while using relatively little repression and pretending to be democratic.... their secret lies in the control of information. Instead of isolating their countries, imposing ideologies, or terrorizing citizens, such leaders achieve many of the same ends by manipulating public opinion. With the help of censored or co-opted media, they persuade citizens that they are competent and benevolent; their legitimacy rests on popularity rather than fear. ... Instead of trying to reprogram people's thinking with a comprehensive ideology, they aim only to improve evaluations of their leadership. (Guriev-Treisman, 2020 p.1)

We modified the original IA model since our case study proves that the either/or approach of competency/professionalism versus ideology-based governance, is wrong. The Hungarian version of IA, while emphasizing the competence of the government, uses various ideological narratives widely and very intensively to create and maintain moral panic as the basis of its legitimacy. This extension of the original concept of informational autocracy is crucial for our approach since it emphasizes the role of propaganda as the key element of governance, i.e. the role of MPB as the source of dominating the informational aspects of the autocratic rule. Serving the IA MPB operates with increasing budget and organizational capacity since 2015. The narratives it produces and circulates are

⁴⁴ According to the original concept (Guriev-Treisman, 2020), there are four main characteristics of informational autocracy: (1) the low application of violence against political opponents, (2) they mimic democracy, (3) they have more public support among the lower classes and the less-educated compared to the elites, and (4) that it emphasizes competency over ideology.

constructed from a mix of standard frames and scapegoats which – if necessary - are “refreshed” and tailored to the need of new elements of the narratives while using various ideologies (described in Chapter 1.4) as well as stressing the competency of government and the charismatic features of Orbán.

3.2 Production and circulation of migration related narratives in an IA/MPB system

Since both the media and the Parliament is under the hegemonic rule of the government, the default situation is that MPB provides identical narratives for both, i.e., there is a top-down production of narratives centrally coordinated in the IA system, consequently, there are no independent production of narratives in the media and in the Parliament and hardly any horizontal circulation of them.

Szabó-Panyi (2022) illustrated this mechanism as follows: hours after the outbreak of the war the Chief of Staff of the PM’s Office convened a meeting for the leaders of MPB-affiliated government departments and think tanks and summarized the communication strategy of the government (official position, main messages, etc.). The narratives were already ready (developed on the basis of non-public pro-government research): peace, avoiding participation in the war and shipment of weapons. In the beginning the terms they used were „Ukrainian-Russian conflict” or the official Russian official frame „special military operation”. Orbán in the afternoon repeated these narratives for the public and (using sentences from the then-opposition leader’s earlier speeches) stressed that the opposition intends to send weapons to Ukraine. In late March (i.e., a fortnight before the election) MPB headquarter added Zelenskij to the standard list of scapegoats (Soros, EU and the opposition) and the new narrative was that they endanger the supply of energy of Hungary and only Fidesz (if reelected) can defend the nation against this threat. After winning the election Orbán said: „Now we had to fight against the biggest force ever (...) All the money and organizations of the Soros empire, the international mainstream media and in the end even the Ukrainian president. We have never had so many opponents at once.”

According to an interviewee, MPB regularly investigates the concerns/fears/expectations of its potential voters, and the government makes the decisions⁴⁵ without any deliberation in the Parliament and the results are communicated to and by the media and put into practice by policymaking. In other words, the media and the Parliament do not have much influence over the government’s policy making decisions, they only channel the lay narratives the government communicates to explain and legitimize the decisions it previously has made.

The framing of the narratives is also determined by MPB experts on the top (operating within a network of think tanks, spin doctors, journalists, and politicians), therefore the priming and framing terminology is similar in the communicative and political spheres.

⁴⁵ As an MPB actor summarized it: “We recognized that migration is a bottom-up issue, because it is too close to people emotionally. To say ‘don’t be afraid [of migrants]’ wouldn’t work...”

There are no distinct policy narratives, i.e., either all policy actions are carried out without any policy discourse⁴⁶ or if there is any, it is identical to the lay narratives in the media and politics. An interviewee even argued that there is no such thing as a consistent migration policy since the different forms and aspects of immigration belong to different authorities with little or no horizontal coordination among them. More importantly, the government is able to tailor flexibly the production of migration narratives (and fit the potentially most effectively frames into it) to its short term (even often ad hoc) economic and political interest. In such cases the actual migration processes are less relevant than the political profit IA can earn by applying solely ideology driven policies.

The non-governmental narratives can deviate from the MPB dominated discourse, but their voice is much too weak to create competing narratives except within their echo chambers.

3.3 The characteristics of the production/circulation of migration related narratives since 2015

In 2015 MPB was only in the making, only in 2016/2017 has turned it into full force with the combination of migration threat with the two anti-Soros conspiracy theory-based push polls and the first anti-EU campaigns (Annex 3). The entire media was dominated by the narratives of Fidesz such as “we are against the migration strategies of the EU”, the government’s obligation is to defend the Hungarian people, the fight against illegal migration is inevitable, and the risk of terrorism is high. These narratives were constructed by MPB think tanks and used the full variety of fearmongering frames.

The Parliament role was restricted to legitimize the migration policy of the government and the related narratives were provided for them from MPB headquarters, and the opposition had no influence on the content of the decrees (let alone the laws), and did not develop their own narrative, they only communicate their rejection of what the government says.⁴⁷

Our results coincide with our previous findings of the narratives of the relocation quota in the parliamentary debates and in the media (Bognár et al, 2022): the governmental narrative dominated the public discourse, alternative narratives and frames were audible only in ‘echo chambers’. They identified the following frames: ‘power struggle’, ‘humanitarian/solidarity’, ‘economy’, ‘organizational/technical’, and ‘threat: terrorism/security’. The most prominent frame by far was the power struggle where the quota debate was embedded into the context of European politics on the one hand, and the question of sovereignty on the other. Some of the articles using the ‘power struggle’ frame construct the events as a straightforward bargaining process; others play the blame game and indulge in finger pointing. The most notable interpretation of the quota debate is that of national sovereignty.

Relocation quota in the Parliament received much less attention than it had in the media. The MPs identified the target population usually as ‘immigrants’, and framed the ‘refugee crisis’ often as ‘invasion’ or ‘flood’. Other negative terms in relation to the quota discourse

⁴⁶ An interviewee characterized migration policy as a “trial and error” type of unorganized system where ideas (mostly top-down) could originate from any government authorities.

⁴⁷ One of the interviewees argued that it can be related to the fact that the Hungarian media is a laggard in foreign policy, therefore they could not give a proper geopolitical context to the 2015 events.

were 'invitation letter' (referring to Merkel's initial role in the process), and „population replacement” referring to historical events, when the population was forcibly resettled on the basis of ethnicity.

In 2022 the media, regardless of their political status, contained mostly lay narratives expressing the necessity of helping those coming from Ukraine. In 2022 opposing what the government says was very limited for the opposition because – as one of the interviewees explained – the government supported the refugees and talked about integration, modified laws quickly etc. “You think of something what should be done [as a helper] and tomorrow it is already a government resolution. That is how the spring passed,” he said.

As in the case of the pro-government media, parliamentary speeches of the members of the government served only as a forum of MPB, i.e., more or less monotonously repeating MPB slogans. Orbán usually avoids giving parliamentary speeches; the government messages were highlighted mostly by ministers and state secretaries. Orbán has a regular morning speech every Friday morning, and a few occasions to target larger audiences⁴⁸. These speeches are rare, and they are supposed to strengthen Orbán' aura as a charismatic leader⁴⁹.

The main migration related narrative production and circulation in 2022 was that these migrants are „real” refugees. This narrative is shared by all political actors. The victims were indisputably the Ukrainian people, who had to escape the war, the heroes were the Hungarians and the Hungarian government for helping them. The differences between pro- and non-government narratives were related in regard with the war itself (who and why started it) and the relative weight of government versus the people and the NGOs helping the refugees.

The main difference between the narratives of the migration process in 2015 and 2022 can be partly explained by the differences between the main characteristics of the migrants in 2015 and 2022 (see Table 1).

Compared to the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022, the narratives of the 2015 refugee crisis were much more diverse. Pro-government actors talked about an immigration crisis since in the government's narrative they were not refugees but illegal migrants.

The other significant difference between 2015 and 2022 is the strength of IA and MPB as a significant contributor to its power. During the seven years MPB developed a sophisticated institutional background, and a technology: First, IA compared to 2015 has a much more hegemonistic media in 2022, the role of various agencies is clearer. The methodology of choosing a topic for MPB and the applied tools (as national consultation, various forms of advertisements, use of language, etc.) became more automatic. Also, handling the war in Ukraine from a political communication view proved, that the MPB is applicable to immediate challenges as well. Consequently, MPB nowadays is in a position to increase

⁴⁸ CPAC for the international and Tusnádfürdő (Transylvania, Romania) and the annual “The State of the Nation”-like speeches for national (i.e. for all Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin) audience.

⁴⁹ The more so since Orbán never gives interviews for the non-governmental media outlets and even for pro-government media only very rarely.

the visibility of the differences (and minimize the similarities⁵⁰) between “proper” and “improper” migrants, to maximize the impact of “refugee hypocrisy” (Pepinsky et al, 2022) as part of its migration discourse.

Even though the narratives were more diverse in 2015 than in 2022, the basic ideology upon which the narratives are built has not changed between 2015 and 2022. The main purpose of the MPB narratives is to evoke the fear of the “People”, from existential threats and provide enemy images.

For example, an Orbán speech in July 2022 used the standard actors of the MPB narratives: Soros, EU, migration and gender but framed it as a humble petition of an underdog:

“There is less talk about migration now, but believe me, nothing has changed. Brussels, with its Soros army, simply wants to force immigrants on us. Our position here (gender E.S) is simple, we are asking for tolerance, we don't want to tell them how to live, we just want them to accept that in our country the father is a man, the mother is a woman, and our children should be left alone, and that they should make George Soros' army to accept this”.⁵¹

This narrative is easily connected to other narratives of threats and enemies. In May 2023 at the annual CPAC meeting in Budapest Orbán framed the war somewhat differently: proudly declaring to be the spearhead of the conservative attack against their archenemies such as the left and the liberals, and their worldwide conspiracy under the disguise of globalization but who in fact only want to destroy nations, freedom and the basic morals of conservatism. The narrative contains the same scapegoats (Soros, Brussels, migrants, leftist liberals, LGBTQ ideology and its representatives, NGOs etc.) but the frame is different: it uses a virus analogy and claims that Hungary is an incubator for testing the serum against the cosmopolitan/globalist attack on “normality”:

... Uncle Georgie announced his resettlement program. He mobilized his NGO army and set about implementing his grand plan. They flooded the Balkans with illegal migrants and built a people-smuggling route leading into the heart of Europe. But then they came up against Hungary. We gave the command to halt, we took up the gauntlet and we defended ourselves: we built a fence, and we defended our country. After a while I realized that it is not enough to defend our borders, it is not enough to fight in physical self-defense, but we can only defend our country if we also engage in intellectual and ideological battles. We found ourselves in the middle of an intellectual-ideological battlefield because migration is an important part of the liberal progressives' philosophy. We had no choice but to call out the ideology of the open society, and with it the entire empire of George Soros.

Today, as the leader of an incubator program, I am reporting to you that we are all under attack—in Europe as well as in America. I must also report to you that the attack is not economic in nature: we are dealing with a biological weapon. A virus

⁵⁰ Such as both flows were unexpected and large, and in both cases the overwhelming proportion of the refugees only wanted to cross Hungary as quickly as possible since they often had networks in different European countries.

⁵¹ <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-xxxi-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban/>

attack has been launched against us. The virus was developed in progressive liberal laboratories. This virus is attacking the most vulnerable point in the Western world: the nation. ... Today we can see that this virus has not simply escaped: it has been bred, it is being propagated and spread all over the world. Migration, gender, and woke: these are all just variants—variants of the same virus. ... The good news for everyone is that we need look no further for a serum for the progressive virus: it is here, in Hungary. ... All that is needed, before the election, is to write in huge, prominent letters on your flag: “No migration! No gender! No war!”⁵²

Although these excerpts illustrate the continuity in the meta-narrative, pro- and the non-governmental interviewees view very differently whether the narratives have changed or not. The official pro-governmental approach refers to the pro-refugee behavior of the government in 2022 as the proof of that the government has never acted against migration in a racist way but followed its principle that Hungary accepts refugees only when Hungary is the first safe country for them and since Hungary considers Serbia a safe country, this did not apply for the refugee coming in 2015. A non-governmental interviewee illustrated lucidly the abuse of a historical narrative of Hungary (defending Europe as the “last bastion” from the Osman Empire): whereas in 2015 Hungary was “the last bastion of Europe defending Christianity”, in 2022 it was “the last bastion of peace”.

3.4 Is Hungary an outlier or only an extreme case on a continuum?

The short excerpts in of the four Orbán speech we analyzed earlier prove that our modification of the IA model was correct, i.e., competency and ideology are not either/or alternatives but they may create synergies to convince the people to accept the rule of Fidesz. The excerpts also show the ability of MPB to add (and not replace) to the original IA theory all forms of ideologies (Enyedi 2023) identified as part of the MPB propaganda.

To put the Hungarian version of IA (and the role of MPB in it) into a comparative perspective we should emphasize that while none of the techniques used in the construction and operation of the Hungarian IA were invented by Hungarian experts, as a compact experiment was developed and fine-tuned in Hungary – just as Orbán claimed in his 2023 CPAC speech Hungary is the anti-virus laboratory of the conservative world.

Our hypothesis is that the result of the conservative experiment in Hungary since 2010 (and especially since the introduction of MPB in 2015/6) is that Hungary is not a democracy anymore. This assumption is confirmed by the trend of the evaluation of Hungary and especially the situation of the Hungarian media in the past years by professional international organizations.⁵³

⁵² <https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-opening-of-the-cpac-hungary-conference/>

⁵³ For example: V-dem Report in 2023 (https://v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf) , Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2023 (https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf), Freedom House Report, 2023 (https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/NIT_2023_Digital.pdf)

Our conclusion, however, is biased by two significant shortcomings of the comparative analysis. First, a major limitation of our analysis is „methodological nationalism”, i.e., we analyzed the production and circulation of migration related narratives and their application as part of the IA sensitive MPB discourse as if it was a Hungarian story. In other words, we pretended that the processes we identified in our analysis started in Hungary and do not have any impact on other countries either. But both these assumptions are false. This is obviously the case with the „Conservatives of the World Unite!” intention of CPAC so lucidly illustrated by Orbán speeches. Secondly, there are ample examples of the various forms of „borderless” production and circulation of narratives such as fake news, conspiracy theories, etc. and ignoring their impact on the production and circulation of the migration related narratives severely bias our understanding the role of these worldwide processes and organizations (from large and state-financed troll armies, to the international market for spin doctors and exporting marketable fake news-production techniques to simply innocent importation of propaganda⁵⁴ etc.) on the national cases.

⁵⁴ Just to illustrate it with a war-related example: Hungarian news portals were about 8-14 percent more likely to use terms to describe the Russian aggression in the articles that could be used to blunt or obfuscate what in fact was happening (e.g. "Ukrainian situation", "Ukrainian events") than BBC news. (Tóth-Varga, 2022),

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Annex 1: Short biographies of the experts⁵⁵

Kováts, András

Since 1995 works as a researcher at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the National Research network focusing on refugee and migration issues. He is also the director of Menedék – Association for Helping Migrants, member of the board of PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and of the editorial board of the European Website on Integration (EWSI). Since 2016 teaches refugee and migration courses at the Corvinus University and at the ELTE Ethnic and Minority Studies and holds training courses for various state authorities and civil associations on the field of integration and refugee policy.

Marsai, Viktor

Viktor Marsai, PhD, received his degree from ELTE in history and aesthetics, from the National Defense University in security and defense policy. He wrote his dissertation about the Somali state building efforts and obtained his PhD in 2014. In 2010-2011 he worked for the Hungarian Ministry of Defense. Since 2012 Marsai has been working for the National University of Public Service as assistant professor. In 2017 he became the leader of “Africa in the globalized world” Ludovika Research Group in the NUPS. In 2019 he became the research director of the Institute for Migration Research. His main research areas focus on the migration trends of the African continent and the security aspects of migration.

Orbán, Balázs

He graduated from and completed his PhD at the ELTE Faculty of Law and Political Science. In 2014, he graduated from the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University with a degree as a codifier. During his university years, he worked as a fellow at the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Justice and Public Policy of the Office of the Parliament. He started his career in 2009 at the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement and in 2013 he joined Századvég think tank as a Research Director responsible for public law and public policy research. From 2015 to 2018, he was Director General of the Migration Research Institute, founded by the Századvég Foundation and Mathias Corvinus Collegium, and Associate Lecturer at Budapest Metropolitan University. Since 2016 he was a lecturer at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium and in 2020 he became Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Collegium. Since 2021, he has been Political Director of the Prime Minister.

Polyák, Gábor

He graduated from the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs. He holds a Master's degree in Legal Informatics in the field of Information Technology Law from the University of Vienna. He obtained his doctoral degree from and habilitated at the University of Pécs. Since January 2021, he has been Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Communication at ELTE. From 2014 to 2016, he

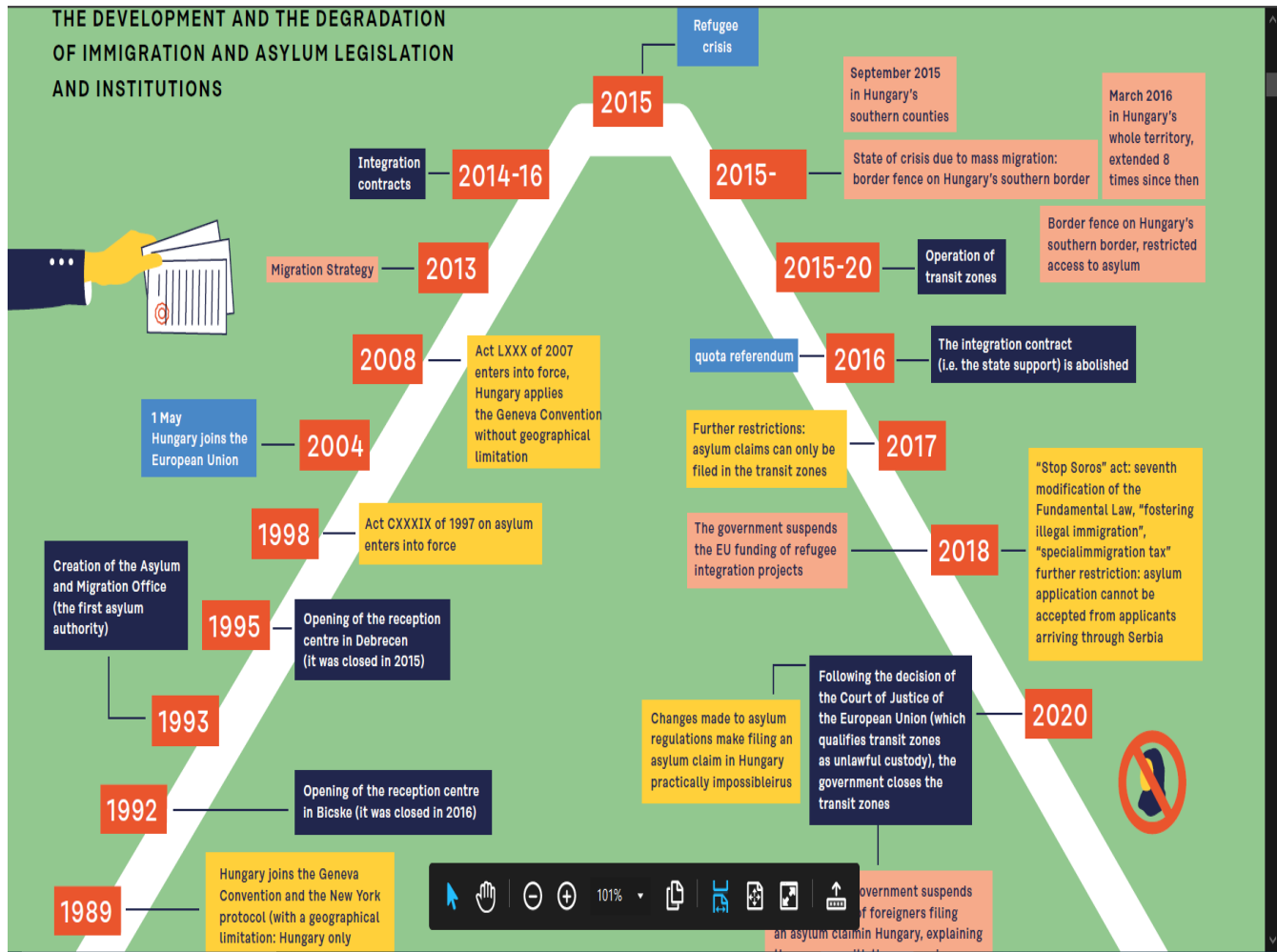
⁵⁵ In alphabetical order and focusing only those elements of the CV which are closely related to the case study.

worked as a researcher at the Institute für Informations-, Telekommunikations und Medienrecht at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster. He is the founder and until 2015 editor-in-chief of the professional journal Infocommunication and Law and is currently editor-in-chief. Editor of the human rights journal Fundamentum. He is the co-founder and director of Mertek Media Monitor media watchdog.

Urbán, Ágnes

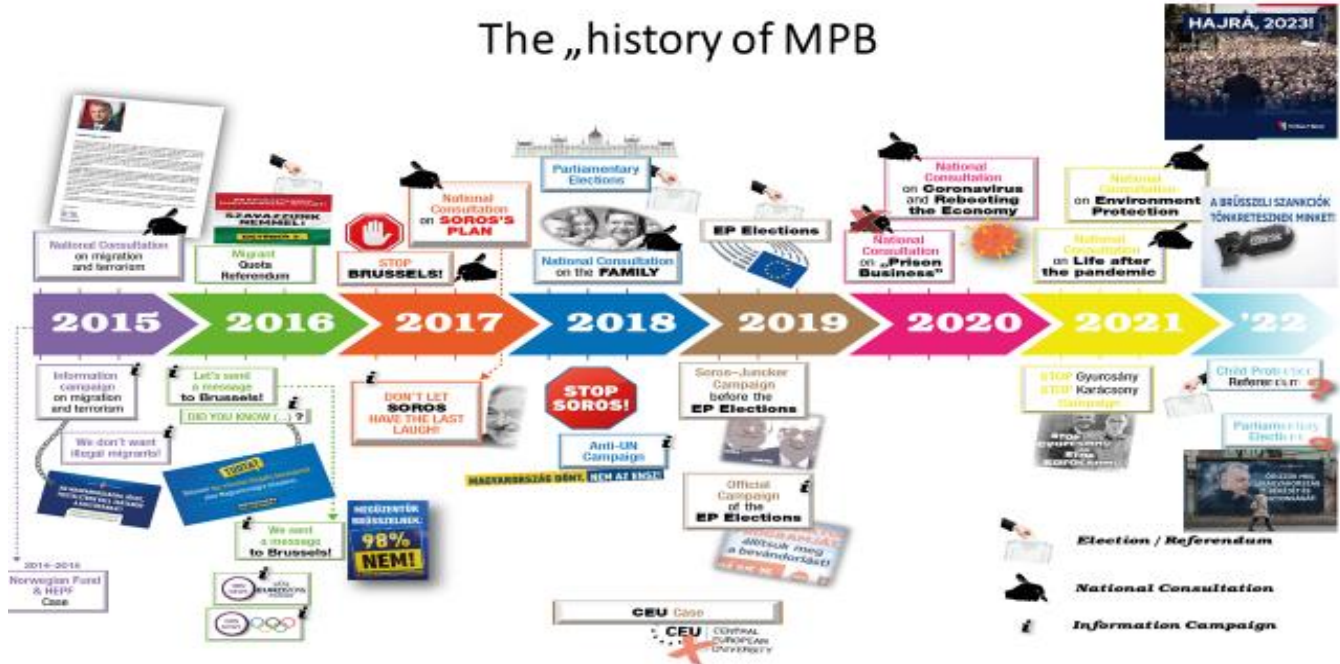
Associate professor and chair of the Infocommunications Department at the Corvinus University of Budapest. She received her master's degree in 1998 and followed up with a PhD degree in 2006 at Corvinus University. She is an instructor of the subjects Media Economics; Media Systems and Media Policies; and Media and Audience Research. She is also co-founder of Mertek Media Monitor media watchdog organization. Urbán's main research areas are changes in media business models, trends in media consumption patterns, the evolution of the Hungarian media market and the analysis of policy issues concerning media markets. She was involved in several European research programs and is the author of some 100 Hungarian and English-language international publications in the fields of media and infocommunications.

Annex 2: The milestones of the history of immigration and asylum legalization in Hungary between 1989 and 2020



Kováts András Foreword (2022) in: Valahol otthon lenni eds. Kováts András és Soltész Béla Menedék, Budapest https://tudastar.menedek.hu/sites/default/files/valahol_otthon_lenni.pdf

Annex 3: The “history” of MPB (revised version of Gerő-Sik, 2020)⁵⁶



Source: Revised version of Gerő Márton – Endre Sik (2020) *The Moral Panic Button in Europe and the Refugee Response* eds. Elzbieta M. Godziak, Izabella Main, Brigitte Suter, Routledge pp. 39-58. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429279317/chapters/10.4324/9780429279317-4>

⁵⁶ The two pressings of MPB in 2022 were a national consultation on the impact of war related EU sanction on Hungary (above the line) and the Parliamentary election (below the line).

BRIDGES: Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives is a project funded by the EU H2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and implemented by a consortium of 12 institutions from all over Europe. The project aims to understand the causes and consequences of migration narratives in a context of increasing politicisation and polarisation around these issues by focusing on six European countries: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. To do so, BRIDGES adopts an interdisciplinary and co-productive approach and is implemented by a diverse consortium formed by universities, think tanks and research centres, cultural associations, and civil society organisations.

The BRIDGES Working Papers are a series of academic publications presenting the research results of the project in a structured and rigorous way. They can either focus on particular case studies covered by the project or adopt a comparative perspective.

How to cite this Working Paper:

Gerő, Márton, Zsanett Pokornyi, Endre Sik, and Ráchel Surányi. 2023. "The impact of narratives on policy-making at the national level. The case of Hungary" *BRIDGES Working Papers* 22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10489546>

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10489546>

ISSN: 2696-8886

Editorial Coordination: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

This publication has been funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101004564. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or of the participants of the research. The European Commission and the Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.