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

It is customary to distinguish between periods of constitutional politics and normal politics.<sup>1</sup> When the over-politicized, feverish political life of a transitional phase becomes normal or 'boring' again, this can be viewed as the clearest signal that democracy is consolidating itself. That process began in Hungary in 1994 when the ex-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) came to power. The reformist socialist "technicians" slowly replaced the intellectual elite of the transitional period.<sup>2</sup> This did not necessarily change the way intellectuals thought about politics. The restructuring of the political class, its professionalization and separation from the intelligentsia did not result in any broadening or diversification of political discourse. At the same time, a large part of society turned away from politics and preferred to rely on experts. The gap between the civil sphere and the political elite widened. This may be seen as a post-transitional return to normalcy, but it resulted in voters having less influence on politics, and elected politicians facing less pressure to report on their actions. In this paper, I intend to explore the problems arising from this consolidation of democracy, with special attention to the New Right that ruled the country between 1998 and 2002.

One consequence of the narrowing down of political life in the mid-1990s was that many observers came to see the consolidation of democracy as a kind of 'restoration'.<sup>3</sup> Not in the sense of a return to the old system: it was clear that this could not happen. What returned was a 'plundering' politics based on rival networks of control, interest and patronage. The formation of political groups during the transitional period had upgraded this "network capital" and thus provided new opportunities for the party nomenclature.<sup>4</sup> In return for the acceptance of political reforms, the former elite was given a substantial share of the privatization profits. But there were major differences between countries of Central and Eastern Europe. On the western periphery of the Soviet empire, the party nomenclature had much less control over privatization than in Russia.

When the Socialists returned to power in 1994, in coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), this coincided with the end of the ten-year period of symbolic politics of the regime change. Until 1985, under the leadership of János Kádár, a de-politicizing, materialistic style of politics had prevailed. The leaders of the socialists had been trained in this political environment. The first "revolutionary" period of symbolic politics lasted from 1985 to 1990. Programs of political

<sup>1</sup> R. Dahrendorf, Ralf *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> L. P. King, I. Szelenyi *Theories of the New Class: Intellectuals and Power*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> A. Michnik, "The Velvet Restoration" *Transition*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1996), pp. 13-16.

<sup>4</sup> A. Czakó, Á., Sik, E., "A hálózati tőke a posztkommunista Magyarországon [Network Capital in Post-Communist Hungary]", *Mozgó Világ*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (1994), pp. 17-25.

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openness, speeches at opposition rallies, counter-projects of dissident circles and the roundtable method of constitution making were characteristic of this phase. The new model of politics was implemented through the mass media. "The symbolic center of the new eastern European democracies became the over-politicized and militant television".<sup>5</sup> The emerging multiparty system crystallized around groups that had opposed the regime and then played a key role in changing it.

Symbolic politics did not disappear, but its function changed. The symbolism of the change of regime was replaced by a 'system-creating,' institution-building symbolism. Those were times when the basic questions of democracy, the relationship to historic traditions and the European institutional system had to be the topics of debate. Constitutional politics is a politics of identity, in which questions of self-identification can not be avoided. The participants in debates and political battles represented historically determined but seemingly 'natural' world-views. 'Natural allies' always see 'natural enemies' in their political adversaries. The ideological catchwords of these alliances came from the Christian-national-conservative tradition and, on the other hand, from the anti-fascist left, and the westward looking Europeanists who questioned the return to a national past.

The shift to interest group based politics appeared in 1994, but its official birth was the introduction of the Bokros package in 1995. Lajos Bokros, the Minister of Finance, proposed a strategy for overcoming macroeconomic depression, all the more attractive since it seemed to respond to the hardships of transition and to link up with the formation of interest groups. This shift from symbolic to materialistic politics went together with the replacement of the 'regime changing' strategy of coalition building with a more opportunistic one. Accelerated deregulation and privatization, in the name of international economic competitiveness, weakened the state. As opposed to this, the Right – increasingly influential after the mid-1990s, advanced the idea of a stronger state committed to growth, participation and the public good. Campaigning on this platform the Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz-MPP) – led by Viktor Orbán - came to power in 1998, in coalition with two smaller parties.

**The "civic radicalism" of the New Right**

The new government was widely perceived – and liked to present itself - as representing the rising new bourgeoisie and the vigorous peasantry aspiring to bourgeois status, whereas its adversaries were identified with the old working class, the unmarketable civil servant strata, and the declining forces of the Budapest comprador intelligentsia. This way of thinking suggested that the defeated groups would soon end up in the dustbin of history, and give way to the healthy, dynamic and young bourgeois forces of the future. The most basic maxim of the new government was that democratic politics is a zero sum game: they believed that only victory matters, and political strategy should not be subordinated to any other criteria.

In 1998, the privatization process was finished, state wealth had been distributed and the new government was left with a weak state. It was clear that the consolidation of democracy could not be permanent if the citizens did not trust the democratic state. The 1980s image of a movement-like civil society opposing dictatorship had faded. However, the classic liberal rhetoric of the 'weak state vs. strong civil society', much used during the first half of the 1990s, was pushed into the background, because the idea of a weak state was now less popular and often associated with

<sup>5</sup> G. M. Tamás, "A válság [The Crisis]", *Népszabadság* (September 27, 1995).



a weak civil society. With the Fidesz-MPP government, the image of a strong and determined state reappeared. If there is no taxation without democratic representation, then the obverse might also be true: democratic representation cannot be maintained without strict taxation. A republic can only be 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 else but 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. Between 1996 and 1998, Fidesz-MPP politicians repeated this assertive republican credo. When coming to power however, they went further and insisted that citizens should not only contribute to the public good by paying taxes punctually, but also by accepting the notion that the government can have a creed for 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.

From the beginning, the Fidesz-MPP government was handicapped: it would have realized 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. A civic revolution cannot be realized in a consolidating society that has already gone through a civic revolution. The civic radicalism of the government was directed at keeping the support of a heterogeneous bloc of voters, and found only limited expression in the exercise of power. From time to time the government ignored established law; it created new procedural precedents; it brought the mutual distrust of democratic political practice and strengthened its purely juridical aspect. To a certain extent, in the first six months of this center-right government, a *simulation* of a regime change took place. It was as if there were a 'double power' in the country, and an "October Revolution" should have followed the February one. It does not follow from the above, however, that the measures of the government were invariably mistaken. It made some good decisions from the point of view of a functioning democracy (for instance doing away with the almost absurd local government system of social insurance, and putting those trade unionist lobbies in their place) and some not so good ones. But it was the convulsive and aggressive style, and the polarizing strategy, rather than any specific measures that affected the quality of Hungarian democracy. Style is not secondary to 'content,' because raising cultural stigmatization to the level of government policy is alien to a consolidated democracy. The essence of democratic policy is not total victory or defeat, but an appropriate sense of proportion: government and opposition giving proportionate answers to the steps of the other. In a democracy every victory and defeat is temporary and relative: it is dependent upon the election cycle and is never total.

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### **The defeat of the New Right: causes and implications**

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 (it was 71 per cent in the first round and 73 per cent in the second). Never before had there been such a strong polarization, nor had democratic Hungary ever seen such an

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emotionally charged, highly passionate race. Never had the governing parties conducted so biting and negative a campaign, fearing defeat, and never had they been able to bring such masses of people into 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 having lost the elections. Never before had the two victorious parties been so close spiritually and emotionally, in spite of their contrary origins: MSZP, the legal successor of the former Communist Party, and the liberal SZDSZ, which can be traced back to the underground opposition of communist times.

The reasons for the defeat of the Fidesz-MPP were mainly its confrontational style of government and the mistakes made during the campaign. The classic campaign strategy of center-right parties dictates securing the radical-right votes first, then with the approaching elections, a gradual move to the center should follow. Most elections can only be won from the center. During its campaign, from the end of February, Fidesz-MPP moved closer and closer to the far right to attract supporters of the Hungarian Justice and Life party (MIÉP), but it was too late. By the end of March, the party had no time to return to the center: it became the prisoner of its own MIÉP-like rhetoric. As a result, MSZP was able to move into the vacuum at the center with its milder campaign, and at the same time the Center Party, an organization supposed to have no chance at all, was making some headway. So, what Fidesz-MPP gained on the right it lost in the center.

The main reason for the Fidesz-MPP election defeat, however, was the way the Orbán government had exercised power in the period between 1998 and 2002, and this was linked to their conception of democracy. The ideologists of the party claimed that the 'false consensus' achieved between the old and new elite during the transition had proved to be harmful. The Prime Minister tended to consider the people who had sat around the 1989 roundtable as regime preservers rather than regime changers. He did not hide his opinion that the transition was not over until a change of elite had taken place, and the old network stopped functioning. In order to reach this goal, he had to break with the consensual conception of democracy, and replace it with a revolutionary one.

The leaders of Fidesz-MPP not only wanted to make democracy work, but also to re-create it in their own image. In order to legitimize this, they needed an ideology that would make it easy to communicate the message. This ideology was the 'spiritual revival' of the country, conveniently linked to the celebration of the millennium of the Hungarian State. Fidesz-MPP in power wanted to address the political community, naturally divided in every democracy; its aim was to reconstruct – according to the ruling party's own values – the cultural-moral community that lived in the imagination of Hungarians. The New Right began its term by promising to revive the republican spirit, and to empower the country to revive itself, relying on its inner strength. 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 of 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' the citizens of the country.

The main reason for the defeat of Fidesz-MPP was thus their conflation of the idea of political community and cultural community, and the attempt to build a political strategy upon this misconception.<sup>6</sup> The Orbán government believed that it would re-create the political community

<sup>6</sup> A. Bozóki *Politikai pluralizmus Magyarországon, 1987-2003*. [Political Pluralism in Hungary, 1987-2003]. (Budapest: Századvég, 2003).

from above, through the reconstruction of the cultural community, and by doing it in the way they prescribed by their preferred values.

During the 1989-90 democratic transition, priority had been given to the demonstration of breaking with the old regime; the dominant symbolism was about a line drawn between past and present. The political elite and their followers spoke the language of moral politics. After that, the most important issue was the mitigation of crises caused by the vast economic changes, at which point political discourse became dominated by pragmatic debates over state finances, a balanced budget 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 crises and how to achieve a successful transition.

But once a major change in an economic system is achieved, and the economy has gained momentum, political discourse tends to focus on issues of distribution. That seemed to be happening in Hungary when the political force that was elected in 1998 openly supported the middle classes, regarding them as the major driving force behind the economic and moral development of the nation., while paying little attention to other social strata: to the old, the uneducated, the marginalized and the unemployed. What proved to be a novelty in this situation – as compared to international trends in democratic consolidation – was the aspiration of this group to divide society. In times of economic prosperity, this is quite unusual, and raises questions about the ultimate priorities of the government.

There are two types of politicians: dividers and unifiers, and it depends on historical circumstances whether the time is ripe for one or for the other. During periods of radical social change, priority is usually given to dividing policies 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 government was that it proposed to consolidate the country while openly aiming at division. The dichotomies (us vs. them, patriots vs. quislings, nationalists vs. anti-nationalists), well known from the political discourse of the 1990-1994 MDF regime, reappeared in a new context. Tension was created between symbolic politics and the consolidation tasks of the government. How is it possible to consolidate by using the rhetoric of a 'second revolution'? More and more analysts voiced their suspicion that the government was indeed de-consolidating.

The democratic deficit of the government was clearly reflected in its attitude toward parliament. Plenary sessions were held less frequently, the right to question ministers was curtailed, and it took a longer time to react to political events. Supporters of the government described this as a "working parliament", as if the elected assembly were there not to discuss political-alternatives, thus orienting the citizens, but to diligently work out government decisions in committees and then put them to a quick vote. According to an often-quoted remark of the Prime Minister, this parliament was functioning well without an opposition.

Another peculiarity of the Hungarian 'working parliament' was that it lacked opposition-led investigating committees. Those committees had to be opposition-led – according to the rules of the House – because checks and balances were considered to be the essence of democracy. The governing parties of the period between 1998 and 2002 failed to vote for any investigating

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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. In all these ways, the leadership of Fidesz-MPP consciously burned the bridges of co-operation with the socialists and the liberals. By doing so, Orbán set the stage – emotionally as well – for a future MSZP – SZDSZ coalition.

During the time of the Fidesz-MPP government, a new form of “state capture” appeared in the Hungarian political life. The term “state capture” originally refers to a situation in which the government becomes the captive of interest-groups – not chosen by it – and economic lobbies. The public good is sacrificed and falls prey to the particularisms of the groups, which tear the state apart. Interest groups thus conquer the state ‘from within’. The Orbán government combined such policies with militant rhetoric about national interests. Claiming the democratic approval of the voters, it operated the state – contrary to its stated aims – as if it were its own political and economic venture. The state had its own bank, its own security services, its own revenue office, which were used, parallel to the original functions, as means to annihilate political and economic rivals. In larger construction and cultural projects the Orbán government neglected the tender system or paid lip service to it, and took care that most of these commissions were in some way profitable to some of these state-protected groups.<sup>7</sup> In practice, the government gradually ceased to ensure equal chances or remain 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 improve the conditions of all Hungarians – the state began to behave as if it were a patrimonial lord: it rewarded the ‘good’ Hungarians, and punished the ‘bad’ ones – including communities and districts that were governed by the opposition, and their population. The traditional question of Hungarian politics came to the fore: who is a Hungarian? In order to win tenders, professional performance was often not enough; performing “Hungarianism” was required. The entrepreneur had to prove that he was a ‘good’ Hungarian, in other words, a generous supporter of the governing parties. State capture was realized in a way that the democratically approved government did not use the state for the same purposes that are customary in European democracies. Under the Orbán government, and as a result of its authoritarian methods, the country was drifting dangerously fast towards the practices of post-Soviet Eastern Europe.

By the end of the government’s term, the policy of ‘total offensive’ [*egész pályás letámadás*] was clearly more than a temporary device to complete the change of elites. Orbán’s offensive determined his political career and became a part of his personality.<sup>8</sup> This combative, revolutionary mentality has its advantages and disadvantages, depending on the historical situation. For those who had different ideas about democratic consolidation, the method of permanent aggression was simply too much.

To sum up, the Orbán government did succeed in installing a new political elite, but it had a further agenda: the cultural division of the country. The advantage to be gained from this was the reintegration of the right that was shattered in 1994 and thus avoiding the fate of the fragmented Polish right. By challenging the principles, practices and institutions of the 1989 constitutional consensus, the Orbán government defined its own social basis, creating thereby two parallel Hungaries – a battlefield of two, strong rival political cultures.<sup>9</sup> This symbolic political discourse, which had become an integral part of political strategy, also concealed the creation of a less

<sup>7</sup> E. Barrett, “Corruption and Anti-Corruption Policy in Hungary”, *Monitoring the Accession States: Corruption and Anti-Corruption Policy*. (Budapest and New York: Open Society Institute, 2002), pp. 236-287.

<sup>8</sup> L. Kéri *Orbán Viktor* [Viktor Orbán]. (Budapest: Századvég, 1994); J. Debreczeni *Orbán Viktor*. [Viktor Orbán]. (Budapest: Osiris, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> P. Kende, “Két magyar politikai közösség [Two Hungarian Political Communities]”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, Vol. 11, Nos. 1-2 (2002), pp. 121-133.



visible elite that was jeopardizing consolidation and embroiled in a struggle with a public that was watchful of constitutional rights and politics. Those who voiced their misgivings about constitutional 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' or 'against' those in power.

Electoral defeat did not change the fact that the Hungarian Right was based on a social coalition and expressed its needs on the political level. The coalition and its corresponding ideological constituency was far from homogeneous. For one thing, Fidesz-MPP consciously built its clientele in the most literal sense. Another layer was kept together by anticommunist beliefs: the Orbán government managed to convince them that if they voted for the opposition, they would automatically be aligning themselves with the Communist past. The third layer, the circle of religious people, partially overlaps with the second one. The Orbán government encouraged the traditional Churches to become publicly and politically active. During the celebration of the thousand years of the Hungarian State, this went so far that it raised doubts about the traditional constitutional distinction between church and state. Addressing these three layers, Fidesz-MPP was thus able to forge an alliance of originally very heterogeneous elements. The more moderate leaders of Fidesz-MPP won over the conservatives in the center, (including the President of the Republic), while the other end of the coalition could safely count on the votes of the less educated people in smaller communities, most of whom were losers in the transition and could be attracted by radical rhetoric.

Even so, this coalition might not have come into being if the need of the people for a strong, efficient and protective state had not been widely perceived. The deregulatory, market-oriented program of the democratic transition made people feel that there was no social institution to protect and defend them. Society was saturated with the fear that along with the turmoil in the world, the state belief in standing up 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. This overwhelming and reasonable demand was recognized by Fidesz-MPP, and they took pains to meet it. They were right to assume that there is no democracy without a state. But they were less able to understand that the state must also be constitutional. Instead of making the state a means of realizing what is good for the public, Fidesz 'made the state its home', and its own. Since the state became the servant of one interest group (one that was opposing the socialists, and presenting that opposition as an alternative), the rhetoric of a "strong state" came to be seen by many people as a fig leaf for nepotism. By strengthening those institutions that were financed publicly, but disconnected from parliamentary responsibility, the dividing line between privatization and nationalization was blurred.

#### **Concluding remarks: the quality of democracy**

It is a basic prerequisite of democratic consolidation that democracy must enjoy wide legitimacy among elite groups as well as throughout society. It is dependent upon the development and consolidation of a democratic political culture. In this political culture the participants do not think in terms of games that move beyond the limits of realizing interests in a democratic way; this

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attitude is reflected in every law, political procedure and the details of bureaucratic administration, as well as in everyday political life. Democratic consolidation may be studied at the level of elites, organizations or citizens.<sup>10</sup> Consolidation takes place among the elite when politicians, opinion formers, prominent figures of culture and business, and 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 which secures it deserves their active support. Political leaders, too, acknowledge the constitutional right of each other to engage in a peaceful contest for power. They are also aware of the fact that the law and all regulations must be observed, and thus do not encourage their supporters to violate mutually respected constitutional norms of political behavior. The same applies to the norms of the government of all of the major parties, interest groups and movements. 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.

There is more to democracy than free elections: much depends on how the freely elected government behaves, namely, in the way in which it exercises its authority between elections. Does the governing party realize that it is in its own best interest to adhere to constitutional rules, which might benefit them at a time when they are in the opposition? Is the regime willing to lose sight of its long-term interests and sacrifice them for the success of short-term tactical interests, which would mean curtailing the rights of the opposition? Hungarian democracy is not welfare democracy yet. From a long-term historical perspective, the years that have passed since the transition amount to very little; but during this period, there was not only a complete transformation of the political system, but also the shock of privatization. Processes that have taken decades in other countries have been completed in Hungary practically overnight. The answer that Hungarians gave to communism was a tactic of survival and shrewdness; to the new capitalism, they reacted with aggression and appropriation. These are all individualistic responses. As if the price to pay for acquiring wealth and advancement were the loss of honor and the rejection of solidarity.

After the shock of political and economic transition, the political class in power had to face the challenge of democratic consolidation. In theory, consolidation goes hand in hand with social peace, the healing of wounds and the extension of prosperity to a gradually widening segment of the population. Liberal democracy aims to secure 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 1998-2002 New Right coalition government attempted to consolidate by means of a “second revolution.” But it soon became clear that consolidation could be achieved 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 he was looking at his last chance to rearrange power structures. The program of “more than government change” was an effort to modernize and mobilize the Right. It was an attempt to build a ‘Fidesz-Hungary’ and to entrench a new political structure – very different from the socialist one. Orbán believed – and he was right, up to a point – that it is better if two oligarchies compete for power, than if there is just one. He strove to organize an economic and social base for the contest of these two ‘Hungaries’. Instead of social reforms he saw it as his mission to change the elite, secure key positions for his people, build a new base of support and a definitive institutional background for Fidesz-Hungary. He failed to align the majority of the people with his program.

<sup>10</sup> L. Diamond *Developing Democracy Toward Consolidation*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).



Orbán subsumed the political community under the cultural community (the latter defined from the perspective of the Right), and this led to his downfall. It is one of the basic characteristics of liberal democracy that political and cultural communities are utterly different: any number of cultural communities may 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 loudly proclaims that he is not committed to the principles of liberal democracy. Fidesz-MPP government tried to balance the division of the political community with the reconstruction of the imaginary cultural community of the nation within and beyond the borders. The Prime Minister kept referring to 15 million Hungarians (including those living in neighboring countries), but the citizens increasingly felt that he was only pursuing the interest of voters on the Right. When he argued for the spiritual strengthening and reuniting of Hungarians, those sympathetic to the Left were bound to feel that this rhetoric of the spiritual reunification of Hungarians across borders was less than authentic: it served to make people accept the symbolic and normative structure of an imaginary cultural community dear to the government.

Orbán's attempts to re-draw the political map through social mobilization are reminiscent of the 1940s and 1950s in Argentina under President Juan Perón, or 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 situation was observable in Italy in 2001, where the former power of multiple parties disappeared, and the frontline of political struggle lay between pro-Berlusconi and anti-Berlusconi groups.

Populism is a common label for the political style that reduces the democratic process to a choice between issues like life and death, truth and lies, past and future, good and evil. Populism also entails a redefinition of the role of the state: it becomes paternalistic. Other characteristics of populism are: some form of economic nationalism, moralistic rhetoric constantly referring to the ideas of nation and justice, a steady process of searching out and stigmatizing the "enemies of the nation" (traitors within, communists, big business, the financial oligarchy, cosmopolitan intellectuals and so on), and the polarization and reduction of political pluralism to one single dimension. During those few years political competition did not center around different programs and rationally debatable arguments but was reduced to a passionate and symbolically mediated metapolitical war of "us versus them" which was justified for "cultural" reasons. National symbols (the flag, the circle ribbon, and the national anthem) that represent the unity of the nation were appropriated by Fidesz and its supporters, thus stressing the idea of division. The community of national politics was identified with the circle of Fidesz-MPP supporters, and they were called upon to 'defend the nation' It soon became evident that populism did not need intellectuals, only propagandists.

One of the most important components of a populist policy is a leader-centered discourse, accompanied by various techniques of the personalization of power. This was reinforced by television, and a culture of commercials and video clips that during the last decade became ever more effective in opinion-making, as well as by the process of overall 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 as opposed to those that convey their policies using the classic devices of verbal debates and programs. Feeling it becomes more important than conscious understanding and acceptance. These feelings are most accessible through charismatic personalities who communicate the message of the party. If there exists such a charismatic personality, then the message can become

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metapolitical: instead of a confrontation of political programs, symbols, tokens of belief, religious or quasi-religious convictions clash. The personality that conveys the message becomes the message itself. In this way the political leader becomes the leader of a charismatic group that is similar to a religious community, and becomes a figure who is central to the experience, and whose politics give those –especially the younger generations - who are searching for identity, the opportunity to “feel” it. In a ‘leader-democracy’<sup>11</sup> for the followers of the policy it conveys the message of experience, immersion and a sense of belonging together; ideologies become identities; the rational-argumentative type of policy becomes a policy of identity.

Obviously, a large part of Hungarian society felt the need – at least a temporary one - for this type of commanding behavior. Those living in the countryside needed it more than people living in towns. They could feel that there was someone who told them in an understandable and simple, yet competent way, what should be done in this irrational, decadent and confusing world. During Orbán’s term in office, some changes in the manner of exercising power could be seen as positive. Political authority became more dynamic, more explicitly associated with a project, and seemed to be reaching out to common people. The government looked beyond everyday problems, and focused on forming an understandable and attractive vision of the future. The elections however, proved that in the end, 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 them beginning in their present. Hungarian voters were not inclined to disregard the circumstances of their everyday lives.

In his statements after the elections Viktor Orbán found no connections between the performance of the government and the defeat of Fidesz-MPP. He tended to explain the defeat in terms of transcendental causes, and even after losing the elections he tried to divert attention from the mistakes his government had made. The leaders of Fidesz-MPP could not face the fact that they had made mistakes serious enough to lose an election in times of prosperity. After the defeat, the former Prime Minister intended to remain 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 elections, he refused to accept posts in the party or within the faction, and declined to play the traditional role of opposition. By organizing ‘civic circles’, and spontaneously active groups, he transferred his political activities to the activities of a movement, and announced his belief that his followers were not in the minority because the ‘nation cannot be in opposition’. He wanted to represent the ‘nation’ by rising above opposition parties and organizing the infrastructure and social base of a new, imaginary ‘Future-Hungary’. 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 grand alliance of the Right.

To repeat a crucial point, one of the lessons to be learned from the 1998-2002 electoral period is that in democracy, political and cultural communities are two different things. In one political community more than one cultural community can exist side by side, because democracy considers the groups to which different religions, lifestyles, taste and culture belong equal. The New Right government, however, wanted to restructure the cultural community according to a right-wing cultural value-system, and by doing so it suggested that whoever failed to agree with that could not be a member of the political community. It alienated people who did not believe in the ‘order-authority-homeland-work-discipline-family’ type of value system communicated by the government. It remains to be seen how definitive the setback was. ■

<sup>11</sup> A. Körösnéyi, “Vezérdemokrácia és az antik orátorok [Leader Democracy and Ancient Orators]”, M. Szabó (ed.) *Demokrácia és politikatudomány a 21. században*. [Democracy and Political Science in the 21st Century]. (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2002), pp. 54-76.



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Proof-reading: Paul McCullough