

Hungary's 'Rebalanced' Media Ecology

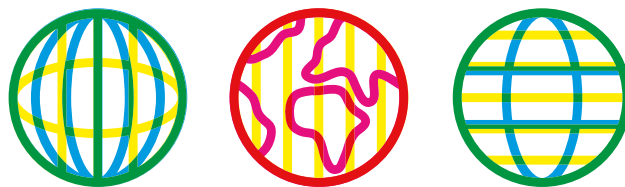
Toxic Narratives on Migration, Gender,
and Europe

Roy Sommer and Ida Fábián
(University of Wuppertal)



opportunities

for a fair narrative on migration



opportunities

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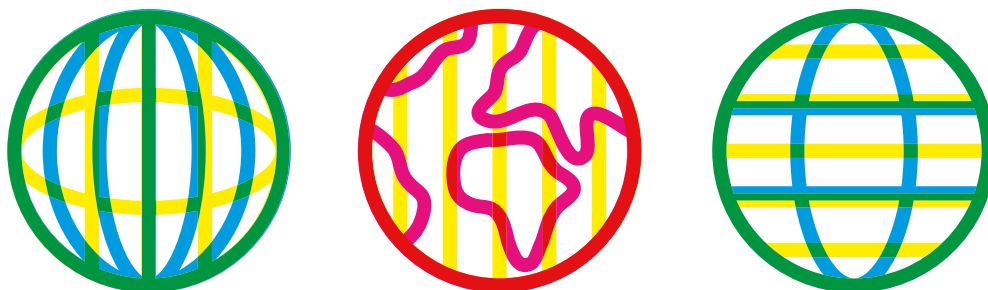
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Toxic Narratives on Migration, Gender,
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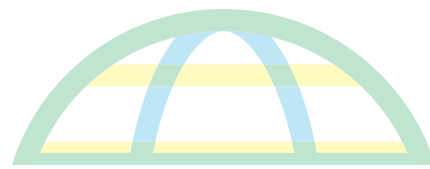
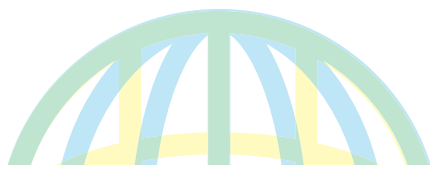
Lead Beneficiary: University of Wuppertal (BUW)

Authors: Roy Sommer and Ida Fábián



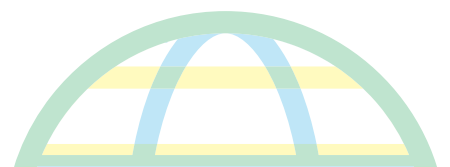
Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Hungary's 'Rebalanced' Media Landscape: A Survey	8
3. Hungary's Toxic Narratives: Migration, Gender, Europe	11
4. Conclusion	15
5. References.....	16
6. Appendix	18
6.1 Appendix 1: Overview of National Consultations from 2011 to 2022	18
6.2 Appendix 2: National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism (2015).....	19
6.3 Appendix 3: National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism (2015), Billboard Campaign	22
6.4 Appendix 4: National Consultation "The Soros Plan"	23
6.5 Appendix 5: National Consultation "The Soros Plan," Billboard Campaign.....	24
Endnotes	25



Abstract

Hungary has the most restrictive migration policy in the European Union, and its discriminatory LGBT law and anti-European rhetoric keep alienating more liberal member states. Starting with a survey of Hungary's 'rebalanced' media landscape, this essay explores the narrative dynamics of Viktor Orbán's nationalist rhetoric. We focus on the government's manipulative 'national consultation' strategy and billboard campaigns to show how new communication channels are established which allow the government to address its national audience directly, making it largely independent from both legacy media and social media. We further argue that the "immigration and terrorism" narrative of 2015 is designed to fuel ontological insecurity and, like the toxic narratives on gender and Brussels initiated by Orbán, serves a dual purpose: it fosters the centripetal dynamics of Hungary's nationalist narrative while fueling the centrifugal dynamics of an anti-liberal vision of Europe.



1. Introduction

Respect LGBT rights or leave the European Union, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told Hungary's premier as EU leaders confronted Viktor Orbán over a law that bans schools from using materials seen as promoting homosexuality. Several EU summit participants spoke of the most intense personal clash among the bloc's leaders in years on Thursday night. "It was really forceful, a deep feeling that this could not be. It was about our values; this is what we stand for," Rutte told reporters on Friday. (Bazcynska 2021, n. pag.)

This short message by news agency Reuters conveys the frustration felt not only by Mark Rutte following yet another provocation by Viktor Orbán, Hungary's longest-serving prime minister.¹ The values Rutte mentions, the ideas that the EU stands for, have been repeatedly rejected by a government responsible for democratic backsliding, discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, and a gender policy supporting heteronormativity and a return to patriarchal gender roles. What is more, Hungary's strong stance against immigration and integration, celebrated by right-wing parties across Europe, ignores refugee rights and discredits the core idea of European values and solidarity. To this end, the government has created and spread the strategic conspiracy narrative against the so-called Soros Plan which, allegedly, "is to push the languages and cultures of Europe into the background so that integration of illegal immigrants happens much more quickly" (see section 3).

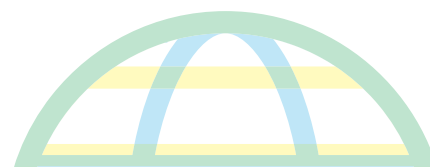
Given Orbán's anti-EU stance, it is somewhat surprising that a Huxit, following the example of Brexit, is not on the agenda. One possible explanation is that while Orbán and his party, FIDESZ, continue to enjoy great popularity in Hungary, leaving the EU is unpopular among Hungarian voters who have consistently shown high levels of support for the European Union (see section 4). Another factor is competition among right-wing parties: the Volner Party, founded by former member of Hungary's conservative political party Jobbik János Volner, openly seeks to leave the European Union.² Orbán, in contrast, seems bent on changing the EU from within.³

This article analyses the narrative strategy of the Orbán government with a focus on the narrative dynamics of migration discourses in Hungary.⁴ Our thesis is that Orbán's political rhetoric is best understood as a strategic narrative addressing two audiences simultaneously,⁵ the Hungarian public on the one hand, and liberal European governments on the other. The goals of this strategy are to destabilize the EU (centrifugal narrative dynamics), while ensuring support at home. The latter strategy is aimed at manipulating public opinion in Hungary while pretending to foster innovative forms of deliberative democracy and political participation. To this end, the Orbán government employs a polling system, first introduced in 2010: the so-called National Consultation is designed to develop and disseminate right-wing steering narratives which routinely employ disinformation, falsehoods, and conspiracy theories.

The article is divided into three parts. In section 2, we provide a media ecological survey of key developments of media in Hungary. The concept of media ecologies, originally proposed by Neil Postman in 1970, advocates a holistic approach to public communication and mass media (see Carraciolo et al. 2023). The ecological metaphor emphasizes a systemic approach to communication, emphasizing the role of media environments or media landscapes in shaping our experience of the world. According to Paolo Granata (2021, 8), "the media are our habits and habitat, the infrastructure of that invisible and complex network that is the human ecosystem." Our overview shows how Hungary's media landscape has been subjected to a long-term 'rebalancing' strategy by the government, leading to increased polarization and a precarious situation for independent media.



Section 3 focuses on the alternative media employed by the government, i.e., the “national consultation” (*Nemzeti Konzultáció*), a survey routinely conducted by the current Hungarian government; unlike opinion polls, it is not based on statistically average groups of people but regularly addresses all Hungarian households. These surveys are accompanied by large-scale billboard campaigns and the news-oriented *About Hungary* website run by the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister. We analyze the ‘national consultations’ conducted in 2015 (“National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism” / “Nemzeti Konzultáció a bevándorlásról és a terrorizmusról”) and 2017 (“About the Soros-Plan” / “A Soros-Tervről”), showing why they should be viewed as tools designed for manipulation rather than consultation and participation, even though they appear to have the desired centripetal effect of ensuring support for Orbán’s government. We also argue that the official narratives on migration and Brussels serve an ancillary function with respect to the underlying narrative of a Great Hungary, a narrative which has a centrifugal effect with respect to the EU, promoting European disintegration. Hungary’s media ecology thus generates a polarized, and polarizing, narrative dynamics – a challenge for media theories developed to account for opinion-building in pluralist democracies.



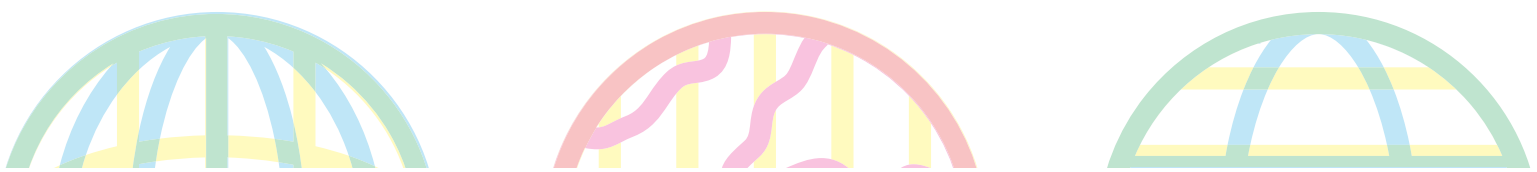
2. Hungary's 'Rebalanced' Media Landscape: A Survey

The Hungarian media landscape, as we know it today, is a relatively recent development. As Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2008, 71) points out, the phase of transition which followed the end of communism saw the emergence of new, free media in Eastern Europe: "Countries that have made the most rapid progress with the reforms did also privatize the state media, took it off the budgets of the national and regional authorities, and pursued economic and regulatory policies aimed at creating an environment in which the media business could take hold." The transition was particularly fast in the new member states of the EU, among them Hungary: "If we look back in time, we find Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic evolving from not free to free in the space of only two years (1989–1991), with a year of 'partly free' in between. This is 'revolution.'" (71)

With the benefit of hindsight, one has to conclude that this initial 'revolutionary' phase was soon followed by a backlash whose origins can be traced back to Viktor Orbán's return to power in 2010. Today, Hungary's media landscape is characterized by "limited political and media pluralism" (Bajomi-Lázár 2019, 620). Through measures like the redistribution of radio and television frequencies and awarding senior positions in media organisations to government-friendly candidates, Viktor Orbán's successive governments "have gradually taken informal control of most media outlets, including the publicly owned MTVA (an umbrella organization of 14 public service radio stations and television channels as well as the national news agency)" (620). As the private KESMA Foundation, founded in 2018, which coordinates the news services of around 500 private outlets across the country,⁶ is also affiliated with the government, "opposition voices are hardly covered outside the capital city Budapest; only some online news sites and the evening news bulletins of the private commercial television channel RTL Klub provide exceptions to the rule" (Bajomi-Lázár 2019, 620–621). Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), an NGO advocating the freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism, comes to a similar conclusion: "Since returning to power in 2010, Orbán has unceasingly attacked media pluralism and independence. After public broadcasting was turned into a propaganda organ, many private media outlets were taken over or silenced."⁷

How can a government of what is, after all, still a democratic country and EU member state, exert control over the media without using obvious forms of censorship? A key element of such a media strategy is creating and exploiting grey areas which facilitate what political scientists call media capture. Media capture means the takeover of media by external actors like investors whose interests are both economic and political, thus subverting the democratic functions of independent media, such as providing unbiased information, reliable news, and investigative journalism. Mungiu-Pippidi (2008, 73) offers an in-depth analysis of the conditions for and indicators of media capture in post-communist states:

Among the features that make the landscape of media capture we can count concentrated, nontransparent ownership of media outlets, with important political actors controlling the media, a strong linkage between media and political elites, and important infiltration of the media by secret services. Indicators of media capture can give us important information on the trend the media is on, toward more freedom or more capture. We can find precise indicators to measure capture, although indirectly. For instance, a large sector of nonviable media living on covert sponsorship indicates a captured, not an autonomous media. The expectation toward media in democratic countries is of economic viability, if not of clear profit. (73)



Two factors facilitating media capture, i.e., close ties between political elites and media entrepreneurs and the concentration of media outlets in concerns, can be observed in Hungary, according to RSF: “The ruling party, Fidesz, has seized de facto control of 80% of the country’s media through political and economic manoeuvres and the purchase of news organisations by friendly oligarchs.”⁸ Advertising revenue is of vital importance in this context, as the IPI Hungary press freedom mission report 2022 points out: “In Hungary the state is the largest advertiser in the media market. In 2020 government bodies, ministries and state-owned companies spent €79 million euros on advertising – around one third of the total advertising revenue of the media market.” (6) RSF has pointed out that pro-government media conglomerate KESMA receives approximately 85% of this state advertising revenue.⁹ The IPI report claims that “no legislation exists which provides fair and transparent criteria for the distribution of state advertising in Hungary,” concluding that “funding in Hungary is distributed according to political affiliation and loyalty” (n. pag.).

This assessment has been rejected – predictably, but with a surprising justification – by Zoltán Kovács, the government’s international spokesman and secretary of state for international communication and relations. Kovács insists that “Hungary’s media market is the most pluralistic in the EU because conservative media were given equal weight to liberal media, defending the government’s media policy as an effort to rebalance the media market to ensure diversity of views” (6). Interestingly, Kovács doesn’t deny the government’s interference with the media system through strategic public spending, but justifies it as a ‘rebalancing’ measure. This argument is clearly at odds with the democratic notion of independent media and potentially constitutes an infringement of the EU rules on State aid.¹⁰ In 2022, the European Commission has referred Hungary to the EU’s Court of Justice over two cases concerning freedom of speech, i.e., the controversial Child Protection Act and the refusal to grant a broadcasting licence to independent, liberal Klubrádió, a radio station often critical of the government.¹¹

Media capture through favoritism as a key element of the Hungarian government’s rebalancing strategy is accompanied by discriminatory measures such as denying a frequency license to critical broadcaster Klubrádió. Such measures create a hostile environment for independent news media and critical journalism. Free Press Unlimited, an international press freedom organization, observes self-censorship among journalists and editors as a consequence, and criticizes that independent journalists are subject of “governmental smear campaigns”:

The government regularly accuses critical media of disseminating false information and of receiving funding from George Soros, a billionaire of Hungarian and Jewish origin. In addition to this, journalists critical to the government are often harassed online by ruling party supporters. They are attacked by trolls, flooding them with comments with many personal elements, especially to female journalists.¹²

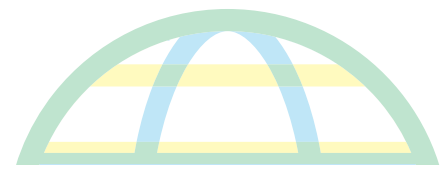
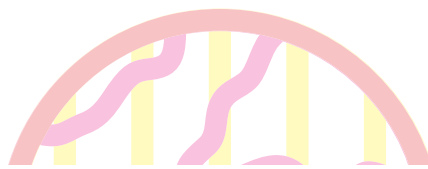
One example which illustrates the pressures on independent journalism is the fate of the popular news website index.hu. After a take-over by Orbán-friendly investors, the editor-in-chief at *Index*, Szabolcs Dull, was made redundant – he had publicly voiced concern about political interventions and the loss of journalistic independence (Kahlweit 2020, n. pag.). Amid public protests, more than fifty journalists from the editorial team of index.hu resigned to start a crowd-funded independent news-website, telex.hu, which has been online since September 2020. Financial independence doesn’t, however, guarantee journalistic freedom, given the more subtle measures used by the government to suppress critical voices. In a contribution to the International Press Institute website titled “How Hungary’s pro-government outlets are favoured at press briefings,” Veronika Munk and Ferenc Bakró-Nagy (Telex) criticize the common practice of “overlooking” critical journalists during press briefings: “Regardless of viewership, popularity, or readership, the government gives preference to pro-government journalists and their media outlets during its regular press conferences. Critical media outlets, such as Telex, are left standing at the back of the line.” (Munk and Bakró-Nagy 2022, n. pag.) Their survey of the average order of questioning at government briefings shows that independent and critical media are ignored systematically. This is highly problematic considering that “(t)here are hardly any opportunities left in Hungary for journalists to freely and publicly ask government officials about anything” (ibid.).



In 2022, after Orbán was elected prime minister for the third time since his return to power in 2010, the KESMA chose to downsize its operations. According to Judit Szakács and Éva Bognár, this is no coincidence: “The closure of media outlets just after the elections suggests a view of the media as a political instrument. It also signals a shift towards social media, used by 61% in Hungary, in Fidesz’s media strategy.” (Szakács and Bognár 2023, 80) The first observation is in line with the findings of a study of the media coverage of the 2016 referendum on migrant quota conducted by János Tóth (2021, 512–513), which found compelling evidence that “what appear to be pro-government, bottom-up, self-organized social media communities in fact have close ties to the FIDESZ government”. Szakács and Bognár’s second observation, a shift towards social media, also resonates with Tóth’s analysis which also finds a surprising level of negative sentiments toward a government-initiated event even on pro-government online media outfits, in this case a Facebook channel, concluding that pro-government online media were “either not very good in controlling sentiments in favor of the referendum, or they did not even try” (514).

The latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2023) shows that this is not an isolated case:¹³ In the section on Hungary, Szakács and Bognár (2023, 80) hold that “Megafon Centre, a conservative social media incubator that trains pro-government influencers and promotes their posts, has been pushing the government’s narratives to Hungarian Facebook users’ feeds.” Although the freedom of the press still exists in theory, in practice economic pressure increases, creating an imbalance in the media ecology. This is confirmed by a recent country report on Hungary by the Euromedia Ownership Monitor (Bajomi-Lázár, Krasztev 2022): “In sum, the re-distribution of the various media resources starting in 2010, and in particular that of state advertising whose ratio grew from an estimated 3% in 2010 to 32% in 2018 [...], has by now created an uneven playing field for different media, favouring those in line with the government’s narratives.”¹⁴

Economic factors and unfair practices which disadvantage independent media are certainly warning signs to be taken seriously; Attila Bátorfy (2019) sees Hungary on the path toward an authoritarian media system. Equally worrying, however, is that the government is not content with meddling with the media but has established alternative communication channels. Bypassing both legacy media and digital news outlets, the government’s polling system and billboard campaigns are key elements of a narrative strategy which has helped to promote and disseminate highly controversial government views on immigration, integration, gender, and the European Union.



3. Hungary's Toxic Narratives: Migration, Gender, Europe

Hungary has the most restrictive migration policy in the European Union.¹⁵ There is no government-funding for integration projects, and while non-profit organisations and local authorities can apply for financing through several EU funds, integration-related funding has not been available since July 2018, due to a partial suspension of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) national programme in Hungary.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, it was Hungary that demanded “tougher commitments on return and readmission of migrants throughout the negotiating process,” and continued to block, until recently, attempts to ratify the Post-Cotonou agreement.¹⁷

The anti-immigration stance adopted by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is based on his concept of “ethnic homogeneity.” In July 2022, Orbán said that “in contrast to Western Europe’s ‘mixed-race world,’ where people mixed with arriving non-Europeans, Hungary was not a mixed-race country,”¹⁸ a racist statement which was widely condemned outside Hungary. Orbán later added that his remarks were not rooted in racism but reflected the preferences of the Hungarian people who did not want to become “peoples of mixed race”: “Orbán argued that the Hungarians were racially pure and that they intended to stay that way.”¹⁹ Orbán’s right-wing rhetoric doesn’t shy back from provoking its Ukrainian and Romanian neighbors by displaying symbols of imperialism like Orbán’s “Greater Hungary” scarf during a football match in 2022, a gesture which implies a redrawing of Hungarian borders to include ethnic minorities in both countries.

A third hallmark of Orbán’s rhetoric, in addition to racism and hyper-nationalism, is its backward view on gender policy. Following a meeting in November 2022 with the European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary Péter Szijjártó confirmed that while Hungary supports cooperation with other countries, his country disapproves of the EU using the Post-Cotonou Agreement to legalize migration to the bloc. Confirming earlier positions (“Yes to economic cooperation, no to migration”), Szijjártó repeated the old claim that Hungary’s government has a “no migration” stance. According to the Minister, “such an agreement would compromise the fight against illegal migration to the EU as well as would spread gender ideology.”²⁰ This unusual linkage between immigration and the branding of gender policy as an ideology has long been a feature of Hungarian policy on migration. Reporting the meeting between Szijjártó and Urpilainen, news portal *Hungary Today* quotes the Minister, whose use of the derogatory and simplifying term “sex education” stands in stark contrast to established conceptions of gender rights:

Since all decisions regarding migration and sex education, as well as the employment and integration of foreigners, remain in the hands of the member states, and since we will have no legal obligation regarding sexual rights, we feel that we have fulfilled the expectations of the parliament and can agree to the EU signing the post-Cotonou agreement.²¹

In 2005, Orbán first introduced the project of a government survey, the so-called national consultation (cf. Bocskor 2018, 559). What had begun as an innovative campaign with significant popular appeal was developed into a regular survey campaign after his return to power. Orbán’s first consultation as Prime Minister was on “pensions and allowances,” addressing explicitly “pensioners” (possibly the part of the electorate whose support he thought he needed most), with all subsequent polls being open to “all households.” Since 2010, the survey has evolved into a major communication strategy using questionnaires delivered by letter, with a web-based polling option added later, on a wide range of topics



(see fig. 1). The official English-language website with content relating to the 'national consultation,' *About Hungary* (<https://abouthungary.hu/>), is published by Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister.

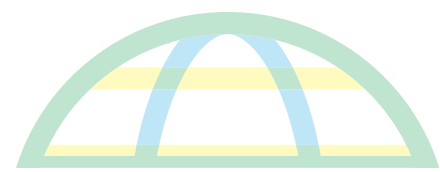
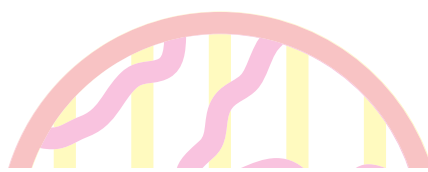
While national consultations can be useful tools in pluralist democracies to initiate "inclusive dialogues and meaningful engagement across the full set of stakeholders" (United Nations 2022, 3), the case of Hungary shows that the rhetoric of consultation can also be exploited as a form of top-down steering: it is a key element of the kind of long-term narrative persuasion, coercion, and even manipulation which characterizes Hungary's transition from a liberal democracy to what Claus Leggewie and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski (2021, 9) call an "illiberal democracy." We prefer the term "anti-liberal" democracy, which is not only closer to Orbán's own characterization of his policies but also acknowledges the fact that the notion of a spectrum (liberal – less liberal – illiberal) is too closely tied to a 'unionist' vision of Europe to fully capture the core of Hungary's centrifugal European policies and the centripetal appeal of Hungary's form of "radical nationalism" (Hunyadi et al. 2019, 54) at home.

Hungary's rhetoric of consultation, we argue, is the core element of Orbán's narrative of confrontation. By this we mean a narrative portraying Hungary as a community of patriots who share a linguistic, cultural, and national identity – and who are, allegedly, unanimously opposed to liberal European values, gender rights, and migration policies. This narrative has most recently been put forward by Orbán in a long interview with Tucker Carlson, former Fox TV host, who was dismissed on April 23, 2023, after repeated allegations of disinformation, conspiracy content, racism, and white supremacy views.²² The interview marks the latest climax in Orbán's nationalist narrative strategy. It was also published on the *About Hungary* website, and openly reveals, as we will show, the dominant steering function of the government's polling system – hence the inverted commas – of the 'national consultation.'

The table in Appendix 1 shows the years in which 'national consultations' were conducted, their participants, the method of data collection (printed questionnaires delivered by letter and/or online polls), and the topics. The list of topics shows that the surveys originally focused on domestic issues, from "pensions and allowances" (2010) to the role of the law in curbing government spending or protecting "values such as the family, the home, order, work and health" (this is question three of the first 2011 survey).²³ The wording is so unspecific, assuming a general consensus on vague issues, however, that it is hardly suited to paint a detailed picture of Hungarian public opinion on the issues in question (it is not even clear what these issues are). According to one online source (reliable statistics are notoriously difficult to come by), "a total of 11.3 percent, or 916,941, of the 8.09 million recipients completed and returned the 12 questions in the survey."

In 2015, the focus shifted to immigration, framing immigration predominantly in terms of terrorism and security threats. However, some continuity is clearly visible, as the preface by Orbán also contains a paragraph on threats posed by "economic migrants" entering the EU illegally: "Economic migrants cross our borders illegally, and while they present themselves as asylum seekers, in fact, they are coming to enjoy our welfare systems and the employment opportunities our countries have to offer." As Ákos Bocskor (2018, 561) points out, this paragraph "builds on the discursive traditions, most consistently established by the former socialist liberal government during the 2005 referendum campaign, which also involved 'threats to labour market positions,' 'abuse of the welfare system,' and a 'rapid influx of high numbers of immigrants.'"

This observation is important for two reasons. On the one hand, Bocskor reminds us that Orbán's anti-immigration policies are deeply rooted in Hungarian politics, building on cross-party sentiments which explain their sustainability despite somewhat obvious contradictions: asylum seekers are portrayed as "terrorists/criminals, welfare cheats and job stealers" (561), and it is hard to see how they could fulfil all the roles ascribed to them. On the other hand, one can see that in 2015 Orbán was still searching for the most effective strategic narrative to project authority and consolidate power. The terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris had provided a new frame, yet economic threats were still deemed necessary to complete the picture. After the so-called migrant crisis,²⁴ clashes on the Hungarian-Serbian border and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Paris in November, "the economic narrative was largely dropped and



attention redirected towards cultural and security questions” (561). Thus, Hungary’s hostile narrative on migration, usually associated with Orbán himself (an effect his authoritarian style of leadership seeks to convey),²⁵ has a longer, bi-partisan history.

From a methodological perspective, the ‘national consultation’ is clearly flawed. In fact, it deviates so far from established standards for conducting robust surveys that it should be considered a tool for manipulation rather than consultation or participation. Conventional attitude surveys using the Likert scale approach measure positive or negative evaluative responses to a set of statements using five levels (strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree). In contrast, the questionnaire on immigration and terrorism (see Appendix 2), which comprises twelve questions, uses a simplified bipolar scaling method using three items only: “Very relevant” – “Relevant” – / “Not relevant” (answers to question 1); “There is a very real chance” – “It could occur” – “Out of the question” (answers to question 2); “I fully agree” – “I tend to agree” – “I do not agree” (answers to questions 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12); “Yes” – “I have heard about it” – “I did not know” (answers to question 4); and “Yes, I would fully support the Government” – “I would partially support the Government” – “I would not support the government” (answers to questions 7, 8).

The ‘national consultation’ doesn’t meet the requirements for a scientifically valid survey of public opinion. It therefore seems reasonable and justified to assume that data collection is not the main goal. What, then, is its true purpose? The manipulative form of questioning quickly reveals the answer. The first two questions frame immigration in terms of terrorism, the third one blames the European union: “There are some who think that mismanagement of the immigration question by Brussels may have something to do with increased terrorism. Do you agree with this view?” Here and in other questions, the wording encourages speculation (“We hear different views,” “There are some who think,” “There are some who believe,” “a very real chance,” “it could occur”).²⁶ Question four (“Did you know that economic migrants cross the Hungarian border illegally, and that recently the number of immigrants in Hungary has increased twentyfold?”) links two unrelated pieces of information without providing numbers for Hungarians to decide whether they consider the increase significant. Question 12, finally, links the government’s anti-immigration stance to its hetero-normative gender policies and solutions for the country’s demographic problems: “Do you agree with the Hungarian government that support should be focused more on Hungarian families and the (potential future) children they can have, rather than on immigration?”²⁷

The ‘national consultation’ of 2017 on the alleged Soros-Plan (see Appendix 4) abandons all pretenses, serving all households a conspiracy theory and a binary choice, yes or no. Question 3 claims that an official EU policy (migrant quota) is actually the result of Soros’ sinister machinations: “One part of the Soros Plan is to use Brussels to force the EU-wide distribution of immigrants that have accumulated in Western Europe, with special focus on Eastern European countries.” This reference to the Soros conspiracy theory, which was also evoked by Donald Trump during his time in office (Bergman and Butter 2020, 338), is evidence that the government uses the ‘national consultations’ for propaganda rather than information, triggering confirmation bias among its supporters. It is best understood as the (ab)use of polling as a measure to steer attitudes and perceptions using manipulative rhetoric.

A key element of manipulation is repetition. The regular surveys are accompanied by billboard campaigns reminding the public of the “consultations” (see Appendices 3 and 5). A third element of the government communication is the website *About Hungary*, a portal with three sections offering “news in brief,” a blog and “speeches and remarks.” What looks like a journalistic news site is in fact fully controlled by the government. The target audience are foreigners living in Hungary:

As the official English-language website of the Hungarian Government, *abouthungary.hu* takes a stand against widespread misinformation in the international media about Hungary and the Hungarian Government. We are also the official source when it comes to economic news, Prime Minister’s speeches, international affairs, investments, family policy decisions, migration and more.²⁸

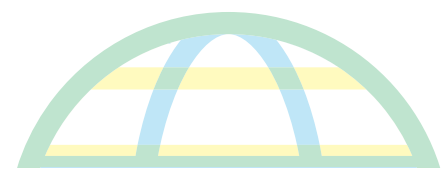
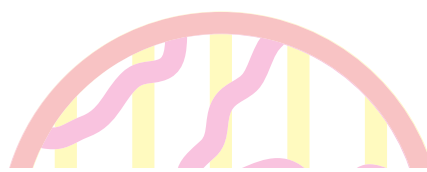
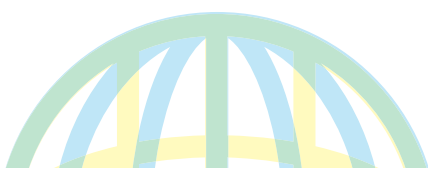


The government's strategy serves at least three purposes. First, agenda-setting: choosing the topics for the polls is a rather powerful instrument for defining the key issues of Hungarian politics. As all voters are addressed directly and individually, there is no escaping the agenda set by the government, regardless of one's political views or topical preferences. Second, the 'national consultation' is a convenient means of framing controversial issues. As shown above, the Hungarian government doesn't refrain from manipulative questionnaire design or from masking of rhetoric as information. Finally, with its equation of immigration and terrorism and the link between anti-immigration and gender, the national consultation on immigration and terrorism (May 2015) set the tone for Orbán's narrative on migration for years to come, promoting "ontological insecurity" (Kinnvall, Manner, Mitzen 2021). The dominant frame is to consider migration as a security threat and immigration as the influx of potential criminals, or an economic burden.

As Birgit Bahtić-Kunrath and Carolin Gebauer (2023, 17) have shown in an in-depth analysis of 71 interviews in Austrian newspapers with experts, politicians across the democratic political spectrum, this kind of framing was extremely rare in neighboring country Austria at the time: "The sub-frame 'terrorism' occurs only once throughout the entire sample." This reveals the deep gap between political discourses on migration in Hungary and Austria in 2015, let alone Germany's "welcome culture" (Gebauer 2023), showing how far Orbán's rhetoric was removed, even back then, from positions dominating outside Hungary.²⁹

What are the long-term effects and consequences of a narrative strategy promoting ontological insecurity? On the one hand, the strategic narrative of Hungary as a homogeneous nation with a shared cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identity, as well as a closed-borders policy securing the status quo helps Orbán stay in power: by 'solving' the 'problems' he creates, he can cast himself in the role of a strongman defending the nation against Brussels. His victory in the general elections in 2022 shows that this strategy was successful. However, the latest results of Eurobarometer show that a majority of Hungarian citizens (54%) tend to trust the EU, while only 41% tend not to trust it.³⁰ This suggests a more EU-friendly attitude than in Austria (tend to trust: 43%; tend not to trust: 50%), Germany (tend to trust: 43%; tend not to trust: 49%), and Italy (tend to trust: 41%; tend not to trust: 50%), the other three countries included in the cross-country comparisons of OPPORTUNITIES.

The biggest surprise, however, is that Hungarian attitudes towards the EU have hardly changed compared to 2016, when 53% were optimistic about the future of the EU, and 42% claimed to be pessimistic: trust has even increased slightly.³¹ Are the survey data inaccurate or unreliable? Are strategic narratives less effective than they appear to be? Are Hungarians immune against propaganda, possibly a lesson learnt in communist times? Do transnational structures appear more trustworthy than the national government? What is the role of the Hungarian diaspora in boosting the EU's reputation at home? It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a robust explanation of the apparent fact that long-term manipulative framing and massive anti-EU rhetoric by the government secured two re-elections for Orbán, in 2018 and 2022, yet had zero impact on Hungarian attitudes toward the EU which remain comparatively positive.



4. Conclusion

This essay has focused on Hungary's official narratives, especially those on migration and Europe. Our analysis has shown that Hungary's media ecology, after more than a decade of 'rebalancing' in favor of the government's anti-liberal nationalist policies, differs from the media landscape in liberal European countries in four aspects. First, the assumption that state broadcasting is less biased than private broadcasting no longer holds if state broadcasting is controlled by one part of the political spectrum only, and private broadcasters, favored through strategic public spending (advertising revenues), are closely aligned with the government. Our findings thus support and confirm the results of the quantitative media analyses and correlation analyses conducted in the OPPORTUNITIES project: David De Coninck, Stefan Mertens, and d'Haenens (2021, 17) consider Hungary an exception, compared to Germany, Austria and Italy, in that "exposure to the public service broadcaster (or here: state media) is linked with more negative attitudes" toward immigrants, refugees, and Muslims.

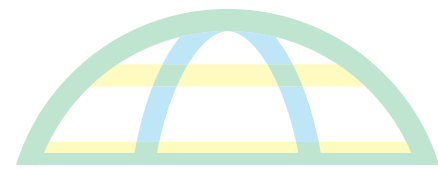
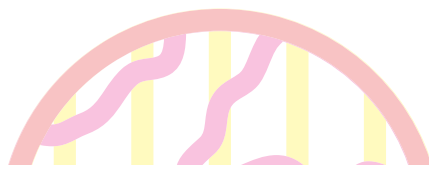
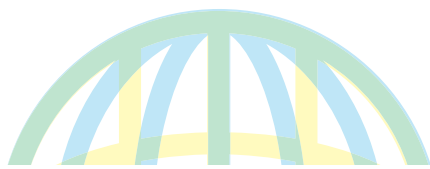
Second, despite systematic 'rebalancing' of the media ecology, ideological divisions run deep in Hungary and it would be wrong to speak of a "narrative monoculture" in Yannis Gabriel's (2021, 221) sense, i.e. "societies dominated by a few hegemonic narratives which are only challenged occasionally and tentatively by oppositional voices [...] that rarely crystallize into proper counter-narratives"; indeed, there are still independent media outlets, NGOs, and researchers whose counter-narratives not only challenge government positions but also demonstrate to European publics elsewhere that Hungary is not a homogenous nation of anti-liberal conspiracy-theorists. Yet the dividing line is not between public services and private broadcasters, but between government-friendly commercial outlets and independent ones which receive no government funding and defend journalistic freedom. Third, the efforts of the Hungarian government to sidestep both legacy and new media by installing direct communication channels with its surveys, billboard campaigns, and the *About Hungary* website, which are part of a manipulative framing strategy, mean that media analysts are faced with a new challenge, a specific media ecology whose narrative dynamics they still need to understand.

Fourth, our analysis of the "national consultation" and the "immigration and terrorism" narrative allows us to argue that creating, spreading and fostering ontological insecurity is among the goals of the Hungarian government's strategic narrative on migration. Individual threat perception is a key factor in defining attitudes toward migrants and migration; the focus in the literature, according to Silke Goubin, Anna Ruelens, and Ides Nicaise (2022, 9–10), is on (perceived) economic, cultural, and ethnic threats to the host society. By linking immigration with terrorism, the Hungarian government has added a major new threat to this list, raising fears that were, seemingly, justified after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Berlin. This may help to explain why citizens in Hungary, against the European trend, "became more negative about migration in general, and prefer more restrictive policies towards migration" (33). Speaking of European trends, however, it is also important to acknowledge that Hungarians appear to trust in Europe – whatever that means to them.

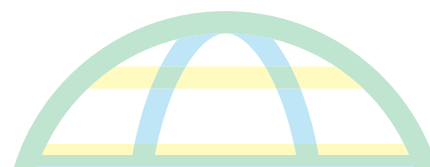


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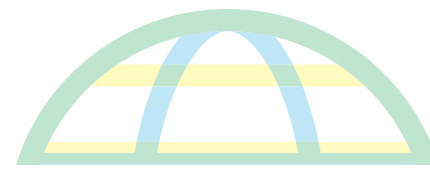
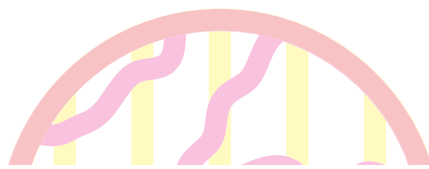
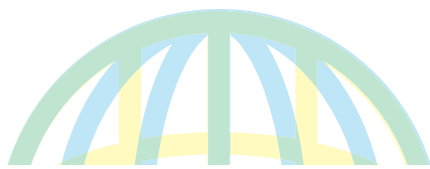
6. Appendix

6.1 Appendix 1: Overview of National Consultations (2010 to 2022)

National Consultations Hungary		
Year	Target audience	Topic
2010	Pensioners (Letter)	“Konzultáció a nyugdíjasokkal” (Consultation with pensioners)
2011	All households (Letter)	“Kérdések az új alkotmányról” (Questions on the new Constitution)
2011	All households (Letter)	“Szociális konzultáció” (Social consultation)
2012	All households (Letter)	“Gazdasági konzultáció” (Economic consultation)
2015	All households (Letter)	“Nemzeti konzultáció a bevándorlásról és a terrorizmusról” (National consultation on immigration and terrorism)
2017	All households (Letter)	“Állítsuk meg Brüsszelt!”* (Stop Brussels!)
2017	All households (Letter)	“Nemzeti Konzultáció a Soros-tervről” (National Consultation on the Soros Plan)
2018	All households (Letter or online)	“Nemzeti Konzultáció a családok védelméről” (National Consultation on the Protection of Families)
2020	All households (Online)	“Nemzeti Konzultáció a koronavírusról és a gazdaság újraindításáról” (National Consultation on the Coronavirus and Restarting the Economy)
2021	All households (Online)	“Konzultáció az újraindításról” (Consultation on post-epidemic relaunch)
2021	All households (Online)	“Konzultáció a járvány utáni életről” (Consultation on life after the epidemic)
2022	All households (Online)	“Nemzeti Konzultáció az energetikai szankciókról” (National Consultation on energy sanctions)

18

*The European Commission’s response to six false claims in the “Stop Brussels!” survey (2017) can be found here: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation_en (accessed September 25, 2023)



6.2 Appendix 2: National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism (2015)



Tisztelt Magyar Polgár!

Mi, magyarok 2010-ben úgy határoztunk, hogy minden fontos kérdést megbeszélünk egymással, mielőtt döntéseket hozunk. Ezért indítottunk nemzeti konzultációt többek között az ország új alaptörvényéről, mindannyiunk szociális biztonságáról, a nyugdíjasok helyzetének javításáról. És ezért indítunk most is nemzeti konzultációt a megélhetési bevándorlás kérdéséről.

Mint bizonyára emlékszik, Európát az év elején példátlan terrorcselekmény ráta meg. Pártisan ártatlan emberek életét oltották ki legyetlen hágyérral és ijedő brutalitással. Mindannyiunkat megdöbbentette mindez, ami történt. Ez az emberi ésszel felfoghatatlan szörnyőség ugyanakkor azt is megmutatta, hogy Brüsszel és az Európai Unió nem képes megfelelő módon kezelni a bevándorlás kérdését.

A megélhetési bevándorlók törvénytelenül lépik át a határt, és miközben menekültnak állítják be magukat, valójában a szociális juttatásokért és a munkalehetőségért jönnek. Csak az elmúlt néhány hónapban mintegy húszszorosára nőtt a megélhetési bevándorlók száma Magyarországon. Ez egy új típusú fenyegetést jelent, amit meg kell állítanunk.

Mivel Brüsszel kudarcot vallott a bevándorlás kezelésében, Magyarországnak a saját útját kell járnia. Nem fogjuk hagyni, hogy a megélhetési bevándorlók veszélyeztessék a magyar emberek munkahelyeit és megélhetését.

Döntést kell hoznunk arról, hogyan kell védekeznie Magyarországnak a törvénytelen határátlépésekkel szemben. Döntünk kell, hogyan korlátozzuk a robbanásszerűen növekvő megélhetési bevándorlást.

Tisztelettel arra kérem, lépjen velünk kapcsolatba, mondja el nekünk is, hogy mit gondol a főtett kérdésekről, töltsse ki, és küldje vissza a kérdőívet. Számítok a véleményére.

Üdvözléssel:

Orbán Viktor

<https://444.hu/2015/04/24/itt-vannak-a-kerdesek-a-bevandorlasrol-amiket-a-kormany-egymilliardert-kuld-ki-onnek/>
(accessed August 25, 2023)

Dear Hungarian Citizen,

In 2010 we Hungarians decided to discuss every important issue before decisions are taken. This is why we launched national consultations on issues which have included Hungary's new Fundamental Law, social security as a matter concerning us all, and the improvement of the situation of pensioners. And this is why we are now launching another national consultation, this time on the issue of economic immigration.

I am sure you will remember that at the beginning of the year Europe was shaken by an unprecedented act of terror. In Paris the lives of innocent people were extinguished, in cold blood and with terrifying brutality. We were all shocked by what happened. At the same time, this incomprehensible act of horror also demonstrated that Brussels and the European Union are unable to adequately deal with the issue of immigration.

Economic migrants cross our borders illegally, and while they present themselves as asylum-seekers, in fact they are coming to enjoy our welfare systems and the employment opportunities our countries have to offer. In the last few months alone, in Hungary the number of economic migrants has increased approximately twentyfold. This represents a new type of threat – a threat which we must stop in its tracks.

As Brussels has failed to address immigration appropriately, Hungary must follow its own path. We shall not allow economic migrants to jeopardise the jobs and livelihoods of Hungarians.

We must make a decision on how Hungary should defend itself against illegal immigrants.

We must make a decision on how to limit rapidly rising economic immigration.

Please contact us and give us your response to the questions we are asking. Please complete and return the questionnaire. I am counting on your opinion.

With regards,

Viktor Orbán

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038038518762081#bibr16-0038038518762081>
(accessed August 25, 2023)



NEMZETI KONZULTÁCIÓ

a bevándorlásról és a terrorizmusról

FELELŐS KIADÓ: MINISZTERELNÖKSÉG

Töltse ki a kérdőívet!

1] Sokféle véleményt lehet hallani az erősödő terrorcselekményekkel kapcsolatban. Ön mennyire tartja fontosnak a terrorizmus térnyerését (a franciaországi vérengzés, az ISIS riasztó cselekményei) a saját élete szempontjából?

☐ Nagyon fontos ☐ Fontos ☐ Nem fontos

2] Ön szerint az elkövetkező években lehet-e terrorcselekmény célpontja Magyarország?

☐ Komoly esély van rá ☐ Előfordulhat ☐ Teljesen kizárt

3] Vannak, akik szerint a Brüsszel által rosszul kezelt bevándorlás összefüggésben van a terrorizmus térnyerésével. Ön egyetért ezekkel a véleményekkel?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

4] Tudta-e Ön, hogy a megélhetési bevándorlók törvénytelenül lépik át a magyar határt és az elmúlt időszakban hús-szorosára nót a bevándorlók száma Magyarországon?

☐ Igen ☐ Hallottam róla ☐ Nem tudtam

5] Sokféle véleményt hallani a bevándorlás kérdésével kapcsolatban. Vannak, akik szerint a megélhetési bevándorlók veszélyeztetik a magyar emberek munkahelyeit és megélhetését! Ön egyetért ezekkel a véleményekkel?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

6] Vannak, akik szerint Brüsszel politikája a bevándorlás és a terrorizmus kérdésében megbukott és ezért új megközelítésre van szükség ezekben a kérdésekben. Ön egyetért ezekkel a véleményekkel?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

7] Támogatná-e Ön a magyar kormányt, hogy Brüsszel megengedő politikájával szemben szigorúbb bevándorlási szabályozást vezessen be?

☐ Igen, teljes mértékben támogatnám
☐ Részben támogatnám ☐ Nem támogatnám

8] Támogatná-e Ön a magyar kormányt, hogy szigorúbb szabályokat vezessen be, ami alapján őrizetbe vehetők a magyar határt törvénytelenül átlépő bevándorlók?

☐ Igen, teljes mértékben támogatnám
☐ Részben támogatnám ☐ Nem támogatnám

9] Egyetért-e Ön azzal a véleménnyel, hogy a magyar határt törvénytelenül átlépő bevándorlókat a lehető legrövidebb időn belül vissza kell fordítani a saját hazájukba?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

10] Egyetért-e Ön azzal, hogy a megélhetési bevándorlók, amíg Magyarországon tartózkodnak, saját maguk biztosítsák az ellátási költségeiket?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

11] Egyetért-e Ön azzal, hogy a bevándorlás elleni küzdelem legjobb eszköze, ha az Európai Unió tagországai segítik azon országok fejlesztését, ahonnan a bevándorlók érkeznek?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

12] Egyetért-e Ön a magyar kormánnyal abban, hogy a bevándorlás helyett inkább a magyar családok és a születendő gyermekek támogatására van szükség?

☐ Teljesen egyetértek ☐ Inkább egyetértek ☐ Nem értek egyet

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

on immigration and terrorism

Published by the Prime Minister's Office

Please complete this questionnaire.

1] We hear different views on increasing levels of terrorism. How relevant do you think the spread of terrorism (the bloodshed in France, the shocking acts of ISIS) is to your own life?
Very relevant Relevant Not relevant

2] Do you think that Hungary could be the target of an act of terror in the next few years?
There is a very real chance It could occur Out of the question

3] There are some who think that mismanagement of the immigration question by Brussels may have something to do with increased terrorism. Do you agree with this view?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

4] Did you know that economic migrants cross the Hungarian border illegally, and that recently the number of immigrants in Hungary has increased twentyfold?
Yes I have heard about it I did not know

5] We hear different views on the issue of immigration. There are some who think that economic migrants jeopardise the jobs and livelihoods of Hungarians. Do you agree?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

6] There are some who believe that Brussels' policy on immigration and terrorism has failed, and that we therefore need a new approach to these questions. Do you agree?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

7] Would you support the Hungarian government in the introduction of more stringent immigration regulations, in contrast to Brussels' lenient policy?
Yes, I would fully support the Government
I would partially support the Government
I would not support the Government

8] Would you support the Hungarian government in the introduction of more stringent regulations, according to which migrants illegally crossing the Hungarian border could be taken into custody?
Yes, I would fully support the Government
I would partially support the Government
I would not support the Government

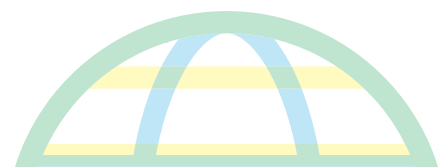
9] Do you agree with the view that migrants illegally crossing the Hungarian border should be returned to their own countries within the shortest possible time?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

10] Do you agree with the concept that economic migrants themselves should cover the costs associated with their time in Hungary?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

11] Do you agree that the best means of combating immigration is for Member States of the European Union to assist in the development of the countries from which migrants arrive?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

12] Do you agree with the Hungarian government that support should be focused more on Hungarian families and the [potential future] children they can have, rather than on immigration?
I fully agree I tend to agree I do not agree

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038038518762081#bibr16-0038038518762081> (accessed August 25, 2023)



6.3 Appendix 3: National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism (2015), Billboard Campaign



https://index.hu/belfold/2015/06/04/megvan_a_kormany_menekultellenes_kampanya_nak_ket_ujabb_szlogenje/ (accessed August 25, 2023)

22

Translation by the authors:

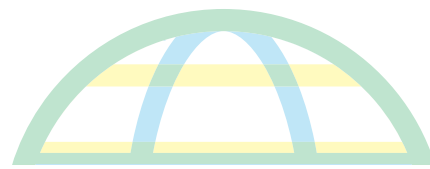
Government Information

If you come to Hungary,

you must not take away

the jobs of Hungarians!

National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism



[illegible]

1. George Soros wants Brussels to resettle at least one million immigrants per year onto European Union territory, including in Hungary.
2. Together with officials in Brussels, George Soros is planning to dismantle border fences in EU Member States, including in Hungary, to open the borders for immigrants.
3. One part of the Soros Plan is to use Brussels to force the EU-wide distribution of immigrants that have accumulated in Western Europe, with special focus on Eastern European countries. Hungary must also take part in this.
4. Based on the Soros Plan, Brussels should force all EU Member States, including Hungary, to pay immigrants HUF 9 million in welfare.
5. Another goal of George Soros is to make sure that migrants receive milder criminal sentences for the crimes they commit.
6. The goal of the Soros Plan is to push the languages and cultures of Europe into the background so that integration of illegal immigrants happens much more quickly.
7. It is also part of the Soros Plan to initiate political attacks against those countries which oppose immigration, and to severely punish them.

The diagrams show three semi-circular blocks representing the Earth's crust under different stress conditions:

- Compressional Stress:** The first diagram shows a block with a green outer shell and a yellow inner core. Blue lines representing rock layers are being pushed together, illustrating compression.
- Tensional Stress:** The second diagram shows a block with a red outer shell and a yellow inner core. Blue lines representing rock layers are being pulled apart, illustrating tension.
- Shear Stress:** The third diagram shows a block with a green outer shell and a yellow inner core. Blue lines representing rock layers are being pushed in opposite directions, causing them to slide past each other, illustrating shear.

6.5 Appendix 5: National Consultation “The Soros Plan,” Billboard Campaign



https://index.hu/belfold/2017/11/20/soros_a_soros-tervrol_ez_hazugsag/ (accessed August 25, 2023)

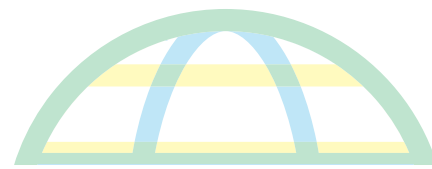
24

Translation by the authors:

National Consultation

About the Soros-Plan

It will not go unnoticed!



Endnotes

¹ Orbán first held the office from 1998 to 2002. In 2010, he was re-elected as prime minister; three re-elections followed in 2014, 2018, and 2022.

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_withdrawal_from_the_European_Union (accessed August 25, 2023).

³ Leggewie and Karolewski (2021, 8) argue that the informal connection called the Visegrád Four, comprising Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, is bent on changing the character of the European Union as a model – “a confederation of states rather than a federal state, national sovereignty instead of transnational community, autocratic rule instead of liberal democracy” (our translation).

⁴ Narrative dynamics is used as “an umbrella term for all kinds of relationships, hostile or symbiotic, competitive or complementary, local or global, between narrative phenomena” (Sommer 2023, 498).

⁵ We use the definition of strategic narratives proposed by Miskimmon, O’Loughlin and Roselle (2019, 2): “Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate.”

⁶ See <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/countries/hungary> (accessed August 25, 2023).

⁷ See <https://rsf.org/en/country/hungary> (accessed August 25, 2023).

⁸ See <https://rsf.org/en/country/hungary> (accessed August 25, 2023).

⁹ See <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/countries/hungary> (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹⁰ “Complaints over these market-distorting practises are currently being assessed by the European Commission under State Aid complaint No. 53108,” according to the IPI report (2022).

¹¹ The so-called Child Protection Act is widely considered homophobic and transphobic and violates, according to Brussels, a series of EU law principles, including human dignity, freedom of expression and information, the right to private life and the right to data protection, as well as single market rules on audio-visual services and e-commerce (see <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/07/15/european-commission-takes-hungary-to-court-over-anti-lgbt-law-and-klubradio-closure> [accessed August 25, 2023]).

¹² See <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/countries/hungary> (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹³ See <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/> (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹⁴ See <https://media-ownership.eu/findings/countries/hungary/> (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹⁵ The most recent major amendments to Hungary’s asylum law were adopted in June 2016, March 2017, and May 2020: “The first cancelled the Integration Contract and Support scheme for beneficiaries of international protection, and the second established special ‘transit zones’ – places for asylum seekers to stay in while their status was determined by the authorities. Finally, the third amendment cancelled these zones, making it impossible for a person to ask for asylum unless they had already submitted a declaration of will at the Hungarian consulates in Belgrade and Kyiv.” (see https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-hungary_en [accessed August 25, 2023]).

¹⁶ See https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-hungary_en (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹⁷ See <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/post-cotonou-deal-in-danger-as-concerns-grow-over-ratification-delay/> (accessed August 25, 2023).

¹⁸ See <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungarys-orban-says-his-anti-immigration-stance-not-rooted-racism-after-backlash-2022-07-28/> (accessed August 25, 2023).



¹⁹ See <https://www.romania-insider.com/tensions-ro-coalition-orban-speech-aug-2022> (accessed August 25, 2023).

²⁰ See <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/hungary-firm-on-its-no-migration-policy/> (accessed August 25, 2023).

²¹ <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungary-agrees-to-eu-signing-the-post-cotonou-agreement> (accessed September 15, 2023).

²² See <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/04/tucker-carlson-great-replacement-white-supremacist-immigration-fox-news-racism.html> (accessed August 25, 2023).

²³ See <https://theorangefiles.hu/orban-government-national-consultation-on-the-fundamental-law/> (accessed August 25, 2023).

²⁴ William Spindler's (2015) reconstruction of the so-called migrant crisis, which is still accessible on the UNHCR website, begins in April, with the drowning of 600 refugees. In Hungary, where thousands of refugees found temporary shelter in Budapest's train station, the climax was reached on September 5, when the Orbán government started providing buses to allow the refugees to continue their journey to Austria and, ultimately, Germany: "More than 1,000 refugees in Hungary marched out of Budapest towards the Austrian border in protest of the Hungarian government's refusal to provide trains to Austria and Germany. That decision was reversed overnight when buses were provided by the Hungarian authorities to take the exhausted refugees to the border where they were met by volunteers from the Austrian Red Cross and the Austrian Order of Malta holding handwritten signs saying 'welcome', and handing out waterproof clothes, food, water, milk and blankets." (n. pag.)

²⁵ In his analysis of the preface to the "national consultation" on immigration and terrorism, which contains a photograph of Orbán and his signature, Bocskor (2018, 559) points out that the central role of Orbán is emphasized "by the absence of photographs or signatures of any other members of the government, as well as by the omission of any other visual stimuli."

²⁶ On the impact of vague wording, question-versus-statement phrasing, and full-versus-partial labeling of response options on participants' responses, see the experimental study of Spratto and Bandalos (2019).

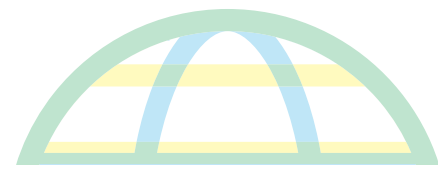
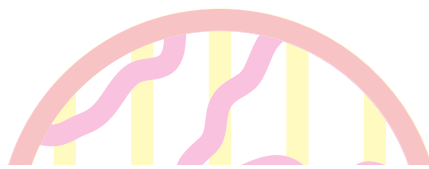
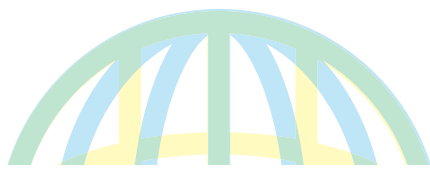
²⁷ According to Waterbury (2020, 968), "the emigration of around 600,000 young, working age, and highly skilled Hungarians, over the last decade has reportedly led to significant labour shortages in key areas of the economy, such as healthcare, and has worsened negative, demographic trends, leaving Hungarian society, border and declining in population." The FIDESZ response to the ongoing brain drain has thus far been largely rhetorical. By dubbing emigrants as "adventurers" or "guestworkers," the brain drain is decoupled, linguistically, from emigration. What is more, the temporary nature of leaving is accentuated, downplaying the demographic effects and the prospect of an ageing population (969).

²⁸ See <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/about-hungary-relaunches-with-new-look-and-vibe> (access August 25, 2023).

²⁹ More recently, the Hungarian government appears to have abandoned the "immigration and terrorism" narrative: quantitative media analyses conducted in the OPPORTUNITIES project show no trace of the "immigrants as terrorists" narrative in the English-language Twitter account used by FIDESZ in 2021 (De Coninck et al. 2021). Instead, the comparative analysis of politicians' tweets in Germany, Austria, Italy, and Hungary reveals that the only Twitter account making regular use of the words "terrorism" and "terror" in the context of migration is that of former Austrian prime minister Sebastian Kurz.

³⁰ See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052> (accessed August 25, 2023).

³¹ See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2137> (accessed August 25, 2023).



An abstract graphic design featuring a white background with several overlapping geometric elements. On the left and right sides, there are two stylized globes or spheres. Each sphere is composed of a grid of lines: a vertical green line, a horizontal yellow line, and a diagonal blue line. In the center, there is a red circle. Overlapping the red circle and the spheres are several wavy, ribbon-like lines in yellow, pink, and red. The text 'opportunities' is centered in a large, black, sans-serif font, and 'for a fair narrative on migration' is centered below it in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

opportunities

for a fair narrative on migration