

Consolidation or Second Revolution? The Emergence of the New Right in Hungary

5

ANDRÁS BOZÓKI

10

15

20

25

The political turn of 1998 in post-transition Hungary marked the beginning of a new era: the rise of the New Right. Fidesz, which used to be a liberal party during the regime change of 1989, later changed its political stance. Under the presidency of Viktor Orbán, Fidesz became a centre-right party by adopting a mixed ideology that contained contradictory elements. The reason for Fidesz's electoral success in 1998 was that it responded to the social need for order and democratic consolidation after the turbulent years of political and economic transformation. However, the years when Fidesz governed Hungary (1998–2002) could be characterized by both conservative consolidation and populist mass mobilization. Voters could not fully understand why the rhetoric of 'second revolution' would lead to the consolidation of democracy. This sort of contradictory agenda-setting from above alienated the majority of voters in the 2002 elections so Fidesz was replaced by the returning MSZP–SZDSZ left-liberal coalition government. Despite two electoral losses (2002 and 2006), Fidesz created a second political culture, an alternative polity that established itself as the Hungarian version of the New Right, a mixture of populism, conservatism, and plebeian, redistributionist, economic nationalism. The emergence of the Hungarian New Right reinterpreted social conflicts, and sharpened political division in the society.

30

Introduction: Symbolic or Materialistic Politics?

35

40

In established democracies relatively few people doubt – unlike opinion between the two World Wars – that democracy is the best possible form of society; in other words, the least bad. Although those in power tend to praise democracy, in their actions they devalue it: in the name of majority rule they ignore the mechanism of balance and counterbalance in their decision-making. Democracy is in danger not from the outside (from anti-democratic groups, mostly on the periphery) but from the inside: those in power corrupt and devalue its principles. The existence of democracy is in

András Bozóki is Professor of Political Science at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.

Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, Vol.24, No.2, June 2008, pp.191–231

ISSN 1352-3279 print/1743-9116 online

DOI: 10.1080/13523270802003046 © 2008 Taylor & Francis

no danger – it could not be ‘sold’ internationally – but its rules are not treated with sufficient respect. This could lead to loss of faith in its consolidation and later possibly to the loss of all illusions about democratic politics. Hungary has come a long way to reach consolidated democracy and has joined the European Union. It has experienced all those problems characteristic of successful countries¹ that belong to the latest ‘wave’ of democratization. This article explores the tension that had arisen in Hungary during the consolidation of democracy, with special attention to the New Right that ruled the country between 1998 and 2002.

It is customary to distinguish between periods of constitutional politics and normal politics.² When the over-politicized, feverish political life of the aftermath of the transition becomes normal or ‘boring’ again, this can be viewed as the clearest signal that democracy is consolidating itself. A similar process began in Hungary in 1994 when the socialists came into power. The technicians of politics slowly replaced the intellectual elite of the transition period. The intelligentsia gradually disappeared from the party elite. Their break with the political class did not necessarily mean the liberation of the way they thought about politics. It did not result in their independence. The restructuring of the political class, its becoming professional, and the division of the intelligentsia did not go hand-in-hand with the widening of political discourse. On the contrary, at the beginning of the 1990s political life was narrowed as a large part of society turned away from politics and handed over the solution of political problems to paid experts. The gap widened between the civil sphere and the political elite. This in fact meant the return of the normalcy that characterized the time after the transition, but simultaneously it resulted in voters having less influence over politics, and elected politicians were less made to account for their actions.

The consequence of the narrowing down of political life was that the consolidation of democracy, for many observers, had a feel of ‘restoration’ to it.³ The system changed but the faces that reappeared in the middle of the 1990s were familiar. The attitudes, the behaviour, the relationship with the public and the conflict management practices of these political figures evoked a feeling of *déjà vu*. This nostalgia for the time after the ‘revolution’ was not feeding on a return of the old system: there was no question that it could ever come back. What returned was a ‘plundering’ politics, based on groups of people linked together by a common cause, on the network that connected people together, and on a materialistic politics focused on questions of distribution. The nature of the transition upgraded the role this ‘network capital’ played in the formation of political groups,⁴ which was viewed by some analysts as a hotbed of corruption, besides leading to the economic and political strengthening of the most organized group, linking people with a common interest together – the former nomenklatura. Many have explained it in a

social sense: there may have existed a ‘Faustian bargain’ between the new regime and the technocratic groups of the nomenklatura. The essence of the bargain was that in return for the acceptance of political reforms the former elite was given a substantial share in the profit from privatization.⁵ But there were major differences among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, from Czechoslovakia to Russia. The further the country is from Russia the less the former nomenklatura could directly control privatization. When the socialists returned in Hungary in 1994, this coincided with the end of a decade of symbolic politics. Until 1985, politics was materialistic and depoliticizing, and was connected to the name of the communist leader János Kádár.⁶ The leaders of the reformed Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*, MSZP) of Gyula Horn were socialized in this political environment. In the Kádár regime only lobbyists inside the party were able to form affective, informal interest groups, the rest had to choose either individually achieving their goals or remaining passive. These tensions were resolved by 1985–86, when those opposition or semi-opposition groups became more open and began to seek allies. At that time, reformers within the party also opened up: the Patriotic People’s Front (*Hazafias Népfront*, HNF), one of the ‘transmission belts’ of the communist party, became a channel for more open, democratizing politics. Formerly strong, exclusive, close and almost ‘tribal’ ties were slowly replaced by network-like, inclusive and people’s front-type ties. In the 1970s, the American psychologist Mark Granovetter advanced his influential network theory, based on ‘weak links’.⁷ According to this theory, if it were not for weak links, societies would become fragmented and incoherent, and new ideas could spread only slowly. Each change involving a great number of social actors is naturally accompanied by the loosening of strong ties and opening up in order to widen social communication and find alliances. In order to achieve these, ideas, symbols and a common, accepted language are needed. Such a common denominator – replacing the ‘reformism’ and ‘democratism’ of the party jargon, which was at times found in idealized phrases⁸ – was in the second half of the 1980s the new language: radical reform, human rights, civil society, democracy, the language of market economy and the strategy based on it.

The first part of symbolic politics, the ‘revolutionary’ period was between 1985 and 1990. The important phases of this value oriented, symbolic politics involved programmes urging society to open up and forge a new ‘mutual agreement’ by ‘common consent’; speeches at opposition rallies; devising policies in reform circles; the message of the funeral of Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the 1956 revolution; and the round-table type of constitution making. This new language of politics was operating with symbols, but beyond that it became important to represent these messages in symbolic

and effective ways in the mass media: ‘The symbolic center of the new eastern European democracies became the over-politicized and militant television’.⁹ In this multi-party system, intellectual political thinking was crystallized in those parties that were in opposition in the 1980s, which became the parties that changed the regime.

Symbolic politics did not disappear; it only changed function. The symbolism of the change of regime was replaced by a ‘system-creating’, institution-establishing symbolism. Those were times when the basic questions of democracy, the relationship with historical tradition and the European institutional system were the necessary topics of debate. Constitutional politics is a politics of identity, in which questions of self-identification cannot be avoided. The participants in debates and political battles do not belong to pragmatic and changeable coalitions, but to historically determined ‘natural’ alliance of world-views. ‘Natural allies’ always see a ‘natural enemy’ in their political adversaries. However, those battles become ‘tribalized’ in a fetishist way and do not follow the rule of consensus but the logic of ‘*No Pasaran!*’ (They shall not pass!), whereby they must decide between two sides – and only between two – and where the will of one party prevails. This break preserved the force of the weak ties. The major dividing line could not have been crossed politically, but within the groups, loose and broad fronts and alliances were formed. The ideological catchwords of these fronts were, on the one hand, the right-wing phrases of the Christian–national–conservative political and cultural tradition, and, on the other hand, the phrases of the anti-fascist left, and of the Europeanists who questioned reaching back into the national past. The differences between the coalitions, following different scripts of constructing a state, overshadowed the differences between the former changers of the regime and the value system of the communist elite.¹⁰ What might have seemed, to some Western analysts,¹¹ to be the natural way for party pluralism to come into existence was in fact an extensive battle of the symbolic politics of the regime changers who grouped themselves into different fronts.

After some time voters tired of the symbolic politics. Since the change of regime itself became unpopular, it is no surprise that the public had enough of the in-fighting in the aftermath of the change and the commotion of state building. And since they did not find a reliably anti-ideological party on the political market, in 1994 they brought back those who had tried to pursue a pragmatic policy in the Kádár era. They voted for those political technicians who were – according to the tone-setting László Békesi, their finance minister – ‘not serving ideals, but who wanted to govern’,¹² and who viewed government as a ‘professional’ task rather than a political one.¹³ For them authority was not about mission or service, but something good in itself, and they described politics in managerial and bureaucratic terms. Acting this way, the voters – paradoxically – promoted consolidation.

Politics based on material factors and interest groups appeared in 1994, but its official birth was on 12 March 1995, the day the Bokros package was introduced by Lajos Bokros, the finance minister, who was committed to escaping from macroeconomic depression. This was the moment when it became clear that, in a country that is slowly sinking into poverty and has no resources, the major issues of politics are determined by the ‘down to earth’ conflicts over the distribution of resources.¹⁴ In such a situation, not only for politicians but also for intellectuals and experts, belonging to an interest group became a matter of existence. In Hungary, amid the hardships of economic transition the demands of the ‘fight for life’ created on the periphery of politics closed interest cartels based on ‘strong ties’, instead of coalitions based on principles. This consolidation-like transition from symbolic to materialistic politics went together with the replacement of the ‘regime-changing’ strategy of ‘weak ties’ with the predatory, lobbyist strategy of ‘strong ties’.

Symbolic – ideological and material – anti-ideological cyclical periods existed in the former regime as well; moreover, as we have seen above, these cycles span entire regimes. When the Hungarian Socialist Party came into power again in 1994, together with its junior coalition partner, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), it coincided with the change from constitutional politics to normal politics, and with a re-stabilization that follows every major political change, as well as with a change of cycles from symbolic to materialistic. For these reasons, the characteristics of the consolidation after the revolution in the collective memory – which processes the present and the recent past – are mixed with the characteristics of the perception of returning to a familiar situation.

To reach a state of economic and international competitiveness, state deregulation and privatization were accelerated, resulting in a weak state. In contrast, from the mid-1990s the gradually advancing right was more and more influential in expressing the idea of a state committed to civil growth, participation of citizens and the public good. It resulted in Viktor Orbán’s accession to power in 1998, as leader of Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Party (*Fidesz–Magyar Polgári Párt*, Fidesz–MPP).

The Characteristics of ‘Civic Radicalism’

‘Do not settle for a draw instead of a win!’, advised Viktor Orbán the members of his faction in the autumn of 1997, in one of the hot debates on the initiation of a plebiscite on land ownership. In a radical campaign Fidesz–MPP and its allies collected 300,000 signatures in favour of a plebiscite, to decide whether foreigners could acquire land in Hungary. Because of the number of signatures, a referendum should have been held on the matter.¹⁵ However, the MSZP–SZDSZ government ignored the will of the signatories, and the

Fidesz–MPP government subsequently did the same, referring to the signatures until it managed to remove the coalition. Then, when they should have taken the responsibility for the incalculable outcome of the referendum, they disregarded their own civil initiative. After the election victory references
 205 to former administrative faults seemed no longer to have relevance, because the will of the citizens had been realized.

‘Do not surrender a win for a draw!’, suggested Viktor Orbán as prime ministerial candidate again in May 1998, between two election rounds, to rural voters. He asked them to vote for Fidesz–MPP, in order to have a
 210 ‘purely civic’ government and to avoid an uncomfortable coalition with others. However, they did not succeed: the new government turned out to be a coalition of Fidesz–MPP, the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) and the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). The new government started its rule with determination: it brought the social insurance municipalities
 215 into government ownership and dismissed the corrupt PostaBank and Saving Corporation leadership. Those categories of politics alluding to social classes, and coloured by generational elements, were believed to be gone, yet they reappeared in the Hungarian political discourse.¹⁶ In the months following the 1998 change of government, it seemed that the old
 220 type of working class, the unmarketable civil servant strata, and the weakening forces of the comprador intelligentsia of Budapest were facing a strengthening new bourgeoisie and a strengthening country peasantry that wanted to join the bourgeoisie. This way of thinking suggested that the former groups would soon end up on the rubbish heap of history, and would leave their places to
 225 the healthy, dynamic and young bourgeois forces of the future. According to this logic, a compromise or a tie is not possible between the strengthening and the declining tendencies stylized into elitist groups. If there is nothing to choose between those who were ‘arranging for accommodation’ of the past and the ‘order-makers’ of the future, then allow majority democracy and
 230 ‘frontal assault’ to decide. The *ars poetica* of the new government that came to power in 1998 – civic in its aims, radical in its mentality – was that democratic politics is a win or lose game: they believed that only victory matters, and the political strategy leading up to it is irrelevant.

235 **State-Centred Politics and Elite Change**

By the time Fidesz–MPP came to power in 1998, the privatization process was close to completion, state property was largely distributed, and the new
 240 government was left with a relatively weak state. It was clear that the consolidation of democracy could not be permanent if the citizens did not trust the quality of democracy. The image of the 1980s, that of civil society that was opposing the dictatorship in the manner of a movement, had faded.

However, the classic liberal rhetoric of ‘weak state and strong civil society’ that was affecting the democratic political values of the early 1990s was pushed into the background, because the idea of a weak state was less popular and was connected with a weak civil society. With the Fidesz–MPP government, the image of a strong and determined state appeared. Politicians of Fidesz–MPP believed in a freshly redefined republican spirit: that if the state is needed for democracy then a strong state is the precondition of a strong democracy. If there is no taxation without democratic representation, than democratic representation cannot be without strict taxation. A republic can only reflect the co-operation of the public, if besides participation in public matters there is also compulsory taxation and health insurance. In this sense, paying taxes is nothing other than being aware of public matters and of the upkeep of public institutions, as well as the clearest representation of putting faith in civil servants as the committed and honest servants of democracy. During 1996–98, Fidesz–MPP politicians repeated this assertive, free-spirited republican opinion. On coming to power, however, they revised this standpoint, so that citizens added to the public good not only by paying taxes punctually, but also by accepting that the government can have a creed in moral, religious and social questions. The government expected citizens – if they were to feel that they belonged to the nation – to identify with this creed.

In concrete cases, however, this republican commitment, coloured with the idea of national self-esteem and translated into a political form, was promoted with such a youthful conviction that it reminded the old generation of the style of the voluntarist political changes of their youth. Back in the late 1940s, like irregulars, the young communist members of the *fényes szelek* (shining winds) and populist, collegiate forces ended the period of civic Hungary and the civic, semi-democratic system. In the 1990s, in similar style, the new *fényes szelek* – young democrats and the forces of the former self-governed residences like dynamic irregular soldiers – wanted to end what they saw as the protracted change of post-communist Hungary by instituting its replacement by a new-bourgeois elite. They viewed themselves as the repository of the new system, and believed that their movement would become the permanent establishment, and on coming into power their instruments would be the order-creating, activist state. Even if the style of the nationalizing new government recalled the *fényes szelek* movement, this feeling of *déjà vu* was not established because the rhetoric of the age was not of ‘populist democracy’ but ‘civic democracy’. The Orbán government had to fulfil, within the norms of established democracy, its promises to bring about order and create opportunities.

The promise of order proved attractive. Who would not want honest public life instead of corruption and a state of public good instead of one struggling in

the grips of economic mafias? Who would not want to see ‘clean hands’, instead of ‘dirty hands’¹⁷ governing the country? The 1989–90 change of regime restructured social and economic relations, and changed the nature of political authority. The freedom brought with itself great insecurity, and increased the consciousness of responsibilities in the individual. But Hungarian citizens wanted secure freedom, and this is why they always voted for the ‘quiet force’: in 1990 for the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and in 1994 the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party). The first MDF-led government completed the transition, but it caused too much pain, fear and ‘confusion’, and was destined to fall. The MSZP-led government consolidated the economy and democracy, but society thought it too corrupt and elitist; moreover, its economic shock therapy inflicted too much public damage. For these reasons it too was destined to fall. In 1998 citizens had no choice but to vote for the only political participant who had a clean sheet and had not been amortized in government, namely Fidesz–MPP.

The Hungarian New Right had to satisfy the need for change and security at the same time. It was as if voters had asked for a government that was different from the previous ones but not too different. The party coming to power defined the period after the regime change as disorder, which had to be changed for the sake of order and security. Its members believed that if change were explained by the need for order, then voters would accept that in this way both of their needs could be fulfilled.

It was characteristic of the voters of the 1990s that they always expected too much and sometimes demanded the absolutely impossible of the parties. In 1990 they expected the supporters of the old, noble Hungary to create the new Hungary. In 1994 they expected the socialists to create a functioning ‘humane’ capitalism. In 1998 they expected the ‘civic–radical’ party finally to create order. To have order and progress: after the turbulent years of change they wanted growth within the confines of law, wealth and consumption, and they wanted to develop civic consciousness. To meet these demands, the victorious party had to present itself as radical and conservative at the same time. People did not want Fidesz–MPP to turn back the wheels of history and re-start the change. The voters wanted to preserve the results of the change – freedom and democracy – but they would have liked everyone to be in a better position, not just the few who had managed to acquire better positions during the privatisation: if not everyone, then at least those who deserved it. Those who work a lot and do so honestly, have three children, study in their free time, send their children to school, and steadily decline – these deserve the benefits of civic society. The change should be wider and more just, and should be effective at deeper levels as well. The task of Fidesz–MPP was to popularize the elite change, and to modify liberal democracy to meet public aspirations.

Voters would have liked to see capitalist modernization coming not from above and outside, and not concerning the few; and the republican ‘popular capitalism’, preached since the Bokros package, matched these expectations well. People expected the government to distribute opportunities for gaining wealth and gaining civic consciousness. The government that came to power in 1998 promised these. However, in its first year it responded to these expectations with a rhetoric of radical elite change, favouring ‘friend- and relative-based business circles’,¹⁸ and marginalizing and sometimes criminalizing those outside the preferred middle class. In May 1998 the talk was all about the meaning of the public good, and the 40-point programme, seven per cent growth, transparency in public life, and ending mafia politics. In its first year in office, it seemed that an elite change was the really important aim for Fidesz–MPP, and they reached it by symbolically dividing the country between those who were hanging on to the socialist past, and those who were the supporters of the ‘civic Hungary’. Subsequently, it emerged that this was the hidden political content of the often-repeated Fidesz slogan, ‘More than change of government but less than a change of regime!’. József Antall, the first democratically elected prime minister, wanted to be ‘prime minister of 15 million Hungarians’; and Gyula Horn, who governed Hungary between 1990 and 1994, considered himself the prime minister of ten million Hungarians. In contrast, Viktor Orbán communicated the message that he wanted to be the prime minister of every Hungarian beyond the borders, but within the country only of those who ‘deserve’ him.

Voluntarism, Vision and Centralization: The Chancellor and his Government

Orbán was a party leader and became chancellor; his party and his government did not want to control his political authority and could not do so. As an aspiring charismatic politician, he took as his starting-point the notion that a president’s job is not to manoeuvre between interest groups, but to shape the course of events. He should not follow but be the sovereign shaper of the political situation. He believed his job was to solve conflicts as if they were the Gordian knot: with one stroke of the sword, instead of analysing the possible steps of his opponents and replying in a manner that can be interpreted many ways, like a chess master. He wanted his political performance to be swift, precise and effective. He did not like the controlling and debating function of parliament, and wanted to curtail its role. His ministers were political lightweights, and were controlled by him, through a cabinet system in which departments in the prime minister’s office control the ministers, or by the under-secretaries of the strong core of his party.

It is worth recalling the 1998 government programme here. It contained a fairly short passage about how the president imagined the state under his control. In his speech following the election victory of Fidesz–MPP, Viktor Orbán observed that the Hungarian parliamentary democracy is in fact a chancellor democracy (*Kanzlerdemokratie*), adopted in 1989, only the Antall government was too shy to draw the obvious political conclusions. A sentence in the government programme – according to which the conditions of effective work must be drawn up – referred to this: ‘The civil–democratic government will realize a new type of government; not losing sight of the will – which was known but not sufficiently realized until then – of the constitutional practice which developed during the renewal of the structure and after the transition’. According to the government programme, the constitutionally acceptable reserves of chancellor government have to be used.

But what were these reserves? In order to answer this question our starting-point must be the West German example: the idea of chancellor democracy appeared there during the time of Konrad Adenauer in the 1950s. Its essence is that the executive branch is divided between the chancellor – who is also the head of government – and the president, but the president has only ceremonial functions, because the centre of authority is the chancellor. The chancellor, chosen by a majority and dependent on it, leads the government. Ministers are accountable to the prime minister, and he is accountable to the parliament for them. However, it is very difficult to remove the prime minister: it can be achieved only by a successful constructive motion of no confidence. That means that the majority of MPs have to agree to remove the prime minister and also agree on his replacement, who must be elected immediately after the successful ‘no confidence’ vote.

This is all there is to the German *Kanzlerdemokratie*. It does not follow from this that the federal chancellor is as powerful a politician as the US president or the British prime minister, or a French president who has the support of the majority in parliament. Even this authority – established on the basis of the stability of Christian Democracy under the post-fascist democracy – was found to be too much for those democratic critics who invented the somewhat pejorative term chancellor democracy. The political history of the Federal Republic of Germany showed that this democracy does not necessarily mean an extremely strong executive branch, and in the course of time it softens to a mere bargaining among the party elite.

The intentions of the government of the ‘Hungarian civic future’ – which were established in the programme of the government – about the means of realizing this new type of governing under the constitution were not at all clear. The voters might naturally assume that it had been a chancellor democracy before and that this would continue. But the

Q2

following sentences of the programme made it explicit that strengthening the state would start with strengthening the office of the prime minister. The new type of governing makes it possible for the prime minister, besides shouldering general constitutional and political responsibilities for the performance of the government, to use the rights and means of realizing the programme. . . . For the sake of productive government, it will define the strengthening of the central initiative and co-operating work as well as the improvement of quality of it as its precondition. The restructuring of the prime minister's office as the basis of the work of the prime minister serves this purpose.¹⁹

Q3

According to the programme, effective government depended on the prime minister's office. The former branches of the chancellery were given to appropriate ministries (external affairs, culture, sport). The goal of this restructuring was total control over the coalition partner and the government, and maximizing the freedom of movement of the prime minister. The position from which Orbán set off 1998 was not achieved by Horn during his four years in power, even with an absolute majority in parliament. This is because, according to his programme:

The prime minister's office is the controller and central coordinator of government activities. For these purposes, the government finds it necessary to build a dynamic relationship between the Office and the ministries, and a departmental control system that would help the government. It is also the Office that draws up the comprehensive government strategy, and follows the operation of the government and how the programme is carried out.²⁰

Q3

Something that existed only sociologically was established legally: it was not a government that had a prime minister, but a prime minister who had a government. It was not the government as a body that decided the daily schedule of the government but the prime minister and the chancellery; moreover, it could interfere in the appointment and dismissal of high officials. However, strengthening the chancellery did not result – despite the promises – in a less expensive state, because it meant doubling the functions. The patronage power of the prime minister had grown, and the most important function of the office was to remove the Smallholders' Party from the centre of power.

Whatever measures the prime minister took to extend the authority of the state institutionally, these efforts did not become a step taken backwards from the constitutional tradition of the Hungarian parliamentary republic. Paradoxically, Viktor Orbán temporarily stabilized the system of the existing parliamentary public law by giving parliament the right to propose the next

445 president. By accepting this, the Smallholders returned to their 1989 programme, according to which the person of the president should be chosen by parliament and not directly by the people – which was their original programme.²¹ They behaved as if they were granted more than just a symbolic gift. According to the precise wording of the law, anyone could nominate someone for president, but only a qualified majority of parliament could elect to that post, and a simple majority is enough to decide only at the third attempt. What Viktor Orbán achieved was quite a lot: he established a coalition with a party that had been unwilling to enter into a coalition, and
450 by restructuring the chancellery established his control over the government as well. These were the conditions of an effective government – so he believed – and the preconditions of uniting the right. These early measures foreshadowed a government that would ‘practise law’, in other words, the Orbán government would realize its great ideas by using less majestic authoritarian techniques.²² While numerous ministers lived up to expectations, many
455 members of the government had spectacular failures.²³ Orbán stood by them, and did not dismiss them, because he wanted to be different in this respect as well: he thought that if he dismissed them it would prove that he been mistaken in appointing them. He believed himself to be sovereign in the first place.
460 It was not the biggest party that ‘produced’ the prime minister; rather, the prime minister had a party. He ‘invented’ his party and made it big. He became a cult figure in his party: the ‘youngest child’, who conquered the ‘highest mountains of power’ by wandering from village to village. Those local governors who belonged to the party, the officers and advisers, should
465 thank him for everything they had; the party members and activists believed in him without reservation.

The resulting mentality radiated from him in his public appearances. He preferred party events to parliamentary appearances. He reported on the ‘state of the country’ exclusively to his supporters in the Vigadó concert
470 hall, and not in parliament. Since he considered accepting the government programme a precondition of belonging to the country, he did not think of the opposition leaders as worthy of celebrating the national holiday with his party, or in March 1999 the historic moment of joining NATO.²⁴ It was not the government that decided that there should be a national day of mourning
475 following a bus accident in January 1999, but Orbán himself. It was not the government but he personally who decided after the flood in March that the state of emergency was over.²⁵

Voters wanted a government of consolidation, but what they got was a government of new confrontations. The radical political formation of the
480 1980s grew used to attacks, conflict and political offensive – a consciously polarized politics.²⁶ This political style included, beside unexpected decisions, such opinion changes and large-scale replacement of staff that were against

the campaign promises of the Orbán government and the former agreement of local Fidesz–MPP members of parliament. Examples of these were postponing the construction of the fourth line of the Budapest underground, postponing the establishment of the institution of the Judges of the Court of Appeal, suspension of the construction of the national theatre and building it in a different location following different plans. Observers began to feel that the prime minister was punishing citizens for having exercised their democratic right.²⁷ The citizens of Budapest had to pay the price for electing Gábor Demszky of the opposition as mayor, and the citizens of the town of Székesfehérvár, the ‘intellectual capital’ of Hungary, had to pay for electing an opposition candidate of the left as governor. Occasionally, the government announced the sudden and unilateral termination of its civil and legal contract, moving from the idea of consensus to the idea of majoritarian democracy.²⁸ For this reason, it was difficult not to suspect the government of applying to itself alone the rules of its programme of adopting civic habits.

While the freshly elected Fidesz–MPP was referring to Antallist, centre-right values and provided the former MDF politicians – who had strong ties with the Antall government – with positions,²⁹ it rejected the idealism, the old-fashioned style of communication and the intellectual mannerisms of the Antall government, and completely without embarrassment it put the interest-centred, pragmatic, materialistic policy taken from MSZP in its place. While government policy was turning intellectual groups against each other, this was not a cultural war; it was rather a political fight for existence. A cultural war requires clearly defined groups, symbols and arguments. For the government its supporters’ proposal of the ‘right to publish corrections’³⁰ was less important than expanding the severe political screening, the control of those journalists who were criticizing the government. Even more important for the Orbán cabinet was having as much influence over television and the written media as the previous government, but centralizing those funds that were distributed by the state, restructuring the inland revenue office and setting up a tax police service. The government communicated its belief that by controlling and overseeing these, it won ‘positions’ in the war against the ‘intellectual armed guards’³¹ (the intellectuals). They behaved as if there were a national cold war taking place.

One of the goals of the Fidesz–MPP government was to restore national self-esteem. It did not aim at presenting the nation differently from what it is: on the contrary, it suggested that they should be proud of themselves and should trust their own strength. In whatever circumstances – the European Union or the National Football Association, for example – the government was suggesting that there was no reason to perpetuate the belief in a specific Hungarian fate, a sense of national weakness, a traditional pessimism and inferiority complex. The message was that if they were dynamic enough, as

a 'rising bourgeoisie' they could deflect the marks of their past 'like water off a duck's back'.³² The country is relatively small, but by Central European standards it is a power of medium size, a sovereign state, where democracy is in no danger. Government policy was promoting the message that the integrational, globalist, modernist and cosmopolitan programmes should be treated with reservation, and enforced only in strictly economic processes; the relationship with them can only be instrumental, it cannot overshadow the commonly held public–national–civic ideas. The people elected the leaders of the country, and these leaders – according to their self-image – merely carried out the will of the 'citizens' with democratic legitimacy.³³ With this authorization, the *volte-face* seemed to be a question of willpower and determination. In the mind of the head of government the world appeared as if subject to political will, which is malleable according to the conception of majoritarian democracy.

In the lexicon of Fidesz–MPP, 'civic' meant both a starting-point and a goal, a condition and a programme. It was a starting-point, because the party-programme was drafted 'together with the citizens', to whom they constantly referred, and the electors – the people – elected them. It was a goal as well, because the government considered its mission to help from the centre reinforce a civic mentality, which entailed lifting the citizens into the wealthy middle class.³⁴ The government of Viktor Orbán and József Torgyán sent the message to the citizens that they could still become civic: behind civil society was a dream of a bourgeois society.

Breaking out was possible individually as well as on the national level, the government suggested, in ways similar to the familiar stories from Hollywood. According to one government idea, subsequently withdrawn, the most effective international propaganda of the celebration of the thousand-year-old Hungarian statehood could have taken place in Disneyland in Orlando, in a 100-squaremetre grotto. Hungary could have appeared in this symbolic area of a favoured point of consumer society as one of the Central European success stories, a model country, the 'most dynamically developing region'. In Florida, the dream of 'Hungary becoming a civil society' would have met the fulfilled American dream. The story was truly like a fairy tale, because it communicated the message that not only the 'youngest child' but, with him as their leader, the people also can fulfil their dreams. This idea contained what the Fidesz party elite experienced in their own lifetime: that there are unlimited opportunities. The road from the legal understanding of citizenship to the sociological concept of 'civic' meant for them the road of double mobility: for the first generation of intellectuals, it meant culturally becoming bourgeois; for those from the countryside, it meant entering a university in the capital and changing their lives into a cosmopolitan one. Parallel to this, the speedy acquisition of the language of the time – the discourse of

democracy; the milieu of the self-governed residences based on the idea of the ‘new elite’ and holding together; the vanishing dictatorship and active participation in the process: all of this reinforced in the group the feeling that, by strongly holding together, with a group spirit and national solidarity every obstacle can be overcome.

The obstacles towering ahead of them were the results of their greater mobility: life itself was an obstacle race. In order to understand the Fidesz phenomenon, however, the sociological and political science analyses as well as social psychological analyses are pertinent. The psychologist Edit Szerdahelyi, in her article on the psychology of ambition, writes of the person who is separated from native community, culture or mother tongue, who goes through a trauma of separation, which could repeat itself when adapting to a new group. According to her:

... in these people, a lifelong psychological, emotional and social learning process takes place, often unconsciously. It often appears as an overload of the spiritual system. The lack of shelter and safety calls out the search for shelter. ... Often an entire lifetime is not enough to create an intra-psychic asylum. The locomotion, the projection, tends to fixate.³⁵

According to Szerdahelyi, people who are motivated by a compulsion to prove themselves, who are ambitious and successful, develop a kind of ‘very strong new personal identity’, which:

... paradoxically covers their weakness: it is in fact a self-armour. It is characterized by restricting themselves ... by influencing their surroundings in hetero- and auto-aggressive ways. Performance is the narcissistic cover. They are clever, precise, autocratic, easily offended and offensive. This is the way they are able to continue constantly against the drag. They live in a feverish state of mercilessness, both inwardly and outwardly.³⁶

These sentences might have been written about the Fidesz elite. The development of this situation was enforced by the socialization in the self-governed residences. The establishment of these residences was inspired by the ‘people’s dormitories’, and were doing nothing except forming the elite. It is apparent today that, in contrast to the positive myth, these specialized residences were not necessarily schools of liberal democracy. Being confined to the same place, sharing a sense of belonging to a vanguard group, and a collective identity that is defined against the outside world, they possess everything that is against civic life and its prerequisites. Room-mates know everything about each other, because they get to know each other by living together. (Sándor Márai wrote about this life – with aversion – in his autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Middle-class Citizen*.³⁷) Privacy is missing,

and the possibilities of moving individually and behaving freely and without control are limited. The skills of a charismatic leader are upgraded and one's worth depends on how much appreciation one attains. The will of the majority is realized immediately and without limit. The life experience of these people is restricted to acquiring the techniques of how to make the great leaps of social mobility and getting their interests realized in a small and closed community. This is important, because these individual and collective experiences are preserved in the collective memory of the subculture, and find their way into the culture of the political elite and the behaviour of their supporters. After that, the experience will be handed down to those who did not experience it personally, but this identification with a canonized form of political culture will subsequently become the precondition of their group membership and of their advancement.

The Political Style of the Orbán Government

From the beginning the Fidesz–MPP government was handicapped: it would have effected a new and different transition had it not come to power too late. The past could not be 'erased for ever', because it included the ten-year history of Hungarian democracy. If those in power are democrats, then they cannot be radical in restructuring the established democratic bureaucracy. Civil revolution cannot be realized in a consolidating society that is already beyond a civic revolution. The government's civic radicalism was directed at holding the support of a heterogeneous group of voters, but the radicalism expired: first, in the daring exercise of power made possible by the given bureaucratic system; second, because they sometimes ignored the established common law; third, because they created new procedural precedents; and fourth, because they turned democratic political practice, beginning from mutual distrust, into a juridical matter. To some extent, in the first six months of this centre-right government a simulation of regime change took place. It was as if (as in Russia in 1917) there were a 'dual authority' in the country, and the October revolution should have followed that of February. It does not follow from this, however, that the government's measures were necessarily mistaken. The Fidesz–MPP government had made sound decisions from the viewpoint of a functioning democracy: for instance, the dismissal of the PostaBank and Saving Corporation leadership, abolition of the almost absurd local government system of social insurance, putting in their place those trade unionist lobbies that acquired too much influence in the earlier period. But it also made some less good decisions, including the unilateral changes applied to the working principles of private pension funds, or the abandonment of the school system reforms.³⁸ These decisions might have been questionable from the point of view of party politics, sympathies or

dispositions, but were not anti-democratic. A government is obviously in a position to decide that a theatre will not be constructed where the previous government imagined it. It can also prioritize the construction of a highway or a dam, instead of a subway. These are questions of public policy, which on their own do not affect democracy: a government's credibility can only suffer if it promised something different before. The refreshing style of the government in its first few months in office changed conspicuously to being convulsive and aggressive. (Following this, measures were taken that went beyond the traditional, democratic common law of Hungary; for instance, refusing to grant the ministerial power to sign the amnesty in favour of the president, or halting the written documentation of the proceedings of government meetings.) The centrally controlled messages that were often repeated were no substitute for dialogue, and the sometimes autistic communication was no substitute for government. Style is not secondary to 'content', because elevating cultural stigmatization into government policy is an alien practice in a consolidated democracy. The essence of democratic policy is not total victory or defeat, but an appropriate sense of proportion, with government and opposition giving proportionate responses to steps taken by the other. In a democracy, every victory and defeat is temporary and relative: it is dependent upon the election cycle and is never total. The coalition government of Fidesz–MPP, FKGP and the MDF came into power at a fortunate moment in 1998. Democracy seemed stable, economic growth seemed unbroken, and the country bound itself internationally to Euro-Atlantic integration and to Westernization. At the beginning an extraordinarily wide segment of society supported the government. In contrast to this – or perhaps because of it – the national–conservative ideas of the largest government party were not expressed in a consensus-seeking way, but rather in the spirit of radical change.

In 1998 Fidesz–MPP could still not decide whether to draft an 'emergency script'³⁹ or start a dialogue with those social groups that were averse to civic radicalism. The cause of this radical rhetoric may have been that the head of government, having learnt from the sharply rising then speedily falling popularity index of his party, always believed it more important to strengthen his influence among the right than to aim at maintaining the support of the heterogeneous and insecure voters outside his party. Orbán knew that for the deepening of the social immersion of a pragmatic clientele party a marketing policy alone is not enough. The entire population may know the name of the currently popular washing powder, but nothing can be done if they have had enough of it, or a rival company comes up with a new one. The success of the marketing policy may burst like a bubble if the results do not correspond with the intensified expectations directed at the government. Eventually this is exactly what happened.

Both the style of his government and that of Viktor Orbán himself have been compared to that of many politicians. The inconsistent and consciously mixed character of his political programme was reminiscent of Tony Blair, but he lacked the political flexibility of the British prime minister. His ideas of government recalled the Bonapartist traditions, which were adapted by De Gaulle, but the *gloire* was missing. His political marketing that was tailored to fit media democracy, and, starting in a mild form, brought back from oblivion the '*Forza Italia*' of Silvio Berlusconi. The political instincts of Orbán made him similar to the Polish Lech Walesa; and his critical political remarks about the West to the Czech Václav Klaus.

Every comparison had a shade of truth in it but all were rather inappropriate. The young Hungarian head of government was striving to find his own unique style, which would be successful in the dull routine of democratic politics, following the change of regime. Subsequently, looking back from early 2003, it seems that, in order to preserve his victory and a chance of long-term political survival, he should have acted less from a power position, following his impulse, but by reasoning, by being convivial, and by paying attention to the expectations of voters who wanted consolidation.

In the first years of the Orbán cabinet, because of the Russian economic crisis and the eruption of war in the former Yugoslavia, the internal political situation in Hungary was tense. The government looked dangers in the face and lived up to the military expectations of its military allies, and this fact alone cautioned him to be even more thoughtful. In tense situations, one-way communication, permanent campaign and the propaganda of victory were inadequate. Prime Minister Orbán's ability to learn from his failures brought him success; but, as his period in government proved, he was unable to learn from his success.

The New Right Government and the Causes of its Fall

In 2002 no one would have expected, judging from pre-election polls, that the left led by the Hungarian Socialist Party would win the April elections, and the centre-right, led by Fidesz–MPP, would be defeated. Hungary was again following in the wake of Poland, just as in 1994 and 1998. The political pendulum seems to swing to a similar beat in both countries. The MSZP and the group led by Fidesz–MPP – which also included the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Roma organization Lungo Drom – fought an extremely tough electoral battle. In the first round on 7 April, MSZP gained 42 per cent of the votes, and took the lead by 1 per cent ahead of the centre-right alliance. However, the composition of the new government came to depend on something more decisive than the contest between the major parties; namely the performance of the minor

participants. The liberal SZDSZ, with its 5.5 per cent vote, barely crossed the 5 per cent threshold necessary to enter parliament, while the far-right Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) fell short of the threshold with 4.5 per cent. Although the second round on 21 April saw the advance of the centre-right alliance, led by Fidesz–MPP, in many constituencies in the countryside, this was enough only to prevent an absolute MSZP majority, thereby leaving the door open for a socialist–liberal coalition.

Thus a parliament of four parties was created, where the social-democratic MSZP and the liberal SZDSZ occupied the seats on the left, while the conservative MDF and the so-called New Right Fidesz–MPP sat across the aisle. The ratio of 198 to 188 parliamentary seats made it possible for the MSZP and the SZDSZ to form a government in May, with Péter Medgyessy as prime minister.

Cold Civil War? The Campaign of 2002

There are several reasons for considering the 2002 parliamentary elections the most interesting and most memorable in the history of Hungarian democracy. Never before had there been such a high turnout (71 per cent in the first round, 73 per cent in the second). Never before had there been such a strong polarization, nor had democratic Hungary ever seen such an emotionally charged, highly passionate contest. Never had the governing parties conducted such a biting and negative a campaign, fearing defeat, and never had they been able to bring such masses of people on to the streets between the two rounds. No leader of a defeated party had ever received the welcome that Viktor Orbán had from Fidesz–MPP supporters after losing the election. Never before had the two victorious parties been so close spiritually and emotionally, despite their contrary origins: MSZP, the legal successor of the former Communist Party, and the liberal SZDSZ, one of the parties that can be traced back to the underground opposition of communist times.

All public opinion polling firms – except one called Median – predicted the victory of the confident Fidesz–MPP, and they turned out to be wrong. They were not alone in their error: if people do not dare reveal their opinions, the pollsters cannot be blamed – they can only work with the information that people give them. If people are afraid of the possible consequences of their thoughts, they will keep their thoughts to themselves (hence the lack of polls in a dictatorship). Most anti-Fidesz–MPP voters simply did not dare speak their minds, and this proved to be the harshest criticism of the four years of the Orbán government. Such a situation under a democratic government is quite shocking. The pollsters were unprepared for such a situation: it turned out that on election Sunday, masses of previously silent, covert socialist voters had suddenly appeared at the polling stations.⁴⁰

The reasons for their defeat were mainly the confrontational style and content in their government and the mistakes they made during the campaign. The classic campaign strategy of centre-right parties' dictates securing the radical-right votes first, then with the approaching elections, a gradual move to the centre should follow. Most elections can only be won from the centre. During its campaign, from the end of February, Fidesz–MPP moved ever closer to the far right to attract MIÉP voters, but it was too late. By the end of March, the party had no time to return to the centre: it had become the prisoner of its own MIÉP-like rhetoric. As a result, MSZP was able to move into the vacuum at the centre with its more moderate campaign, at the same time that the Centre Party, an organization believed to have no chance at all, was making some headway. So, what Fidesz–MPP gained on the right it lost in the centre.

One reason why Fidesz–MPP began to aim at radical right votes, and drifted to the right periphery, is to be found in the change in the international climate. While the shocking effect of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack favoured right-wing parties, and added to the popularity of Fidesz–MPP, it made a coalition with the anti-American MIÉP impossible. I am not suggesting that Viktor Orbán considered such a coalition, but he never excluded the possibility. When in 2000 Austria was temporarily 'separated' from the EU because of the Schüssel–Haider coalition, the Hungarian prime minister did not hesitate to receive Schüssel in Budapest, thereby making it clear that the coalition of the centre-right and the radical right could be a model for him as well. Because a speech by the extreme nationalist István Csurka on 11 September made a coalition impossible, Orbán had no choice but to turn those who would vote for the MIÉP towards Fidesz–MPP. Consequently he was derailed, and never returned to the centre.

While Fidesz–MPP fought a strong, multi-level campaign, and sought to deliver far-reaching symbolic messages – like the opening of the House of Terror⁴¹ or the National Theatre – its arch-enemy the MSZP chose a 'soft' campaign to get closer to moderate, centrist voters. For this reason, the MSZP candidate Péter Medgyessy promised to move forward with all the sensible measures of the Orbán government but to stop the witch-hunts and fill the gaps in this divided society. While the Fidesz–MPP campaign emphasized the symbolic demarcation line between past and future and by doing so was on the side of the younger generation, the MSZP campaign was targeting not only the active, vigorous voters, but also the weak, elderly pensioners. By doing so, the MSZP deliberately stressed its soft counter-arguments against Fidesz–MPP hard-line messages.⁴²

The campaign of Fidesz–MPP relied greatly on presenting the activities of the government, in which the campaign of the party and the government were interconnected and associated with the propaganda of success.⁴³ It was

accompanied by a wider ‘metapolitical campaign’ which was explained in more general terms, referring to the new Hungarian economic model (‘the Hungarian miracle’), the Olympics, the nation, the spiritual reincarnation, and to Hungarian development encompassed in large-scale visions and dreams. However, the first round of the elections was like a cold shower for Fidesz–MPP, which was unprepared for defeat, and they began the toughest and hottest campaign ever seen in the history of Hungarian democracy. Its activists delivered tens of thousands of leaflets to households, not to mention sending electronic mails and text messages to mobile phones, which were utterly new to Hungarian voters.⁴⁴ In between the two rounds, there were two Fidesz–MPP campaign events. At the first, Viktor Orbán called out his supporters for a battle against the socialist party of ‘Finance Capital and Big Capital’. The leader of the right, waving the national flag and with the slogan ‘Go, Hungary’,⁴⁵ called for a war in support of ‘the nation’. The prime minister, quoting Leonidas, suddenly initiated a ‘Thermopylean battle’ against his political opponents. According to Orbán, ‘everything that we worked for very hard in the past four years was in danger’, even more than that, everything that makes life ‘important and beautiful’ – ‘our family, our children, human dignity, our freedom, our belief and country. And we have to defend these now’.⁴⁶

In order to balance this aggressive tone, at a later assembly at Kossuth Square, in Budapest, where hundreds of thousands of people appeared, and which he called a ‘national assembly’, the prime minister announced the ‘campaign of the power of love’.⁴⁷ In those days, when the Fidesz–MPP was facing defeat, the right began to use the language of love and hatred at the same time, in order to win over as many voters as possible. In two weeks Viktor Orbán visited more than 20 locations in the countryside, where the elections were not yet over. By that time Fidesz–MPP was openly using the network and infrastructure of the Church. The ‘campaign of civic collaboration’ was perceived by many as a ‘regime-changing’ event. One speaker, the Slovak politician Miklós Duray, openly stated that ‘a revolution is going on’.⁴⁸

In this hot campaign of 2002, symbolic politics dominated again, in which the ‘defenders of the nation’ fought with the ‘defenders of democracy’. It emerged that, from a right-wing perspective, the friends of democracy might well be Hungarian, but the ‘defenders of the nation’ were even more Hungarian. The difference between the two was emphasized by the governing parties in their practice of monopolizing the usage of essentially unifying national symbols for dividing and party purposes. Supporters of the opposition might have believed that not only the victory of the left or right was at stake but the survival or defeat of democracy. Right-wing activists might have believed that the saving of the nation was at stake. Or more, they might have to save the results of the transition: ‘civic future’ needed salvation from a ‘socialist future’ born of the marriage of the

socialist past and 'big capital monetary funds'. Although elections were held in perfect order, many could not come to terms with the division of the both Hungarian and democratic voters. Those who believed themselves to be members of the political community and simply democratic Hungarian citizens, they
845 were torn by the fact that these two identities, which they believed to be complementary, were set against each other, as if being a Hungarian and a democrat were incompatible, or as if the compatibility of these two were guaranteed by the re-election of one of the political groups. While the Orbán government was working on bringing Church and state close to each other, and even on increasing
850 the importance of the Crown in public law, returning to the republican spirit during the campaign seemed quite odd: 'Hungary is a republic not a joint-stock company', said the prime minister,⁴⁹ who in fact governed the country as though it were such a company, and juggled with the symbol of a kingdom. The MSZP emphatically used the methods of a negative campaign on two
855 occasions. They did it first in January 2002, when they predicted that the Orbán–Năstase agreement⁵⁰ would be disadvantageous, and focusing on the unemployment in the eastern counties of Hungary, suggesting that Hungarian employees would lose their jobs to the influx of Romanian employees; and for the second time in the last week of the campaign, when they used the hasty
860 remark of László Kövér, apparently suggesting suicide by hanging to opponents of a particular scheme,⁵¹ to support the fear of the continuation of Fidesz government.

The alliance led by Fidesz–MPP came in first in the western region and several south-eastern counties; MSZP won in northern Hungary and Budapest.
865 It proved fatal for Fidesz–MPP to underestimate the significance of Budapest, since MSZP gained its marginal advantage not by the votes in the countryside but by the overwhelming victory in the capital: the left won 28 out of the 32 seats in Budapest. It seemed as if the elections were decided by a battle between the countryside and the capital. SZDSZ gained the minimum number
870 of votes necessary to enter parliament, thus stabilizing its position for the next four years. The campaigns of the MSZP and the SZDSZ seemed to divide the task facing them: MSZP emphasized the positive messages of social peace and welfare transition, while SZDSZ chose an ironic, negative campaign, targeting government corruption. The political system of Hungary seems to be moving
875 toward a bipolarity of left and right, and it will become more difficult for the SZDSZ to keep to the liberal alternative. Although smaller in number, the Alliance of Free Democrats obtained a greater share in governance than they had in the 1994–98 Horn government, where, although the second biggest party in the country, they became coalition 'surplus'.

880 The group led by Fidesz–MPP failed to attract all the voters on the right, but it certainly sucked the oxygen from the far-right MIÉP. For the supporters of liberal democracy, the good news of the 2002 elections was that the anti-EU

and ultra-nationalist MIÉP did not make it into parliament. Although MIÉP has been able to keep its electoral base since 1998, it was unable to expand and win new voters to reach the number that the higher turnout would have warranted. Those hundreds of thousands of newcomers, who boosted the turnout to over 70 per cent, voted for either Fidesz–MPP or MSZP; they were mobilized by the fierce struggle between the two major parties. This new situation left MIÉP a loser. (Parallel to that, the orthodox communist Workers’ Party received only 2 per cent of the votes.)

Fidesz–MPP’s Conception of Democracy

The defeat Fidesz–MPP suffered in the 2002 elections, was not entirely due to mistakes made in their campaign. The main reason was the confrontational way in which the Orbán government exercised power in the period 1998–2002, a style connected to their conception of democracy. The ideologists of the party asserted their belief that the ‘false consensus’ achieved during the transition between the old and the new elite proved harmful. The prime minister tended to consider the people who were sitting at the 1989 round table not as ‘changers of the regime’ but preservers of the regime.⁵² He did not hide his opinion that the transition was not over until a change of the elite took place and the old network stopped functioning; that is when the notebook with the old telephone numbers had to be thrown away. In order to reach this goal, he had to break with the ‘consensus democracy’ concept, and put ‘revolutionary democracy’ in its place.

The leaders of Fidesz–MPP not only wanted to make democracy work, but also wanted to re-create it in their own image: in order to legitimize this socially, they needed an ideology that would make it easy to communicate this message. This ideology was the ‘spiritual revival’ of the country, in the year of the celebration of the foundation of the Hungarian State. Fidesz–MPP in power not only wanted to address first and foremost the naturally divided political community, but aimed at reconstructing the cultural–moral community – according to its own values – that existed in the imagination of Hungarians. The new right began its term by promising to revive the republican spirit, and giving hope to the country to revive itself, relying on its inner strength.⁵³ It wanted to achieve more than that – the reconstruction of the cultural–moral community – but achieved less, because it lost the support of the political community. The Orbán government wanted to become not only the government of the Hungarian citizens of Hungary, but the government of every individual who belonged to the Hungarian people, even those who were not Hungarian citizens, who voted in other countries and did not pay taxes in Hungary. While they wanted to be the government of an imaginary,

spiritual nation that reached beyond the borders, they lost the confidence of those who were ‘merely’ citizens of the country.

925 The main reason for the defeat of Fidesz–MPP was its confusion of the ideas of political community and cultural community, and building a political strategy upon this misconception.⁵⁴ The Orbán government believed that it would re-create the political community from above, through the reconstruction of the cultural community, and doing so in a way they believed to be right and following the values they represented. While the government was talking about realizing the ‘Hungarian dream’, the possibility that this dream might 930 not be shared by every Hungarian, but only the dream of a minority in Hungary, did not even occur to the prime minister. But even if it were the dream of the majority, the Hungarian people might have thought themselves responsible for realizing this dream and not the government. Happiness is not a political category, but choosing the means to achieve it is. The Orbán 935 government thought it to be the other way round.

Consolidation or De-consolidation?

940 During the 1989–90 democratic transition, priority was given to the demonstration of breaking with the old regime; the discourse of those days was dominated by symbolism in politics, and a dividing line was drawn between past and present. The political elite and their followers spoke the language of morality politics. After that, the most important issue was the mitigation of crises caused by the vast economic changes, at which point political discourse 945 became dominated by pragmatic debates over state finance, budget balance and the reform of big distributive systems. With symbolic politics jettisoned, reform politics took over, manifesting itself in debates about how to handle the country’s deep economic crisis and how to achieve successful transition in the economy. This culminated in a package of austerity measures aiming at a 950 speedy transition to a market economy.⁵⁵

But once a major change in the economic system is achieved, and the economy has gained momentum, political discourse generally turns to and increasingly focuses on issues of distribution. That is precisely what happened in Hungary when the political force elected in 1998 openly supported the 955 middle classes, regarding them as the major driving-force behind the nation’s economic and moral development, but simultaneously paying little attention to other social strata: the old, the uneducated, the marginalized and the unemployed. What proved a novelty in this situation – compared with international trends in democratic consolidation – was the aspiration 960 of this group to divide society. In times of economic prosperity, it is quite unusual for a government to start its tenure with a programme of carrying out something ‘more than a government change, but less than a change of

[political] system' and then to pursue it with the application of intense pressure. Such an attitude makes one question whether the government is really devoted to consolidation politics based on national reunification.

965 There are two types of politicians: dividers and uniters, and historical circumstances determine whether the time is ripe for one or the other. During periods of radical social change, priority is usually given to dividing policies that are based on the 'friend or enemy' dichotomy, while in times of peace and consolidation the usual items on the agenda are unification and the maintenance of social peace. What was unusual about the activities of the 1998–2002
970 government is that it tried to consolidate the country while openly aiming at division. The dichotomies (us versus them, patriots versus quislings, nationalists versus anti-nationalists), well known from the political discourse of the 1990–94 MDF regime, made their reappearance and they are hardly characteristic of democratic consolidation. A tension was created between symbolic politics and the consolidation tasks of the government. How is it possible to
975 consolidate by using the rhetoric of a 'second revolution'? More and more analysts voiced their suspicion that the government was indeed de-consolidating.

The government's democratic deficit became clear to many when they realized that in the lexicon of the government 'weekly' meant in every
980 three weeks: from 2000 the parliament held its plenary session – the cornerstone of parliamentary democracy – less frequently. Consequently, the right to call upon ministers (interpellation) was curtailed, and it took longer to react to political events. Political questions were postponed for three weeks at a time, thus appearing 'warmed-up', and the 'flavour' of democracy
985 – the possibility of hot parliamentary debates – decreased. Supporters of the 'three-week system' emphasized the 'working-parliament' feature, as if parliament were there not to show political alternatives as a means of orienting the citizens, but to work out government decisions diligently in committees and then put them to a quick vote. According to an often-quoted remark of
990 the head of government, 'this parliament was functioning well without an opposition'. The other peculiarity of the Hungarian 'working parliament' was that it lacked opposition-led investigating committees. Fidesz–MPP would have run into difficulties winning the elections if it had put obstacles in the way of setting up a committee to investigate the Tocsik affair.⁵⁶ At
995 the time, the Horn government – keeping with the rules of the House – favoured the opposition by allowing its representative to 'interrogate' the leaders of the coalition. Investigating committees were opposition led – according to the rules of the House – because this balance-counterbalance was considered to be the essence of democracy. The governing parties of
1000 the period 1998–2002 failed to vote for any investigating committee, or if they accepted the existence of one on paper, they failed to vote for the members – and without members there are no committees. The reaction to

these scandals was counter-scandals. Politics was driven by the needs of the media.

The other significant problem of the period was the case of advisory boards of the public service media.⁵⁷ The strongest opposition party was the MSZP; but the MIÉP,⁵⁸ which was kept alive artificially and was formally an opposition, claimed two of the four delegated positions – belonging to the opposition – on public media advisory boards. The number of seats given to each party according to the votes of the people also gave two delegated positions to MSZP, one to the SZDSZ and one to the MIÉP. Not only the rules of the House but the will of voters was ignored when János Áder, speaker of the House, disallowed even minimal application of the principle that seats are to be proportionately distributed. The MSZP had to learn that the gestures it made to the right in 1996–97 – in the way it distributed the commercial television channels – were very likely never to be reciprocated. The leadership of Fidesz–MPP consciously burned the bridges of co-operation between the socialist and the liberals. By doing so, Orbán set the stage – emotionally as well – for a future MSZP–SZDSZ coalition. The left and the liberals were dependent on each other. In 2002, the Demszky line, which claimed to have kept the same distance from both of the large parties, fell, and in the MSZP the anti-SZDSZ and nationalists were pushed into the background. Orbán was so determined to divide the political spectrum that on the night of the first round of the elections he categorically excluded the possibility of a coalition with SZDSZ – which would, theoretically, have made it possible for Fidesz–MPP to stay in power.

A New Form of State Capture

As mentioned above, the position of the Orbán government was that a complete transition required a complete change of the elite; the overheated rhetoric of ‘more than a government change’ referred to this radical programme. This was a war strategy for the new, generation-based elite, and at the same time it promised a remedy for those who lost in the transition. While the Fidesz–MPP government failed to realize its large-scale social reform, it wrapped its redistributionist policy in the guise of a symbolic political discourse to make the practice of ‘more than an elite change but less than a reform’ socially legitimate.

During the time of the Fidesz–MPP government, a new form of state capture appeared in Hungarian political life. The term ‘state capture’ originally referred to a situation in which the government becomes the captive of interest groups – which were not chosen by it – and is helplessly struggling against economic lobbies and other powerful groups. The public good is sacrificed, and falls prey to the interest of the groups, which tear the state apart. It

1045 followed from this that the government with the democratically elected head
of government was not governing with the public good in mind; rather, with its
own interest groups it conquered the state ‘from within’. Possessing the
democratic approval of the voters, it operated the state – contrary to its
1050 stated aims – as if it were its own political and economic venture. The state
had its own bank, its own security services and its own revenue office,
which were used, parallel to their original functions, as means to annihilate
political and economic rivals. In larger construction or cultural projects the
Orbán government neglected the tender system or made it a formality, and
1055 took care that most of these commissions were in some way profitable to
some of these state-protected groups.⁵⁹ The political practice of the govern-
ment gradually stopped giving equal opportunities, stopped being neutral in
competition, and ignored the principle of equality before the law. Contrary
to the propaganda – which suggested the image of a state committed to uplift-
ing all Hungarians – a change took place, because the state behaved as if it
were a lord: it rewarded the ‘good’ Hungarians, and punished the ‘bad’
ones – opposition-governed places and their populations. The traditional
question of Hungarian politics came to the fore: who is a Hungarian? In
1060 order to win tenders, often performance was not enough; performing ‘Hungar-
ianism’ was required. That is, the entrepreneur had to prove that he was a
‘good’ Hungarian, namely a rather generous supporter of the governing
parties. State capture was realized in such a way that the democratically
approved government could use the state for different purposes than are cus-
tomary in European democracies. During the term of the Orbán government,
1065 given its authoritarian methods, the country was drifting dangerously fast
towards the practice of the post-soviet Eastern Europe; by the end of his
term, the state meant ‘the lads’.

1070 **Sports as Metaphor for Politics**

Viktor Orbán revealed the essence of his politics, which in short was to be on the
offensive at all times.⁶⁰ According to Orbán, a political organization or a poli-
tician who is unable to take the offensive will be pushed aside. For him, the field
of politics is an arena, where the best defence is offence. Politics is like boxing:
1075 it is a battle for survival, in which either you knock the enemy out or you are
knocked out. Political heroes need sport heroes, in order to strengthen their
image of invincibility. The advertised figure of the government of the 1998–
2002 period was István Kovács, who became a professional boxer, with
whom the head of government was proud of his publicly maintained friendship;
1080 he often made an appearance at his fights. The boxer’s career is very similar to
the political career of Orbán: the talents, the determination, the will to fight, the
way that led straight to the Olympics, then to the title of world champion. It

turned out later that their fall was similar, too: in the first challenge after their final victory they both lost. After a demanding match, István Kovács could relax at government retreat in Balatonaliga; then he joined the Fidesz campaign, and at the end of his career he received government medals from the outgoing
 1085 prime minister. Viktor Orbán, who had himself been a club football player, had a good relationship with the football legend Ferenc Puskás and his soccer partner. He often used the opportunities that football diplomacy offered him (for example, in his dealings with Berlusconi and Chirac). During the Fidesz
 1090 period, the country applied for the right to hold the European football championship, and began a national programme of stadium reconstruction. The government timed the collection of signatures for the right to hold the Olympics in 2012 during the 2002 election campaign,⁶¹ and as part of this it made famous sports persons, artists, scientists and business persons appear on television – and in the government media.

1095 The government considered supporting sport as a means of keeping the nation together, besides being easy to sell in the media. Naturally, this is not unusual: in many democracies politicians like to appear together with famous sports persons, artists and media personalities, whose support will ensure their popularity. However, these phenomena in the media campaign
 1100 of the Orbán government did not only appear marginal – as a temporary, exceptional event that matched the carnival-like atmosphere – but as a message that expressed the government’s philosophy, and was carefully structured and of great importance. They sent out the message that with willpower, with the ability to fight, and by acquiring other virtues connected with sports,
 1105 every obstacle can be overcome and every goal achieved. The cult of the young was supplemented by the cult of the strong and able, with the praise of the optimistic and voluntarist politics.

By the end of its term, the policy of ‘total offensive’ was not merely temporary but, according to the prime minister, the essence of politics. This offensive
 1110 attitude determined Orbán’s political career, and became a part of his personality.⁶² Such a combative, revolutionary mentality has its advantages and disadvantages, depending on the historical situation. For those with different ideas about democratic consolidation, this aggressive mentality proved simply too much. The majority of the voters simply wanted peace, and had
 1115 had enough of this type of politics, which was similar to a circus or a gladiator contest. Democracy is a better system because there is no need for charismatic heroes with outstanding talents and super-human abilities to make it work. Democracy can function well with average people, because its fundamental characteristic is that it works not because of the greatness of the leader, or
 1120 of his strong will, but because people believe that its institutions work correctly. In democracy, the authority of the law prevails, because the base of the legal system is sovereignty of the people.

The Politically-Driven Division of Society

1125 The Orbán government did succeed in replacing the elite, but it had a further
agenda: the cultural division of the country. The advantage gained from this
was the reintegration of the right that was shattered in 1994, thereby avoiding
the fate of the fragmented Polish right. By challenging the principles, practices
and institutions of the 1989 constitutional consensus, the Orbán government
1130 defined its own social basis, creating thereby two parallel Hungaries – a
battlefield of two, strong rival political cultures.⁶³ This symbolic political dis-
course, which had been turned into a strategy, also concealed the creation of a
less public, ‘private elite’,⁶⁴ that was jeopardizing consolidation and was
embroiled in a struggle with a public that was watchful of constitutional
rights and politics. Those who voiced their misgivings about constitutional
1135 procedures were not judged on the merit of their concern for the public, but
on the basis of their political affiliation: whether they were ‘with’ them or
‘against’ them. This policy was not inevitably anti-democratic; it merely con-
tradicted the democratic spirit based on equality before the law.

Despite its defeat, the Hungarian right was based on a social coalition expres-
sing existing political needs. This social coalition consisted of more than one part
or milieu. Here belonged groups and individuals in the outer circle: Fidesz–MPP
1140 consciously built up its clientele. Another layer was kept together by anti-com-
munist beliefs: the Orbán government could mobilize its campaign in such a
way that any vote for their opponent would automatically be seen as a vote for
the past – for ‘communism’. The third layer, the circle of religious people, par-
tially overlaps the second. There is a widespread belief in Hungary that those who
1145 are religious vote for right-wing parties, and this mainly the result of the political
activities of the Catholic and Calvinist churches in the campaign.⁶⁵ The Orbán
government encouraged the traditional churches to become publicly and politi-
cally active. During the celebration of the thousand years of the Hungarian
state, the government raised doubts in the minds of many about whether it
1150 respected the traditional constitutional distinction between state and church.
Addressing these three layers, Fidesz–MPP was able to forge a coalition of ori-
ginally very heterogeneous elements. The more moderate leaders of Fidesz–MPP
won over the conservatives⁶⁶ in the centre, while the other end of the coalition
1155 could safely count on the votes of the less-educated people in smaller commu-
nities, most of whom were losers of the transition and could be attracted by
radical rhetoric.

1160 Still, this coalition might not have come into being if the strong need of the
people for a strong, efficient and protective state were not perceived. The
deregulatory, market-oriented programme of the democratic transition
resulted in people very probably feeling that there was no social institution
to protect and defend them. Society was saturated with the fear that, alongside

the turmoil in the world, the state they believed to stand for the welfare of the public was also disintegrating and falling prey to different interest groups. The neo-liberal economic policy of the Horn government failed to satisfy this need for reassurance; this overwhelming and reasonable demand was recognized by
 1165 Fidesz–MPP, and they took care to meet it. They were correct to assume that there is no democracy without a state, but they were less able to realize that the state must be constitutional as well. As elaborated above in connection with state capture, instead of making the state a means of realizing what is good for the public, Fidesz ‘made the state its home’, and its own. Once the state
 1170 became the servant of one interest group – one that was opposing the socialists, and thereby offering an alternative – during the Fidesz government, in the eyes of many the rhetoric of a ‘strong state’ reinforced nepotism. By strengthening publicly financed institutions, and removing them from the responsibility of parliament, the dividing line between privatization and nationalization
 1175 soon diminished.

The majority of the people sensed that the attitude of Fidesz–MPP leaders was ‘If communists were allowed to steal, so are we’. But if that was the case – the voters may have thought – what is the difference in attitude between their ‘new civic Hungary’ and the country under communist rule? Using the state as a
 1180 tool for this ‘egalitarian’ policy, Fidesz–MPP obliterated its liberal characteristics, and in many cases it questioned the constitutionally guaranteed principle of equal rights. If the larger projects are not thrown to open competition, then the members of the same group will take them, and in that case the main criterion becomes political alignments, and the competing social actors will be
 1185 treated unequally. As a result, the system seemed to lose its democratic mandate, and an emerging view of politics was reinforced, namely that the idea of a liberal, constitutional state and parliamentary democracy is a mere facade; and behind the scenes Fidesz–MPP, like the socialist before 1998, were using their power to grow rich. This could have created a potentially
 1190 dangerous situation: if many people do not believe in the possibility of sustaining a democratic, constitutional state, then it will be difficult to keep alive. The result of the 2002 elections was that this democracy-threatening attitude was dismissed.

1195 **The Quality of Democracy**

It is a basic characteristic of democratic consolidation that democracy must enjoy wide legitimacy among elite groups as well as in society at large. It is dependent upon the development and consolidation of a democratic political
 1200 culture. In this political culture the participants do not think in terms of games that go beyond the limits of pursuing interests democratically; this understanding is present in every law and political procedure and the bureaucracy, as well

as in everyday political life. Democratic consolidation may be studied at the level of elite, organizations or citizens. Consolidation takes place among the elite when politicians, opinion formers, prominent culture and business figures, the heads of other similar groups, not only passively submit to democracy but are also deeply convinced that this is the best possible form of government, and that the constitutional system that secures it deserves their active support. Political leaders, too, acknowledge the constitutional right of each other to engage in a peaceful contest for power, but they are also aware that the law and all regulations must be observed, and so they do not encourage their supporters to violate mutually respected constitutional norms of political behaviour. The same applies to the norms of the government of all of the major parties, interest groups and movements. On the level of citizens, we can speak of consolidation if more than 70 per cent of the population basically share the belief that democracy is the best possible form of government, not only in theory but in practice as well, and for their country in particular. Moreover, there is no anti-democratic party or movement that enjoys significant support, and the citizens of the country as a whole reject the idea of using force, fraud and illegal or anti-constitutional means to enforce political preferences at the elections.⁶⁷

However, there is more to democracy than free elections: much depends on how the freely elected government behaves, that is, on the way in which it exercises its authority between two elections. Does the governing party realize that it is in its own interests to adhere to constitutional rules that might benefit them when they are in opposition? Would the regime lose sight of its long-term interests, and would it sacrifice them for the success of short-term tactical interest, which would mean curtailing the rights of the opposition? Moreover, in a favourable situation, it is more than realizing one's own interest, but also comes from a normative conviction.

However, as research in Latin American democracies and post-Soviet regimes has shown, in corrupt oligarchic regimes, built on or controlled by an 'inner party' or a mafia-like network (in other words, in regimes where corruption is rife and state prosecutors and intelligence agencies are regularly used as a cover for political games), there is a tendency to institutionalize informal, illegal and anti-constitutional practices behind the mask of constitutional democracy.⁶⁸

If the political and business elites hold up the latter as an example, people may be inclined to follow this pattern. Then they will identify democracy with the majority, the nation with an ethnic group, and a constitutional state with 'the strong asserting their right'. The more shallow and exclusive a system is, the more its representatives feel that they are accountable to the citizens, the more difficult it becomes to make democracy acceptable to social groups in the lower strata of social hierarchy, since corruption appears not only as a side-effect but as a basic characteristic of the system. The consolidating

democracy of Hungary did not progress so far, but, as many voters felt, it made some steps in that direction. This fear was projected into the future, and for that reason they voted for a change of government.

1245 The government that came to power in 2002 believed its first task to be reuniting the country and ending the internal ‘cold war’. It did not follow from this that there were no basic dividing lines in Hungarian society. The twentieth century saw the country suffer from the traumas of two world wars, and dictatorships following each, so it lacked freedom for decades. 1250 The shock of democracy found most of the people unprepared for the inevitable injustices of capitalism; it is no wonder, therefore, that people have accumulated pain, grievances and frustration. Most of these wounds caused by history have begun to heal, and there was no treatment yet for the social differences created by capitalism. This democracy was not yet welfare democracy. 1255 The time since the transition of 1989 is almost nothing from a historical perspective, and during this period not only the transformation of the political system but also the shock of privatization has taken place. Processes that have taken decades in other countries have been concluded in Hungary practically overnight.⁶⁹ Hungarians response to communism was the tactics of survival and shrewdness; it reacted to the new capitalism with aggression and 1260 appropriation.⁷⁰ These were all egoistic, individualistic responses, as if the price to pay for acquiring wealth and improvement were the loss of honour and the rejection of solidarity.

1265 **A Political or a Cultural Community?**

1265 After the shock of political and economic transition, the political class in power had to face the challenge of democratic consolidation. In theory, consolidation is a policy of social peace, healing of wounds and extending the common prosperity to a gradually widening segment of the population, a 1270 policy that would encourage a diversity of identities, instead of forcing them into the over-simplified, dichotomy-based worlds of the political left and right. Liberal democracy can secure both freedom in politics and freedom from politics at the same time; for this reason, the idea of ‘permanent revolution’ is alien to its rhetoric and essence. The New Right coalition government during 1998–2002 attempted to consolidate by means of a ‘second 1275 revolution’. As it soon turned out, consolidation cannot be concluded by widening the gap between groups and reducing it to one dimension, namely to the extremist dichotomy of friend or foe. In 1998 Viktor Orbán may have felt that it was the last moment to rearrange power structures. The programme of ‘more than government change’ was an effort to modernize the right, to 1280 build a ‘Fidesz Hungary’, to help a new political structure take root, very different from the socialist one of oligarchy and social support. He believed

– correctly – that it is better if two oligarchies compete for power than if there is just one. He made an effort to organize a possible economic and social base for the contest of these two ‘Hungaries’. Instead of introducing social reforms, he saw it as his mission to change the elite, secure key positions for his people, construct a new base of support, and construct an institutional background for Fidesz Hungary once and for all. But he failed to align the majority of the people with his programme.

His major mistake was that he identified the political community with the cultural community (even though the latter notion was only with reference to the right) and it caused his defeat. A basic characteristic of liberal democracy is that political and cultural communities are utterly different: any number of cultural communities might peacefully coexist within a single political one. Anyone trying to force an existing (and culturally heterogeneous) political community to follow the norms of one specific cultural community proclaims loudly that he is not committed to the principles of liberal democracy. The Fidesz–MPP government tried to balance the division of the political community with the reconstruction of the imaginary cultural community of the nation outside the borders. It became more important whether the prime minister considered himself to be the leader of a country or of a state. While he was constantly making reference to the 15 million Hungarians, the citizens felt that he was only realizing the interest of voters on the right; and this caused tensions in the policy of the Orbán government. When he argued for the spiritual strengthening of Hungarians and reuniting them (which brought with itself the suspicion of being nationalistic), the left might easily have felt that this rhetoric of the spiritual reunification of Hungarians across borders was being used to make people accept the symbolic and normative structure of an imaginary cultural community that was dear to the government. It was capable of causing fear.

The voters of Hungary were unlikely to have any objections to a successful, pragmatic, consolidating rightist government, but the thought that this government might aim to change their values, norms and customs inspired fear among them. It seemed that the Orbán government inclined to restructure the entire society from above, with the values and models of one particular cultural group. The government does have a function of organizing society, but the organization of cultural communities is not its responsibility or task; that should happen organically from below, following civic models. The prime minister sent the message that ‘the future is here’ in vain, because, as soon became obvious, the past cannot be wiped out forever. They could have won in 2002 with a calm, mature, conservative–liberal policy; but with civic radicalism simulating the transition it was defeated.

With his policy of social mobilization, Orbán re-drew the political map, as had happened in the 1940s and 1950s in Argentina under Juan Perón, or in the

1990s in Croatia under Franjo Tuđman, and in Slovakia under Vladimír Mečiar. All these countries saw the supporters of autocratic democracy opposing the supporters of liberal democracy. The same was observable in Italy in 2001, where the former power of the multiple parties had disappeared, and the front line of political struggle lay between pro-Berlusconi and anti-Berlusconi groups. Some observers have compared it to Great Britain under Blair.⁷¹ The last two weeks of the Hungarian election campaign of 2002 saw a fierce and emotionally overheated fight between the pro-Orbán and anti-Orbán political coalitions. The ‘cold civil war’ took the shape of a hot campaign. Although Fidesz–MPP lost the election politically, Orbán still managed to create a ‘second Hungary’, with its own cultural milieu, which survived despite the electoral defeat.

This political style is often called populist policy, when a democratic process is represented as a choice between life and death, truth and lies, past and future, good and evil. Populism also entails a re-definition of the state’s role, by emphasizing that it dispenses and is paternalistic. Other characteristics of populism include a kind of economic nationalism, a moralistic rhetoric constantly referring to the idea of the nation and justice, a steady process of searching out and stigmatizing the ‘enemies of the nation’ (traitors within, communists, Big Business, financial oligarchy, cosmopolitan intellectuals and so on), and the polarization and reduction of political pluralism to a single dimension. During those few years political competition did not revolve round different programmes and rationally debatable arguments but was reduced to a passionate and symbolically mediated metapolitical war of ‘us versus them’ which was justified by ‘cultural’ reasons. National symbols (the flag, the shield, and the national anthem) that represent the unity of the nation were appropriated by Fidesz and its supporters, thereby stressing the idea of division. The football slogans ‘Go, Hungary’ and ‘Go, Hungarians’ became the campaign slogan of the party, similarly to the ‘Forza Italia’.⁷² The community of national politics was identified with the circle of Fidesz–MPP supporters, and they were called upon to ‘defend the nation’.⁷³ It was soon evident that populism did not need intellectuals, only propagandists.

One of the most important components of a populist policy centred on a leader is a technique of personalization of power. This was reinforced by television and a culture of commercials and video clips, which in the past decade acquired the power to form people’s minds, and the overall process of commercialization. Modern democracy is, in many ways, a media democracy, a campaign democracy. In such a world, anyone who can simplify his ideas and communicate real or apparent truths in a watered-down but credible way gets the upper hand. Most people prefer parties that transform politics into a visual experience rather than those that convey their policies using

the classic devices of verbal debates and programmes. Feeling becomes more important than conscious understanding and acceptance, and these feelings are most accessible through charismatic personalities who communicate the party's message. If there exists such a charismatic personality, than the message can become metapolitical: instead of a confrontation of political programmes, symbols and tokens of belief, there is a clash of religious or quasi-religious convictions. The personality that conveys the message becomes the message itself. Thus the political leader becomes the leader of a charismatic group, similar to a religious community, and becomes a figure who is central to the experience, and whose politics give those youth who are searching for identity the opportunity to 'feel' it. In a 'leader democracy',⁷⁴ for the followers the policy conveys a message of experience, immersion and togetherness; ideologies become identities; the rational–argumentative type of policy becomes a policy of identity.

It became apparent that the majority of society felt a need for this type of commanding behaviour. Rural dwellers needed it more than people living in towns did. They could feel that here is someone who tells them, in an understandable and simple yet intellectual way, what should be done in the irrational, decadent and confusing world, full of the inappropriate results of a previous conditioning.

During the period of the Orbán government changes that could be evaluated as positive took place in the exercise of power. These include changes in political communication, in making politics more dynamic, in conditioning people to think long term (a picture of the future), and aspiring to make politicians more clearly comprehensible to common people. The Orbán government looked beyond everyday problems, and focused on forming an understandable and attractive picture of the future. The elections, however, proved that voters were more interested in the present, than in the past, and believed in the dreams and successes of the future if they could see it beginning in the present. Hungarian voters were not in a position to disregard their everyday circumstances.

In his statements after the elections, Orbán found no connections between the performance of his government and the defeat of Fidesz–MPP.⁷⁵ He tended to blame the defeat on transcendental causes, and even after losing the elections tried to divert attention from his government's mistakes. The leaders of Fidesz–MPP could not face the fact that they had made mistakes that caused them to lose an election in times of prosperity.⁷⁶ After the elections, the former prime minister chose to be the leader of the people, and made it clear that he did not want to get used to parliamentary politics again. For one year following the election, he refused to accept posts in the party or within the faction, and avoided the traditional roles in opposition. By organizing 'civic circles' and spontaneously active groups, he transferred

his political activities into the activities of a movement,⁷⁷ and announced his belief that his followers were not in minority because ‘the nation cannot be in opposition’. He wanted to represent the ‘nation’ by rising above opposition parties, and to organize the infrastructure and social base of a new, ‘Future Hungary’, that he imagined. He was still the prisoner of his own campaign rhetoric. From leading Fidesz as a party campaigning for election victory, he moved to the idea of building a wide political movement – a future right-wing party union – that filtrated the different institutions of state. The Orbán government made an attempt, in a single attack, to realize goals that clashed: this was the ‘revolution of souls’ and consolidation. He prioritized confrontation over compromise in his policies, and the voters did not like that. One of the lessons of the 1998–2002 electoral period is that, in democracy, political and cultural community are two different things. In a single political community more than one cultural community can exist, because democracy considers as equals the groups to which different religions, lifestyles, taste and culture belong. The New Right government of Hungary did not accept this, and it led to a campaign in which the ideas of ‘democracy’, ‘nation’, country’ and ‘homeland’ could be turned against one another. The government wanted to restructure the cultural community according to a (right wing) cultural value system, and in doing so it suggested that whoever fails to agree with it cannot be a member of the political community. It resulted in concern on the part of those who did not believe in the ‘order–authority–homeland–work–discipline–family–will’ type of value system communicated by the government. The government took the offensive, because its members believed that the majority of the national political community was behind them, as well as identified with their system of values. They were wrong. With its voluntarism the cabinet alienated social groups who would have been easily won over by a moderate centre-right government.

The Hungarian New Right was created by Viktor Orbán and his associates between 1998 and 2002. It proved to be an unsuccessful project politically but still remained very strong culturally. Fidesz–MPP lost the parliamentary elections of 2002 and 2006. However, it emerged as virtually and symbolically *the only* opposition.

In 2004, Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy was replaced by Ferenc Gyurcsány, a younger, more dynamic politician whose rise was considered the left’s proper political answer to Orbán. Gyurcsány was able to keep the socialist–liberal coalition in power as a result of his successful campaign of 2006. However, his personality proved to be not as far from the leader of the right as Medgyessy was, which is why Gyurcsány was able to compete with them. After 2004 the sharp polarization of the country was symbolized by the increasing personalization of politics that centred upon the two leaders, Orbán and Gyurcsány. The sharp opposition of political camps resulted in

open civic protests against the government in the autumn of 2006, culminating in street battles between protesters and the police. It seems clear that, although Orbán lost two elections, he managed to achieve his long-term political goal: the social embeddedness of the New Right and the extreme polarization of Hungarian politics.⁷⁸

In a pluralist system, consolidation cannot be based on one or two imaginary cultural communities, because the existence and self-organization of various cultural communities is a natural phenomenon. On the other hand, democracy is the concern of a political community, independent of cultural preferences. It is the concern of every citizen who is old enough to vote, in a democratic system in which rules are secured, and where elections are general and secret.

NOTES

1. Cf. Samuel P. Huntington (1991), 'How Countries Democratize', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.56, No.4 (1991), pp.579–616; Charles Gati, 'The Mirage of Democracy', *Transition*, Vol.2, No.6 (1996), pp.6–12; Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
2. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990).
3. Adam Michnik, 'The Velvet Restoration', *Transition*, Vol.2, No.6 (1996), pp.13–16.
4. Ágnes Czakó and Endre Sik, 'A hálózati tőke a posztkommunista Magyarországon (Network capital in post-Communist Hungary)', *Mozgó Világ*, Vol.20, No.6 (1994), pp.17–25.
5. Roman Frydman, Kenneth Murphy and Andrzej Rapaczynski, 'Az elvtársi arcú kapitalizmus (Comrade-faced capitalism)', *Magyar Hírlap*, 8 March 1996.
6. János Kádár ruled Hungary in the period of communist dictatorship, between 1956 and 1988; he died in July 1989.
7. Mark Granovetter, 'A gyenge kötések ereje: a hálózatelmélet 'felülvizsgálata' (The strength of weak bonds: a reappraisal of network theory)', in Róbert Angelusz and Márton Tardos (eds.), *Társadalmak rejtett hálózata* (The hidden networks of societies) (Budapest: Magyar Közvéleménykutató Intézet, 1991), pp.371–400.
8. Jason McDonald, 'Transition to Utopia: A Reinterpretation of Economics, Ideas, and Politics in Hungary, 1984 to 1990', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.7, No.2 (1993), pp.203–39.
9. Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 'A válság' (The crisis), *Népszabadság*, 27 Sept. 1995.
10. Gyula Tellér, 'A három részmagyarország' (The three partial Hungary), *Századvég*, Vol.1, No.1 (1996), pp.52–66.
11. Maurizio Cotta, 'Structuring the Party System after the Dictatorship: Coalitions, Alliances, Fusions and Splits during the Transition and Post-transition Stages', in Geoffrey Piriham and Paul G. Lewis (eds.), *Stabilising Fragile Democracies: Comparing New Party Systems in Southern and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.69–99.
12. László Békési, 'Kormányozni vagy ideálokat szolgálni' (To govern or to follow ideals), *Népszabadság*, 17 Oct. 1995.
13. Tamás Sárközy, 'Kormányzás a "politika" és "szakma" ütközéspontjában' (Governing at the crossroads of 'politics' and 'profession'), in Sándor Kurtán, Sándor Péter and László Vass (eds.), *Magyarország politikai évkönyve* (The political yearbook of Hungary) (Budapest: DKMKA, 1996), pp.193–207.
14. Cf. Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 'Az új establishment' (The new establishment), *Magyar Narancs*, 29 Sept. 1994, pp.12–13; András Körösenyi, 'Kényszerkoalíció vagy természetes szövetség?'

Q5

(Forced coalition or natural alliance?), in Csaba Gombár et al. (eds.), *Kérdőjelek: a magyar kormány, 1994–95* (Question marks: the Hungarian government 1994–95) (Budapest: Korridor, 1995), pp.260–80.

15. They wanted to have the referendum on the land issue together with the NATO referendum in November 1997, but the effort was rejected by the ruling coalition.
- 1485 16. Cf. Gáspár Miklós Tamás, 'Új osztálypolitika' (New class politics), *Népszabadság*, 18 Nov. 1998.
17. László Kövér, a leading Fidesz politician, used this expression in the campaign of 2000.
18. The appointment of former party cashier Lajos Simicska of Fidesz to the post of president of APEH (the Hungarian tax authority) caused the biggest outcry.
19. For more details see András Bozóki, 'A hatékony állam titka' (The key of an efficient state), *Magyar Narancs*, 6 July 1988.
- 1490 20. András Bozóki, 'A hatékony állam titka' (The key of an efficient state), *Magyar Narancs*, 6 July 1988.
21. This view was represented by the Smallholders' Party, Fidesz, the SZDSZ, and the MSZDP during the 'four yes' referendum in the autumn of 1989.
22. József Debreczeni called the attitude of the Orbán government towards constitutionalism as equivalent to the attitude of a tricky lawyer: see József Debreczeni, *Orbán Viktor* (Viktor Orbán) (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), p.121.
- 1495 23. For example Tamás Deutsch, Pál Pepó and József Torgyán.
24. Hungary signed the accession treaty with NATO on 12 March 1999 in Independence, USA.
25. This also appeared in the Hungarian political folklore: Hungarian citizens started to tell more and more jokes about Orbán.
26. For details see Péter Tögyessy, *Elégedtelenségek egyensúlya* (The equilibrium of dissatisfactions) (Budapest: Helikon, 1999).
- 1500 27. Halting the building of the national theatre and cutting off the government's financial contribution to the building of the fourth line of the Budapest underground received negative responses from voters; the possibility of such a reception had been forecast before the 2002 general elections by public opinion polls: 'Miért szeretik vagy nem szeretik a Fideszt' (Why Fidesz is supported and why it is not), *HVG*, 29 March 2002.
28. This was the case in relation to the building of the fourth line of the Budapest underground.
- 1505 29. For example, Ferenc Mádl became president of the republic, Ibolya Dávid, János Martonyi, Ervin Demeter ministers and Erzsébet Pusztai state secretary, and Mrs. Etelka Pataki Barsi, György Csóti, Géza Jeszenszky and Tamás Katona ambassadors.
30. This idea was supported by Béla Pokol of the FKGP and Róbert Répássy of Fidesz–MPP; however, it was rejected by the constitutional court.
31. An expression used by László Kövér in the 2002 campaign.
32. Ibid.
- 1510 33. In its 1998 campaign, Fidesz–MPP emphasized that its programme is not a party programme, but a 'contract with the citizens', that is a social programme that emerged through the dialogue of Fidesz–MPP and the citizens.
34. Cf. '[A] Magyar Köztársaság Kormányának programja' ([The] programme of the government of the Republic of Hungary), in Sándor Kurtán et al., *Magyarország politikai évkönyve* (The political yearbook of Hungary) (Budapest: DKMKA, 1999), pp.903–66.
- 1515 35. Edit Szerdahelyi, 'A felfelé törekvőkről' (About those heading upward), *Thalassa*, Spring 1992, p.121.
36. Ibid.
37. Sándor Márai, *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a middle-class citizen) (Budapest: Akadémia-Helikon, 1990; first published 1934).
38. The halting of the *Sulinet* programme of Internet for schools and that of the National Curriculum (NAT).
- 1520 39. In spring 1998 leader of Fidesz–MPP Viktor Orbán stated during his election campaign that his party was putting together an 'emergency plan' to be used in case of election fraud.
40. For details see András Bozóki and Péter Kelemen, 'Merre tovább liberálisok' (Which way to go, liberals?), *Beszélő*, Vol.7, Nos.7–8 (2002), pp.36–9.

41. The handing-over ceremony of the House of Terror was the moment when the supporters of Fidesz–MPP and MIÉP joined forces. At that point it became obvious that some of the sympathizers of MIÉP would vote for Fidesz in the general election. It might also be the occasion that made most voters in the political centre to vote for the left. On the campaign of Fidesz–MPP, see Csaba Tóth and Gábor Török, ‘A tematizáló Fidesz’ (Thematizing Fidesz), in Miklós Sükösd and Mária Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ? Kampánystratégiák és kampányetika, 2002* (Where is the limit? Campaign strategy and campaign ethics, 2002) (Budapest: Élet és Irodalom, 2002), pp.186–92.
42. For details see Gábor Török, ‘Hatásvadászat: választási kampány a médiában’ (Looking for the effect: election campaign in the media), *Politikatudományi Szemle*, Vol.11, Nos.1–2 (2002), pp.73–92; Balázs Kiss, ‘Marketingszemlélet a kampányban (Marketing in elections campaigns)’, in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.17–45. For the campaign of the MSZP, see Ferenc Baja, ‘Evaluating the 2002 election campaign’, in *ibid.*, pp.484–91; Zoltán Lakner, ‘Határok nélkül: MSZP-kampány a kettéhasadt országban (Without limits: the campaign of the MSZP in a divided country)’, in *ibid.*, pp.109–25.
43. The government was paying for newspaper commercials under the title ‘Record of the Parliament’ and it was using public funds to finance the commercials.
44. Endre Dányi and Miklós Sükösd, ‘Fekete PR és politikai vírusmarketing: interaktív kommunikációs eszközök a kampányban (Black PR and political virusmarketing: interactive communication in the campaign)’, in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.276–94; Viktória Lugosi, ‘Jobboldali röplapdömping a kampányban (The Right’s extended use of political flyers in the campaign)’, in *ibid.*, pp.241–63.
45. György Petőcz, ‘Forza Hungaria! Olasz–Magyar párhuzamok (Forza Hungaria! Italian and Hungarian parallels)’, in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.232–40.
46. For the speech of Viktor Orbán delivered at the University of Physical Education on 9 April 2002, see the *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet*, 10 April 2002.
47. Special trains were set up to transport the participants coming from the countryside to Fidesz’s campaign event at Kossuth Square; the sound system was operated by the army; the pro-government press spoke of one and a half million participants, three or four times more than the real number of those present. Yet, a crowd of 300,00 or 500,000 still counted as huge and well surpassed the number of people who attended the anti-Csurka demonstration of the Democratic Charter in 1992.
48. For details on Orbán’s speech at Kossuth Square, see *Népszabadság*, 15 April 2002.
49. See *Népszabadság*, 15 April 2002.
50. The Status Law was augmented by the agreement reached by Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Năstase and Hungarian Prime Ministerer Viktor Orbán on 22 December 2001 that made it possible for citizens of Romania who were not of ethnic Hungarian origin to seek jobs legally in Hungary.
51. In his March 2002 campaign trip László Kövér condemned those who doubted in the feasibility of the government’s plan to organize the Olympic Games in Budapest in 2012 on several occasions; he expressed it such a way that it could be interpreted as a call for these people’s suicide by hanging themselves.
52. See Orbán’s speech, ‘Ten years after’, delivered at an international conference in Vienna, July 1999.
53. Cf. Gyula Tellér, ‘A rendszerváltozás két útja’ (Two roads of regime change), in Kurtán et al. (eds.), *Magyarország politikai évkönyve*, pp.17–28.
54. Cf. András Bozóki, ‘Politikai közösség vagy kulturális közösség? Az Orbán-kormány demokráciafelfogása’ (Political or cultural community? The Orbán government’s view of democracy), in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.161–85.
55. See the evaluation of the Bokros austerity package in Tamás Bauer, ‘Válságoktól a konszolidációig: az MSZP–SZDSZ kormánytöbbség 1995-ben’ (From crises to consolidation: the governmental majority of the SZDSZ and the MSZP in 1995), in Sándor Kurtán et al. (eds.), *Magyarország politikai évkönyve* (The political yearbook of Hungary) (Budapest: DKMKA, 1996), pp.72–9; Ferenc Rabár, ‘Volt-e gazdasági korszakváltás 1995-ben’ (Did

an economic regime change take place in 1995?) in *ibid.*, pp.255–60; András Vértes, ‘A fordulát és tényezői’ (The turnaround and its factors), in *ibid.*, pp.276–80.

56. Marta Tocsik, a lawyer engaged at a very high fee to negotiate compensation payments following the privatization of municipal assets, then transferred the fee – or much of it – to the Socialist Party; she was later charged with fraud.
- 1565 57. At the EU accession negotiations Hungary could not close the chapter on communication rights until the summer of 2002 because the Orbán government, together with MIÉP, did not want the advisory boards of the public service media to work on parity even though the country reports of the EU repeatedly urged the settlement of the issue.
- 1570 58. According to the 1998 decision of the Constitutional Court, MIÉP could form a parliamentary fraction with the number of MPs elected even if it did not reach the 15-member minimum that is the criterion of fraction formation in the House rules. This decision was correct and stemmed from the spirit of democracy since the House rules cannot overwrite the will of the citizens. However, the membership of the fraction was reduced in the meantime, and thus it did not reach the number of the elected MIÉP MPs. However, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly did not initiate the break-up of the MIÉP fraction since it was in the interest of the parties of the ruling coalition to keep that fraction alive. On the ‘opposition’ role of the MIÉP, see András Bozóki and Borbála Kriza, ‘Pártrendszer és közbeszéd: a félig lojális partook’ (Party system and public discourse: semi-loyal parties), in Kurtán Sándor et al. (eds.), *Magyarország politikai évkönyve* (The political yearbook of Hungary) (Budapest: DKMKA, 2002), pp.288–307.
- 1575 59. For details see Elizabeth Barrett, ‘Corruption and Anti-corruption Policy in Hungary’, in *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Corruption and Anti-corruption Policy* (Budapest and New York: Open Society Institute, 2002), pp.236–87.
- 1580 60. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 Oct. 2001.
61. To declare a city’s candidacy for organizing the Olympic Games there is no need either to collect signatures or follow any other kind of ‘popular initiative’.
62. Cf. László Kéri, *Orbán Viktor* (Viktor Orbán) (Budapest: Századvég, 1994); József Debreczeni, *Orbán Viktor* (Viktor Orbán) (Budapest: Osiris, 2002).
63. For details see Péter Kende, ‘Két magyar politikai közösség’ (Two Hungarian political communities), *Politikatudományi Szemle*, Vol.11, Nos.1–2 (2002), pp.121–33.
- 1585 64. Viktor Orbán, László Kövér, Lajos Simicska, András Wermer, János Áder and Attila Várhegyi belonged to the inner circle of the party leadership; Tamás Deutsch, Zoltán Pokorni, István Stumpf and József Szájer were on the periphery of the inner circle; other politicians of Fidesz did not take part in making political decisions within the organization.
65. Cf. Gábor Czene, ‘Isten útjait fürkészsze: az egyházak a választási kampányban’ (Figuring out God’s will: Churches in the election campaign), in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.455–60.
- 1590 66. Most of them could be found in the Hungarian Civic Co-operation Association and the Batthyány Circle of Professors; Ferenc Mádl, elected President of the Republic in 2000, belonged to these people.
67. For more details see Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
68. Cf. Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes and Bernard Manin (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 1595 69. On its perception, see Guy Lázár, ‘Jólét vagy szabadság? Közvéleménykutatások a rendszerváltásról (Well-being or freedom? Public opinion polls about the regime change)’, *Mozgó Világ*, Vol.19, No.8 (1993), pp.39–51.
70. For more details, see András Bozóki, ‘Rhetoric of Action’, in András Bozóki (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 1999), pp.263–83.
- 1600 71. András Körösnéyi, ‘Parlamentáris vagy ‘elnöki’ kormányzás? Az Orbán-kormány összehasonlító politológiai perspektívából (Parliamentary or ‘presidential’ governance? The Orbán government from a comparative political perspective)’, *Századvég*, Vol.5, No.3 (2001), pp.3–38.

72. György Petőcz, 'Forza Hungaria! Olasz-Magyar párhuzamok (Forza Hungaria! Italian and Hungarian parallels)', in Sükösd and Vásárhelyi (eds.), *Hol a határ?*, pp.232–40.
73. For more details, see the speech of Viktor Orbán delivered at the University of Physical Education on 9 April 2002, reported in *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet*, 10 April 2002.
- 1605 74. Cf. András Körösiényi, 'Vezérdemokrácia és az antik orátorok (Leader democracy and ancient orators)', Máté Szabó (ed.), *Demokrácia és politikatudomány a 21. században* (Democracy and political science in the 21st century) (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2002), pp.54–76.
75. See, for example, József Debreczeni's interview with Viktor Orbán after the elections, in Debreczeni, *Orbán Viktor*.
76. For more details see Zoltán Lakner, 'Körökbe zárva' (Encircled), *Élet és Irodalom*, 27 September 2002.
- 1610 77. Such groups were formed or reactivated, such as the Conscience '88, Hungarian Irredenta Movement, and the civic groups such as Alliance for the Nation, the Go Hungary! Movement, Movement of the Youth of April and so on. Cf. László Tamás Papp, 'Action Hongrie', *Élet és Irodalom*, 2 Aug. 2002; on the ambivalent relationship of the civic circles to Fidesz, see István Elek, 'Amatőrség és anarchia a polgári körökben' (Amateurism and anarchy in the civic circles) interview by Lajos Pogonyi, *Népszabadság*, 1 Oct. 2002.
- 1615 78. Despite two defeats of 2002 and 2006, Orbán still has a chance to return as prime minister in 2010 although he is increasingly criticized by members of his own party.

1620

1625

1630

1635

1640