

The Rising Tide of Authoritarianism

A case study of de-democratization in Central and Eastern European countries

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Abstract

Francis Fukuyama's End of History thesis contested 29 years after its initial publication. Freedom House has reported 12 consecutive years of global declines in freedom. Anno 2018, democracy is experiencing a global recession. We find that this tendency holds in Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Macedonia. These countries have experienced erosion across five democratic indicators (which are derived from the Copenhagen Criteria): independence of judiciary, rule of law, human rights, media freedom and electoral processes. We identify differences in perspectives on international relations between Western European and, Central and Eastern European countries, rising nationalism and weak civil societies as causes of this democratic backsliding. To counter these anti-democratic tendencies, we propose policies aimed at establishing communication between the people living in the countryside and the cities, fostering a sense of community and improving political efficacy. Finally, we propose an event through which all three policy fields can be addressed. These policies should be aimed at young people, since they are currently largely inactive in politics.

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Introduction

Background

In 1806 the philosopher Hegel proclaimed the *End of History*, following the victory of Napoleon's French armies over the Prussians at the battle of Jena-Auerstedt. Hegel saw this victory as the triumph of the liberal values (liberty, equality, fraternity) over other forms of governance (Kojève & Queneau, 2012). Humanity would be at the end of a long lasting evolutionary process focused on finding the ultimate form governance. The two centuries that followed, however, proved Hegel wrong: Monarchies were restored at the conference of Vienna in 1815, and in the latter half of the 19th century a unified German empire was instituted. The 20th century saw the rise of ideologically motivated totalitarian regimes that inflicted terror upon the world both during the Second World War and the Cold War that followed it. Thus, the process of finding the best governance system was far from over after the battle of Jena-Auerstedt. At the end of the Cold War, however, the *End of History* hypothesis was posed again by Francis Fukuyama who stated that:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 4).

Huntington (1991) named the global trend towards democratization the “third wave of democratization”. Starting in 1974 with Portugal becoming a democracy, the third wave spread to countries in Latin America, the Asian Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern-Europe (ibid. pp. 3-6). The third wave is visualised in figure 1, which shows that in the period of 1991 until 2009 the number of democracies in the world rose from 63 to 87 (Roser, 2018). Moreover, the number of autocratic regimes in the world nearly halved from 42 in 1991 to 22 in 2009. Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis would thus seem to hold strong predictive power regarding the process of democratization.

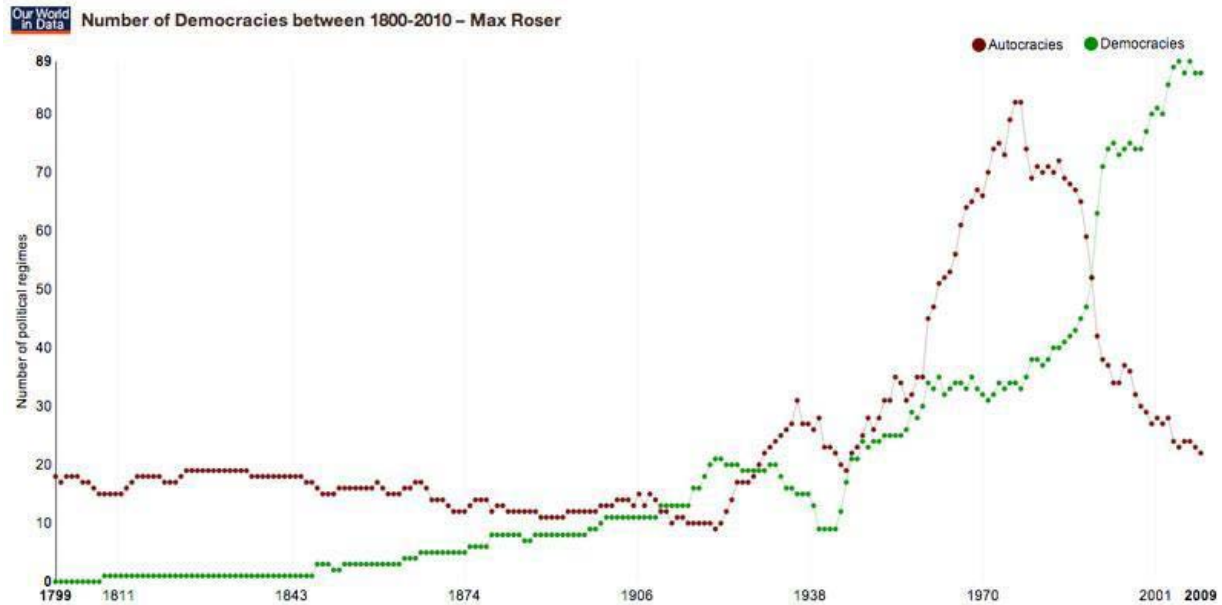


Figure 1: Number of democracies and autocracies in the world (Roser, 2018).

However, in the last decade there have been indications that the *End of History* did not occur after the fall of Soviet-Union. Freedom House’s 2018 report, aptly named *Democracy in Crisis*, (Freedom House, 2018a) reported the 12th consecutive year that marked a decline in world-wide freedom, a value intrinsically linked to democracy (Diamond, 1999). In its annual democracy index, the Economist (The Economist, 2018) also showed a global erosion of democracy. The Journal of Democracy published various special issues in 2015 on the *Authoritarian Resurgence* and *Authoritarianism going global*. Diamond (2015) concluded that “democracy has been in a global recession for most of the last decade”. “Rising new counter norms are threatening to straitjacket liberal democracy’s power ... at its status as the most influential source of norms for global governance” (Cooley, 2015). We might be witnessing the globalization of regimes of *competitive authoritarianism*, regimes that did not make a full transition towards democracy (Levitsky & Way, 2002).

A region of great interest to the advocates of democracy’s third wave is Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Having gained *de facto* independence from the Soviet-Union in 1991, only 27 years ago, most of the countries in CEE have adopted democracy as its form of governance and have sought accession to the European Union (EU). The EU has been granting these requests in three different expansions in 2004¹, 2007² and 2013³, allowing in total 13 countries to join the EU; nearly doubling its member size to 28 countries (European Commission, 2016a). With the global erosion of democracy and democratic values CEE finds itself standing at a crossroads regarding the democratization of the region:

¹ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined.

² Romania and Bulgaria joined.

³ Croatia joined.

Has history truly come to an end or will the region lapse back into a form of authoritarian governance? The situation in CEE merits further research and will therefore be covered in this paper.

Project

Our project consists of two parts: the first part is a research project that offers an examination of the de-democratization of certain European countries⁴. In the second part, several recommendations will be made, based on the research findings. The aim of this paper is to help the Max van der Stoep Foundation (FMS) to improve the promotion of democracy.

The authors believe that such an endeavour is justified by both the innate as well as the external merits of democracy over other forms of governance. Democracy as the form of human governance is preferable over autocracies since they provide a stimulus for economic growth (Maravall, 1994; Siegle, Weinstein & Halperin, 2004; Radelet, 2015, pp. 125-129; Schiffbauer & Shen, 2010), preserve peace amongst nations (Maoz & Russett, 1993), are less warlike in general (Hegre, 2014; Russett, 2010; Russett & Oneal, 2001) and suffer from less severe civil wars (Gleditsch, 2008; Lacina, 2006). Moreover, the citizens of a democracy rarely suffer from famine (Sen, 1984), are healthier (Besley, 2006) and are better educated (Roser, 2016).

In the first part, we will examine, through the use of case-studies, the recent undemocratic trends in CEE. To this aim, this research looks both into countries that have already accessed to the EU as well as into countries that are still outside of the EU. This study will focus on the compliance of these countries with EU values. A preliminary assessment has been done, based on secondary data, to identify the broader trends that have taken place in Europe over the past decade, and to identify the countries in which these tendencies are predominantly present. With trends, or general movements (Merriam-Webster, 2018), we mean movements towards authoritarianism. We have measured these through various indicators, for which we have taken the Copenhagen Criteria as a framework of EU democratic values (European Commission, 2016b). Following these outcomes, we identified Hungary and Poland as especially of interest within the EU and Serbia and Macedonia as EU focus candidates, because all of these four countries have displayed a decline in democratic values over the last decade.⁵

Our research question would thus be: Why have Hungary, Poland, Serbia, and Macedonia drifted away from the EU values in the last decade? The findings of this research will be primarily used to provide project recommendations to the FMS with regard to the democratization of Poland, Hungary, Serbia and Macedonia, focussing on young people. Furthermore, the research might yield insights in the

⁴ The indicators used to assess the movement towards authoritarianism are: the freedom of media, the independence of the judiciary, the strength of the rule of law, the respect for human rights, the degree of corruption, the degree of proper electoral processes and immigration/integration policies. These will be elaborated upon in chapters 1 to 5.

⁵ More elaborate data on these undemocratic trends, both quantitative and qualitative, will be provided in chapters 1 to 5.

processes of democratization that can be used to help establish or strengthen other democratic regimes in CEE and other parts of the world.

Methodology

This research is based on a mixture of quantitative as well as qualitative methods. The preliminary assessments of the global tendencies are quantitative, based on indices concerning the different Copenhagen Criteria. After identifying the countries that are most of interest in terms of de-democratization, more qualitative research has been conducted to identify factors that may have caused de-democratization. To this end, we conducted literature studies about these countries, as well as interviews with CEE specialists. We have also conducted research in one of the countries of interest, namely Hungary, to examine the perception of the citizens towards the issue of democracy. All these resources will be used to establish projects that can be executed by the FMS in the concerning countries.

The remainder of this paper will be organised as follows. In the second chapter, more quantitative and qualitative data will be provided on the trends towards authoritarianism in Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Macedonia. In the third chapter we will enquire into the causes of this shift towards authoritarianism. Finally, in the fourth chapter we will provide recommendations for a project based on our findings. Moreover, we will formulate policy advice and proposals for concrete projects that the FMS can start in the four countries in order to counter the authoritarian trends in those countries and further promote democracy.

1. Independence of the judiciary

The democratic cornerstones of the European Union are respect to fundamental human rights, the rule of law and liberal democratic values, such as a sense of community. One of the core instruments, which is used to protect these values and agreements, is an efficient independent judiciary. An efficient functioning of judiciary is characterized by the ability of the state to limit the power of those in governmental positions. Amongst the legislature and rule of law, it represents one of multiple ways to restrict governmental power. According to the Copenhagen Criteria, in order to become a member of the European Union, the prospect member state must assure an independent judiciary, free from external influence and the ability to provide enough financial resources in order to maintain this independence (European Commission, 2016b). A functioning judicial system and its independence are furthermore crucial for the implementation of potential EU laws or sanctions, which is important for a state's eligibility of being a member of the European Union. One important factor in judging the efficiency of judicial systems is indicated by the average time needed for a judiciary court to solve a legal dispute between two parties (The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2016). A possible reason for time differences in resolving conflict in judicial matters is an increased rate of corruption or negligence of fundamental human rights, as victims or witnesses might not be considered.

1.1 Judiciary in Hungary

When Hungary joined the EU, the judiciary was considered independent, and the courts generally fair (Freedom House, 2005). Over the years, this has deteriorated. In 2009, the judiciary was criticized for "lax regulations [...] and conflict of interest for judges" (Freedom House, 2010a). In 2012, Hungary's judiciary was still considered independent, but slow and not transparent (Freedom House, 2012). Constitutional changes led to the undermining of the independence of judiciary. Consequently, almost 300 judges were forced to retire and the constitutional court's capability to review laws proposed by the government was restricted (Human Rights Watch, 2013a). In multiple cases, the government reacted to rejections of laws by changing the constitution, rendering the court ineffective. A new office, the National Judicial Office (OBH), was given extensive powers as of 2012. The head of the OBH was elected by the parliament and in turn the OBH selected candidates to fill the vacancies left by the 300 retired judges. By 2014, the government had appointed 11 out of 15 Constitutional Court judges (Freedom House, 2016). After the appointees, appointed by the Fidesz-KNDP government (Fidesz-KNDP is the current largest party in the Hungarian parliament under leadership of Viktor Orbán) became dominant within the court, the government's interests were exonerated in 10 out of 13 cases. Previously, the government's interests had been denied in all cases.

1.2 Judiciary in Poland

When Poland joined the EU in 2004, the judiciary was considered to be independent. Still, improvement was demanded by the EU, especially in regard to public access to justices, corruption within justice and the treatment of detainees by the police (Freedom House, 2004). Up until 2006, improvements were measured, and the average time for a judicial procedure was shortened, although not enough (Freedom House, 2006). From 2008 until 2016, the main objections to the Polish judicial system concerned the corruption within the judiciary system and the long procedure time of the courts (Freedom House, 2008a; Freedom House, 2016). Then, in 2017, the government proposed new laws which were not in line with the Polish constitution. Some of these laws granted the ruling party more influence on judicial appointments and led to many retirements in the supreme court (Gall, 2017). Many of these laws were either never put to practice, or mass protests stopped the government from instituting them. Nevertheless, some of the laws came into force, and thus the government gained power over the judiciary. This trend has worried the EU, which has subsequently asked Poland to readjust its rule of law and judiciary system based on the EU-standards (Freedom House, 2017d; Human Rights Watch, 2017).

1.3 Judiciary in Macedonia

When Macedonia became a candidate for EU membership, there were still numerous improvements to be made: Firstly, judges were appointed in a nontransparent way, so independence of judiciary was questionable. Also, within the judicial system, there was a lack of ethnic balance among the appointed judges and prosecutors. Furthermore, officials within the judicial system were found to be corrupt and incompetent (Freedom House, 2005b). In 2008, Macedonia's judiciary progressed towards an independent and efficient system (Freedom House, 2009). Nevertheless, there were still serious problems with corruption. In 2009, further progress was observed, as the first graduates of a new training academy for judges and prosecutors graduated and a new appraisal system for judges and prosecutors was put into place. However, the government put the Constitutional Court into question over the rejection of a law (Freedom House, 2010b). In 2011, a new, more transparent judicial system was introduced. However, reforms to improve judicial independence were not implemented. In 2012, the Minister of Justice's voting right on the national Judicial Court was removed, marking an important step towards judicial independence (Freedom House, 2013). In 2013, Macedonia made progress in the quality assessment within the body of judges and prosecutors. While there were several reforms put into place during the last decade, the independence of the judiciary and specifically the Constitutional Court remained questionable (Freedom House, 2017c).

1.4 Judiciary in Serbia

In 2006, Serbia experienced a renewal of its constitution, which included reforms of the rights of minorities, religious freedoms, and general human rights. Although Serbia's judicial system has largely

profited from these reforms, the practical implementations are considered problematic: In evaluating Serbia's progress towards the Copenhagen Criteria, the judiciary is considered to be not very efficient (Freedom House, 2008b). Reasons for this are the generally long processing times of judicial cases and decision making, and a large political influence in the selection of judges. In 2015, a political initiative was launched, aimed at increasing judicial transparency in order to inform the people about judicial changes. The initiative proved to have little effect, showing that over a third of the people are not interested in political decision making. Furthermore, transparency is still judged as one of the major problems of the country's judicial system (Freedom House, 2017e). Finally, in 2015, the fight against corruption in Serbia resulted in a large wave of arrests, including former policy makers. This step was seen as a push towards EU standards in order to increase Serbia's eligibility of becoming a EU member state (Freedom House, 2017e).

1.5 Comparison

It can be observed that in all four countries corruption, inefficiency and in-transparency of the justice system are still major problems. Therefore, one has to conclude that the Copenhagen Criteria for the independence of the judiciary are not met, as the judiciary is still largely influenced by politics and other undesirable parties. The governments of these countries deal in different ways with the issue and the countries show opposite tendencies. The EU countries Hungary and Poland develop in an unfavourable direction, away from the standards of liberal democracy, towards a judiciary which is largely controlled by politics instead of a judiciary that is controlling itself controlling the power of the executive and legislative branches of government. In contrast, the Macedonian and Serbian governments try to improve their judiciary in the aim of developing towards the values of the EU and becoming member of the EU.

2. Rule of law

Rule of law is another important aspect of democracy, as it safeguards the independent judiciary previously discussed. This indicator has been especially important in recent expansions of the EU, as it is deemed necessary for the establishment of an “autonomous civil and political society” in countries transitioning from authoritarianism (Linz and Stepan 1996). The European Commission stated that for democracy to become a possibility, it is necessary that a government and its institutions are held accountable by a rule of law (European Commission 1998). Rule of law has, however, proven to be a difficult concept to define; differences between the meanings of a rule of law in different EU states make it difficult to monitor its implementation throughout (prospective) member states. This also makes it hard to form a community, especially with the foresight of new countries entering the Union, which are historically and culturally different from the original members (Mineshima 2002). As of 2014, the EU Framework to strengthen the rule of law came into force in order to clarify the power of the Commission to address such situations, activating a three-step procedure to be adopted before a situation might escalate and lead to the procedure under Art. 7 (Peršak, 2015).

If we consider the data provided by the World Justice Project, we can see no significant changes in the index for rule of law since 2014. As the rule of law is part of the required conditions for EU entry, we would expect to mainly see high scores for EU member states. For the non-EU member states, we have no such indication or starting point as the Copenhagen Criteria, although candidate countries would have to meet the criteria before being able to join the EU. In the next chapter, the changes in rule of law for the four countries are considered. When analysing these numbers, it is important to keep in mind that these countries might not have gone through significant changes in the last four years, but that they all have significantly lower scores in rule of law when we compare them to Western-European countries.

2.1 Rule of law in Hungary

From 2014 until 2017, the index for rule of law in Hungary has decreased with a number of 0.06 (World Justice Project 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). For Hungary, there has been some discussion on the rule of law and setting in motion Article 7 by the European Commission, which suspends EU-voting rights for the targeted country (Politico, 2016). This was mainly the result of various reforms the Fidesz-KNDP party of Viktor Orbán has made, which led to the fear of a major decline in rule of law. In 2013, the Hungarian Parliament changed the constitution, putting amongst others more emphasis on the importance of family in a traditional way and thereby ignoring mixed or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT+) families. Another change concerned the retirement age of judges and prosecutors, aiming to change the composition of the court. The European Commission then challenged these reforms, stating they were not in line with the EU rights and principles (Barroso, 2013). These changes are reflected in the index, which declined after 2013.

2.2 Rule of law in Poland

Poland has seen some fluctuations in the index for rule of law since 2014 but has shown no significant differences between the level in 2014 and 2017 (World Justice Project 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). These fluctuations might be the result of the judiciary crisis, as described in 1.2: The Lower House of Poland adopted laws that would make most of the members of the Supreme Court retire. Subsequently, the member seats were replaced through a mechanism in which the ruling party had control over the judicial appointments. As a result, the European Commission started a dialogue on the rule of law in Poland, including the execution of Article 7.

2.3 Rule of law in Macedonia

Macedonia saw its rule of law index decline with 0.05 from 2014 until 2017, during which the country has been an EU member state candidate. The most plausible explanation for this seems to be the overall stagnation in reforms towards EU membership (Kacarska, 2017). Although EU membership had been a driving force to pass reforms in Macedonia before, the blockage of NATO membership in 2008, due to a name dispute with Greece, caused reforms to stagnate. This dispute caused mistrust in international actors like the EU and it also undermined these actors' power to support domestic reforms. Thus, this lack of EU integration seems to be the cause of a decline of important EU values in Macedonia, including a rule of law.

2.4 Rule of law in Serbia

Concerning the rule of law, Serbia has declined with 0.01 over the last three years, even though they are a potential candidate for EU membership. Serbia has begun to reform its judiciary system in order to achieve a stronger governance by improving amongst others the checks and balance system. Also their business climate can be improved and corruption has to be combatted; all these things form important aspects to get closer to EU membership (Gomes, 2017). However, political will, problems of corruption and crime still remain serious problems. Sometimes, the adoption of the reforms is not the main problem, but their implementation is.

2.5 Comparison

Overall, we could say that all four cases show a stagnation or decrease in terms of their rule of law. The two EU countries, Hungary and Poland, show a decline, which has worsened in the last years due to the reforms both Hungary and Poland have set in motion. The fact that the European Commission has started discussing article 7 shows that the threat of considerable decline of rule of law is present nowadays. The two non-EU countries, Serbia and Macedonia, have also shown a decline. However, this decline seems to be caused by a combination of stagnating EU integration and corruption in the judiciary system that

was already present. Although both countries are willing to reform to make way for EU integration, the developments seem to be limited.

3. Human Rights

Human rights are one of the most prevalent topics of current democracy debates in Europe and represent one of the building blocks of liberal democracy as defined by the European Union and the United Nations (United Nations Human Rights, 2018). Human rights include freedom of expression and belief, religious and educational freedom, associative and organizational freedom, protection from physical violence and political despotism, and protection of minorities. Especially police violence, systematic discrimination and violence against minorities and refugees, and women's rights are of increasing importance regarding civil liberties in Europe. Human rights are officially not only inherent to any human being, but often guaranteed by law or treaties. Since the world wars, more than 100 treaties on human rights have been developed (Donnelly & Whelan, 2017). The seven most common treaties had an average of 175 state parties and thus gained about 89% of ratification. Although human rights have become an international matter, implementation still lies within the states' responsibility. Thus, implementation is still lacking in many countries. Ever since the wave of incoming EU-member states in 2004, the debate about human rights violations is gaining attention.

3.1 Human rights in Hungary

Hungary's rating on civil liberties increased in 2005 due to the implementation of EU integration trends (Freedom House, 2005a). Consequently, the country increasingly conformed to EU standards in regard to human rights. In 2011, Hungary's score on civil liberties remained at the highest level, but a downward trend was observed due to the government's attempt to control independent media organisations (Freedom House, 2011). Moreover, concerns were raised about harassments of Roma people. This downward trend continued in 2011 and 2012 with the restriction of LGBT+ rights, women's rights, homeless people's rights, as well as freedom of religion (Human Rights Watch, 2013b): LGBT+ people were discriminated under the Family Protection Act from 2013, which includes married people and parent-child relationships, but excludes same-sex couples and cohabitants. The changed constitution further stated that "foetal life shall be subject to protection from the moment of conception" (Human Rights Watch, 2013a). This phrasing raised concerns about the restriction of women's reproductive rights. A law about the criminalization of homelessness was struck down by the Constitutional Court. Subsequently, the Hungarian government initiated a change in the constitution that permits the persecution of homeless people. Furthermore, 348 of 362 religious associations that previously were grouped under the term churches lost their status, and subsequently their state funding, as a result of 2013s constitutional changes. Following this, the ruling party took charge of the process of re-registration, denying the registration of 66 of the 84 churches that reapplied.

3.2 Human rights in Poland

When Poland joined the EU, the country improved its human rights standards to the level of the EU standards. After that, no significant changes can be observed until 2017. Then, the civil liberty score of Freedom dropped from 1 to 2. This decision was based on the fact that the ruling party tried to gain more power over “media, judiciary, civil service and education system” (Freedom House, 2017d). The management of the television and the radio is selected by the ruling party; therefore, the management is loyal to the current government. Journalists were denied entry to the parliament halls to interview politicians. Furthermore, academics that question the ruling parties’ view on history, especially concerning the role of Poland during World War 2, have to fear to be disgraced in public. A law, which would have decreased women's reproductive rights, was not enforced after massive demonstrations. The government can influence media and education, due to the fact that it can now select the head of television and radio, and the directors of schools. Additionally, the ruling party rewrote the curriculum of the education system. People criticised that the new curriculum promotes the party’s values too much. Since 2017 the country’s score on human rights has stayed low.

3.3 Human rights in Macedonia

Macedonia showed no significant changes in civil liberties over the last decade and a half. Since 2004, Macedonia was rated with a 3 out of 7 for civil liberties by Freedom House, indicating a good to medium rating. However, although the right of association and protest are guaranteed by the law, private citizens, journalists, politicians and religious leaders have been subject to governmental monitoring and wiretapping. Furthermore, women are by law equal to men, but in practice women often experience harassment and social injustice, as well as physical violence (Freedom House, 2017c).

3.4 Human rights in Serbia

Serbia’s ratings of civil liberties stayed stable over the years 2004 until 2018 according to Freedom House. In 2005, Serbia was still dealing with the returns of refugees and internally displaced people and showed difficulties accommodating the returning people (Human Rights Watch, 2006). In 2010, there was severe discrimination of Roma, including discrimination in employment, housing issues and forced evictions (Human Rights Watch, 2010). In 2017, Serbian authorities showed difficulties dealing with asylum seekers, although the number of new arrivals decreased in 2017 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In 2017, journalists in Serbia are still subject to increasing violence and influence of the government. Furthermore, minorities such as Roma still face major discrimination in daily life as well as in other parts, especially in housing. Human right defenders encounter strong resistance. Between August 2016 and August 2017, 79 incidents against LGBT+ activists were recorded. Many of the people who perpetrated these crimes were not prosecuted.

3.5 Comparison

Firstly, it is important to note that no country is implementing human rights sufficiently. Three main topics are a problem in each of the countries. First, the governments have control over the information that the population receives, through controlling private and state media, silencing academics, and corruption. Secondly, discrimination of minorities is a big issue in all of the four countries as well. This can be found in general (daily) discrimination of minorities but also in laws, such as the illegalization of homelessness in Hungary. Thirdly, while in each country women are equal to men per law, in daily life, this equality is not present. Additionally, as can be seen in Hungary and Poland, women's rights are attacked and not preserved.

Except for Macedonia, all countries show a downward trend regarding the implementation and protection of human rights. Striking is that Hungary and Poland showed more effort in protecting human rights before and right after entering the EU compared to their current situation regarding human rights. Even though Macedonia stands out positively in terms of its human rights score, it is important to note that it is the only country of the four that wiretaps and monitors citizens who might be critical about the government. Serbia has troubles implementing human rights, and human rights fighters are experiencing strong resistance.

4. Freedom of the media

The European Union also values freedom of the press, as stated in the tenth chapter of the entry requirements which candidates for EU-membership have to meet before they are accepted as members of the European Union (European Commission, 2016b). Eliminating obstacles for the operations of the mass media has been a priority of this chapter, which was listed within the Copenhagen Criteria (European Commission, 2016b). This specific criterion addresses the freedom of speech as well as the independence of media from the state it operates in. To meet the criteria of the tenth chapter a country has to allow both domestic and foreign media to operate within the nation it likes to operate in and report on any topic that is deemed legal (European Commission, 2016b). Additionally, anyone who, within the law, wants to operate a media outlet has to be able to do so and should be able to voice criticism against anyone if they wish to do so. Both of these core values have been violated by countries within the CEE in recent years.

4.1 Freedom of the media in Hungary

In Hungary, the media has been rendered ineffective on several occasions. This included the stopping and searching of journalists by the police, for instance when reporters tried to report on controversial developments in this country. Also, there have been shut downs and takeovers of critical news outlets within the country, such as the take-over of the critical *Népszabadság* newspaper in 2017 (Freedom House, 2017a). New regulations regarding the media have also hampered their freedom, which means that the media no longer have access to parliament and instead can only receive information through press briefings or directly through parliament members.

4.2 Freedom of the media in Poland

In Poland, the government has been taking over the national public broadcasting service, in order to project the government's message through government approved programs. In doing so, the amount of critique on the government that is broadcasted to the population is limited. Additionally, the Polish government has tried to pass laws restricting the access of journalists to politicians (Freedom House, 2017d). The government has been very strict about criticism on Polish history, especially when not in favour of the ruling party. For instance, outlets that documented the involvement of Polish nationals in war crimes during the Second World War have been sharply condemned. All in all, the general freedom of speech and freedom of reporting have been rapidly deteriorating in Poland.

4.3 Freedom of the media in Macedonia

The government of Macedonia has physically attacked journalists that have reported on anti-government protests and jailed some of them. Some reporters had to flee to other countries, as they were afraid that their reports would threaten the security of themselves and their families. Reporting on the electoral

process was closely monitored by government agencies and, moreover, the government launched a propaganda styled TV-station in February 2017 (Freedom House, 2017c).

4.4 Freedom of the media in Serbia

The media in Serbia are subject to increasing violence and influence by the government. The Serbian government has fuelled statements about anti-government broadcasting being supported by foreign propaganda. Furthermore, death threats have been received by several journalists as of 2017 (Freedom House, 2017e). A number of journalists have been dismissed from the national broadcasting network for political views they had, and others were intimidated when reporting on government critical issues.

4.5 Comparison

When comparing the four countries, one striking feature seems to be the manner in which the non-EU members have handled their press, in comparison to Poland and Hungary. Although these latter countries have very much diminished their press freedom, they have not done this in such a violent manner as have Serbia and Macedonia. Additionally, the death threats and intimidation against the media which occurred in Serbia are unprecedented in countries within the EU. Moreover, both Poland and Hungary have shown to violate the basic principles of press freedom and are therefore not meeting the standards of the EU (European Commission, 2016b). The general attitude in both Poland and Hungary towards the media is one of distrust, which leads to the government taking control of it and limiting its freedom.

5. Electoral processes

Free and fair elections are fundamental for democracy. This means that every citizen that is entitled to vote must be given the chance to vote and to make their choice freely without any fears or threats. Moreover, the vote must be treated confidentially. In order for elections to be fair, the competing parties must be able to campaign and to hold meetings in an equal manner. Also, the voters must be treated fairly in that all votes are counted, and everyone has the chance to register to vote. Lastly, it is essential that the actual votes are reflected in the announced results (Civic Academy, 2018). These requirements for democratic elections are met in many countries in Europe. Nevertheless, there are also countries in the EU that do not comply with all requirements for true democratic elections.

5.1 Electoral processes in Hungary

In Hungary, the president and the prime minister are elected through the National Assembly. This means that for the legitimacy of these votes, it is necessary that the elections for parliament are fair and free (Freedom House, 2018b). However, in recent years, elections for parliament have not been fair and free. From 2014 to 2015, in the timespan of one year, there was a heavy decline in the rating on Hungary's electoral process (Freedom House, 2015). The main reason for this is the revised election system which since 2012 favours the ruling party, Fidesz-KDNP, in such way that the opposition cannot cooperate as easily: the ruling party has legislative, media, and financial resources to their advantage, which leaves the opposition not being able to compete freely and fairly in the formal political system (Varga, 2018).

5.2 Electoral processes in Poland

Poland performs well when it comes to free and fair elections. In Poland, the president as well as the National Assembly are directly elected. The president then appoints the prime minister, who has to be confirmed by the National Assembly's lower house. There have been no changes in the freedom of Poland's elections in the last decades. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) regarded Poland's most recent parliamentary elections in 2015 as competitive and pluralistic, respecting "fundamental principles for democratic elections in an atmosphere of freedom to campaign and on the basis of equal and fair treatment of contestants" (ODHIR, 2015a).

5.3 Electoral processes in Macedonia

In Macedonia, the president is elected by direct vote, the National Assembly is elected by proportional representation and elects the prime minister, who holds "the most executive power" (Freedom House, 2017c). As of 2014, Macedonia has been performing worse on the part of electoral processes. The 2014 and 2017 elections were principally democratic, in that opposition had the ability to campaign and fundamental freedoms were respected. However, there were cases of voter intimidation and doubts about

the correctness of voter lists and the equality of votes (ODHIR, 2014). There seems to be a general lack of trust by the population in the political establishment and institutions (Freedom House, 2017c).

5.4 Electoral processes in Serbia

In Serbia, the president is elected directly, whereas the National Assembly is elected in a proportional representation vote, after which the Assembly elects a prime minister. In the last years, elections were basically free and fair, with some shortcomings. Those include the advantage of the ruling party in the campaigning, due to combining campaign activities with official activities. The opposition is not able to campaign efficiently, due to the pressure that is put on voters by the ruling party and due to the absence of the same financial resources. In addition, there are some administrative irregularities, which among other things led to reruns at some polling stations in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, these reruns were also not without concerns, such as the lacking time, the freedom of voters to complain and missing confidence that complaints will be heard (Freedom House, 2017e). Moreover, many recommendations by the ODHIR remained unaddressed (ODHIR, 2017).

5.5 Comparison

Whereas Poland performs well in the fairness and freedom of elections, both Macedonia and Hungary have shown a downward trend in international electoral process ratings since 2014. However, reasons for this descent in the ratings are diverse. In Hungary, the revised electoral system makes it hard for the opposition to actively campaign and cooperate, whereas in Macedonia, the opposition had no disadvantages. However, there are doubts about the correctness of voter lists and equality of votes, and voter intimidation in Macedonia. Although Macedonia and Hungary differ greatly in the aspects that led to decreased ratings, Hungary and Serbia show some similarities. For instance, in both Hungary and Serbia, a main shortcoming is that the opposition struggles to campaign effectively in comparison with the incumbent party since his party has strong advantages in the form of resources. Freedom and fairness of electoral processes are very diverse in the four countries, as every electoral system is unique.

6. Causes for downward trends

6.1 International relations

The de-democratization in Eastern European countries may have been caused by a difference in ideas about international politics and relations between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. After 1989, the then EU countries promoted a dual transition regarding the former communist countries. This transition encompassed both the shift from a form of authoritarian governance to democracy and the shift from a planned economy to a market economy. These were the ideas heralded in *The End of History* (Fukuyama, 1989). To expand these ideas international institutions such as the EU, the IMF and the World bank actively pushed for the Washington consensus: Providing financial aid to transitioning countries in return for reform packages aimed at promoting a neoliberal society (Naim, 2000). The subsequent transitions would provide a basis for mutually profitable relationships between countries and would result in a net improvement in economic growth for both the CEE countries as well as the Western countries. Thus, successful implementation of the Washington consensus would result in a nonzero-sum game, in which the overall gains are increased through cooperation between the participants, allowing the interests of the participants to overlap (Wright, 2000, p. 20).

A problem might have been that the countries in CEE do not ascribe to the same world view as Western countries. The CEE countries had only just regained de facto independence from the Soviet-Union. Moreover, both Poland and Hungary each had its, relatively recent, national traumas. For Poland these included the invasions of its territory by both Nazi-Germany and the Soviet-Union in 1939 and the subsequent decision of the United States, the United Kingdom and France to allow a de facto annexation of the country by the Soviet-Union in 1945. Hungary's national trauma goes back to the First World War when it was forced to disband its union with Austria and had to surrender more than half of its territory under the Trianon treaty of 1919. Furthermore, it was affected by the Soviet-Union's violent crackdown on its revolution in 1956. Based on events as these, policy makers in both Poland and Hungary can hardly be faulted for having adopted a more cautious view on international politics. They might regard international relations not as the nonzero-positive sum game, to which the liberal countries ascribe, but rather as a zero-sum game in which "one contestant's gain is the other's loss" (Wright, 2000, p. 20).

Mearsheimer (2014) argued that such a difference in world views might be the basis of crisis, based on an example of the Ukraine crisis between the EU and Russia. This crisis eventually led to the annexation of the Crimea by Russia and may partly be caused by different perspectives on international relations. Mearsheimer proposed that some countries act through an entirely liberal view on international relations, seeking cooperation that would result in mutual benefit, while others act through a realist view, which grants paramount importance to state security and sovereignty, and which distrusts the intentions of other states. A clash between these views might play a role in the recent de-democratization and authoritarian tendencies in the CEE countries. Rulers might not simply trust institutions, such as the

judiciary, whose independence is taken for granted in Western European countries. Furthermore, they might feel too constrained by such institutions, as these can only exist at the expense of the executive's own power (Olson, 1993). Thus, in order to secure the tight grip on power, which the realist perspective demands in a state, rulers in CEE might feel tempted to erode the democratic regime in the favour of their own power.

6.2 Nationalism

Compared to nationalism in the West, nationalism in CEE is exceptionally exclusive (Bugaric, 2008). It manifests as ethnic nationalism, nationalism based on the ethnic group to which the majority of the population belongs, in contrast to civic nationalism, which is based on citizenship (Kojouharov, 2004). One consequence of ethnic nationalism is the conceptualization of liberal democracy, as liberties are often not interpreted as the freedoms that are expressed in the European values, but as liberalization from other ethnic groups. This can lead to discrimination and suppression of minorities and the subsequent limitations of human rights, which is happening in CEE with for instance Roma, or the LGBT-community.

Because of this rather ethnocentric nationalism, the losses suffered by a nation might influence its citizens, as if they were their own personal losses (see Gilovich et al., 2016, Moghaddam, 2016 about social-identity theory). The more an individual identifies with his nation, the more defining become its features to the individual's self-esteem. The same emotions that define an individual's self-esteem can thus be employed to the national dignity: Fear, humiliation, and pride (Shaoguang, 2004). One example of this is Viktor Orban's claim that Hungary has been done an injustice with the treaty of Trianon, which allegedly bereaved the country of a large amount of its territory after World War I (Nougayrède, 2017). He hereby induces a sense of national victimhood, triggering a feeling of humiliation in the Hungarian population that feels personal, even for people who did not experience the treaty themselves (Bouchat et al., 2016). This can eventually result in the development of what is called a "learned helplessness", which usually results in resignation and the acceptance of injustice. This learned helplessness finds expression in the acceptance of the illiberal structures found in Hungary, including the limitation of press freedom and the deprivation of civil liberties.

Another objective that is reached with the induction of national victimhood is the conjuring of an enemy that has to be fought. After all, victimhood is a binary concept: If there is a victim, there has to be a victimizer (Lim, 2010). In CEE, this has led to a xenophobic national attitude, since every strange person is a potential enemy that the nation has to be protected against. One example for this is Hungary's reaction to the 'refugee crisis' and a binding EU relocation quota: The citizens are warned that migrants would endanger the country's culture and traditions (Gall, 2016). Human rights are not extended to asylum seekers and migrants, as those in need of help are denied access to the country and partially even pushed back violently.

6.3 Civil Society

The term “civil society” is used broadly to describe organizations, communities, and places where people come together for a self-defined purpose (Evans and Boyte, 1992). These people voluntarily build their own community, become active, and work together on a certain determination (O’Connell, 2000). It had been debated whether civil societies stand to positively affect the association for governance or whether civil societies act as “counterweight to the state” (Foley and Edwards, 1996). When a civil society in a country is strong, it means that citizens are free to form associations in which they can execute their interests and opinions. In a democracy, this is of great importance. It follows that civil society is a crucial factor to democracy as well. States that fail to be recognized as free democracies are those, in which associations among citizens are not politically protected. Such protection is necessary, as associations define and represent the people of a state (Warren, 2012): In order to form a state in which the government is seen as a government *by* the people, citizens have to be directly involved in “deliberative and discursive forums” (McLaverty, 2010). By being involved in that form, decision-making processes are taken to a public level (McLaverty, 2010). Latin America and Eastern Europe have largely pressured authoritarian regimes to change thanks to civil societies (Foley and Edwards, 1996). When it comes to citizens’ ability to gather freely, media plays an important role. Not only does media give citizens the ability to exchange opinions and values, it also provides a tool to gather information to make an informed decision about political parties. Nowadays, in order for any state to be a democracy it needs to have a free and neutral media (Kumar, 2016). Free media and civil societies are closely related. Independence of media is also needed, so that the population can build and share its point of view. As discussed in chapter 4, media has an important role in the unfavourable situation of civil societies as it mainly focuses on the ruling party and discriminates the opposition.

The civil society in Hungary has been under strong attacks since 2013. NGO’s have been criminalized by the government, and funds have been limited. Youth participation in politics has decreased the most in Hungary, in comparison to other EU states. From 2011 to 2013, the percentage of participation in politics decreased from 67% to 39% (European Commission, 2015). Nevertheless, it can be observed that new approaches, such as popular culture, lead to some degree of involvement.

In Poland, civil society is decreasing, as it has been under attack by the government as of 2016. Laws have been put in place, which threaten the work of non-governmental organizations, which leads to these organizations having trouble continuing their work. Also, the government has established its own NGOs, trying to replace the work of the already existing organizations. Additionally, the dialogue between civil societies, the government and the population is shrinking. Finally, youth involvement is low, and decreasing in Poland.

In Serbia, civil society is presented by the fact that citizens gather, assemble, and in some cases even protest. The police has been present and protecting these protests, making sure that those who want to protest can do so in peace. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations in general struggle with

funding in Serbia (Freedom House, 2018b). In 2008, the EU established The Civil Society Facility to help and support the development of civil society. In Serbia, the funds aim at increasing the cooperation and dialogue regionally and support civil society organizations that aim to pursue the goals presented in chapter 23 and 24 of the Copenhagen Criteria of the EU (European Commission, 2016b). Youth political involvement seems to be rather low in Serbia. Young people face many problems in their lives, such as financial dependencies, a lack of good education, and unemployment. Moreover, they feel excluded from politics (Tomanovic & Stanojevic, 2015) and seem to be more attracted to other forms of engagement than politics (ODHIR, 2015b). Even though support from the government is lacking, there are organizations that do support youth involvement in politics (ODHIR, 2015b). In order for youth to become more involved in politics, more and better dialogue and communication and better political platforms are needed (Antony, 2014).

In Macedonia, there has been increasing pressure on civil society, with for instance financial inspections being undertaken. Nikola Gruevski, the ruling party leader, has called for a need of “de-Sorozation” - the financing of civil society by liberal billionaire and foundation chair George Soros or other foreign governments. He wants civil society to rely more on the Macedonian government, which would make them dependent on the government. This is mostly rejected by civil society organizations, as they want to “maintain accountability to the public” (Ifex, 2017). Until now, the youth in Macedonia has not been perceived as being able to have a positive impact on social, cultural and economic changes of society. In general, there is a lot of emigration of young people due to a high unemployment, low participation in social and political development, and very small advantages of social, cultural or economic development (National Youth Council of Macedonia, 2017). Institutions and organizations such as the European Commission and the National Youth Council of Macedonia are working to increase youth participation in politics and civil society (EACEA National Policies Platform, 2018; National Youth Council of Macedonia, 2017).

7. Conclusion

The perception of liberal democracy, which we consider to be representative of democracy is heavily influenced by Western-European values. As such there is a need to bear in mind that the four countries we chose, do differ substantial in their interpretation of democracy from both each other and from the dominant interpretation in Western Europe. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct an in-depth investigation of each country's individual democratic development. Despite the differences between the countries our investigation revealed some striking general tendencies and commonalities. Even though all four countries struggle with key aspects of a liberal democracy, the violations are particularly drastic in Hungary and Poland. This is especially troublesome because both are members of the EU and are committed to the Copenhagen Criteria, which they are currently violating. We established three possible explanations for the democratic backsliding, being: Different perspectives on international relations, rising nationalism and a weak civil society.

The European Commission has very limited policy measures to influence an individual country once it has ascended the EU as a member. Moreover, too much pressure from the EU on national policies could be perceived, or purposefully conveyed to the public, as an outside assault on national sovereignty. Therefore, we recommend aiming policies at a change in the very base of democracy, its citizens. The FMS has the means to facilitate this change and should focus more on younger voters instead of only on politician. The details of this advice and the rationale behind it is outlined in the following recommendations section.

8. Recommendations

There are many countries in the world that can be considered liberal democracies. Each of these countries' political systems differ from each other, but there are five important indicators that each of these countries should possess, as mentioned in our report: (1) The judiciary should be able to operate independently. (2) Rule of law should be in place. (3) Human rights standards should be met. (4) The media should be free of governmental influences. (5) The elections have to be free and fair. While these pillars represent a part of the foundations of liberal democracy, they are solely structural: they describe the structure of the system that is called liberal democracy. However, the essence of democracy is not only systemic: It is also human. After all, democracy is the rule of the people. In order to find out how the people themselves think about the situation in the CEE we visited Budapest and conducted interviews with (young) politicians, academics and activists. By doing so we established that there were major shortcomings in different parts of the democratic system in Hungary. We identify these shortcomings and possible solutions below.

In our report, we found three of the causes for the democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe. Firstly, a one-size-fits-all version of liberal democracy does not seem realistic, considering that each country has a unique culture and background. A realist view on international relations, emphasizing the need for a tight grip on power, might not easily be integrated with a liberal view, which is focused on the spread of liberal democracy. The tensions deriving from this contradistinction may lead a democratic ruler to secure a tighter grip on his power, thus diminishing the power of independent institutions in the country. Secondly, ethnic nationalism is used to justify discriminative and xenophobic tendencies, as well as the limitations of human rights. Finally, a strong civil society is related to freedom of expression. If the civil society of a country is not purpose-built and connected to the citizen's interests, but rather formally organized or restricted, it does not fulfil its purpose as a sphere that operates independently from governmental and business interests. All of these points are directly connected to cultural and psychological concepts and only indirectly linked to political systems. We therefore conclude that interventions to change the system should aim at cultural and individual aspects.

The work of the Foundation Max van der Stoel is based on the assumption that political skills can be learned. Politicians can learn how to communicate with their voters, or how to create a message that will be listened to. We believe that politicians are not the only ones who are able to learn and need to learn political skills.

Every citizen in a country can acquire the skills and undergo the experiences that are necessary to become an active participant in the political sphere. Based on our research and field experience we identified three necessary circumstances that can be induced:

1. There has to be communication between the countryside and the city. If only one group of people is politically active, the country will not be able to develop into a stable democracy.

2. A sense of community is necessary for the citizens to develop the need to actively take part in and influence the political sphere.
3. It is important to improve the political efficacy of individual members of the population ensuring that citizens both believe that they themselves can participate fully in politics and that their participation will have meaningful consequences.

Our recommendations will address these issues concentrating on young people, in the age group of 18-25. We have chosen this target group, because our qualitative research has shown that young people often lack interest in democratic issues and the skills necessary to debate those issues.

8.1 Communication between the city and the countryside

The urban and country divide has been reinforced since the introduction of capitalism (A. Kowalski, personal communication, April 20, 2018).⁶ Even young people from the city and the countryside lack communication between each other. The problem is that the countryside lacks the media infrastructure needed in order to be reached effectively. Most political parties struggled in the last elections to reach voters, as the main communication channel to reach the countryside is face-to-face communication (A. Demeter, personal communication, April 20, 2018). More free media and communication between the people would be necessary to encourage a liberal democracy with freedom of opinion. The lack of (mass) media infrastructure influences the amount of information inhabitants of the countryside receive. Therefore, it is almost impossible for them to inform themselves sufficiently. The countryside does not have the option to peruse different media sources such as international media channel and in general media channels independent from the government, which leads to the transfer of mainly biased opinions (P. Török, personal communication, April 22, 2018). In order to facilitate communication and connection for people all over the country, discussions should be about issues or topics which are important to everyone, such as human rights.

In order to get the discussion started relatively simple messages that can easily reach the young people in the entire country should be used (A. Demeter, personal communication, April 20, 2018).

8.2 Community

Young people in Hungary seem to feel powerless in politics and think that they cannot change anything about the political and societal situation in Hungary. One reason for this perceived helplessness is that young people in Hungary commonly do not learn to express their opinion, neither in school nor in their families. The Hungarian education system fails to teach skills that are necessary to be a democratic citizen (V. Takacs, personal communication, April 19, 2018). Adding to this feeling of helplessness is the perception that an ordinary citizen cannot have an impact as the power of the government seems to be overwhelming. However, this is not true for all young adults in Hungary:

⁶ Summaries of the interviews conducted in Budapest are published in the appendix

there are huge gaps in thought between young people living in Budapest and those living on the countryside. Joining the forces of the young people could counteract the feeling of powerlessness. To improve communication, as mentioned previously, and interaction, it is necessary to create a space, whether physical or virtual, in which young people can come together and exchange their opinions and thoughts (A. Demeter, personal communication, April 20, 2018). Only when they hear and see that others share similar thoughts can one increase one's own feeling of powerfulness.

Bringing together young people from various backgrounds, educationally and geographically, can achieve that they are able to unite and create a sense of community. This means that they may build a democratic community of engaged citizens. In order to reach this, every individual should possess the necessary skills and think that he/she can have an impact.

8.3 Political efficacy

Young people in Hungary generally do not have the feeling that they have control over the political situation. Many young people have voted against the government and feel unheard, and many, whether they voted for Fidesz-KNDP or not, feel like politicians do not really take into account young people's interests. Feelings such as these can be expressed in terms of both internal and external political efficacy. The first refers to which extent a citizen believes s/he is able "to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Craig, Niemi & Silver, 1990, p. 290). The latter is about the citizen's "feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell, 1954, p. 187).

Thus, internal efficacy refers to personal capabilities as perceived by the individual her/himself while external efficacy entails the extent to which the individual believes s/he can influence politics.

Political efficacy is important towards a well-functioning democracy since "the more one feels able to understand politics and have their voice heard, the more likely they are to pursue democratic endeavors" (Zúñiga, Diehl, & Ardévol-Abreu, 2017, p. 574).

The hierarchical system in Hungary strengthens the position of the elderly and wise politicians, which results in the lowering of both internal and external political efficacy of young Hungarians. This low political efficacy, in combination with the absence of education in politics and political systems, results in a very low number of young people being active in politics. Young people feel like their voice is not heard enough, resulting in a disinterest in politics. This disinterest is however a combination of being unheard and not being educated enough about politics. Students in Hungary hardly learn anything about politics and political systems and ideologies in high school; they often lack the knowledge to actively participate. Moreover, the lack of political education is strengthened by the absence of unbiased information, since the Hungarian media is mostly controlled by patrimonial networks loyal to the Fidesz-KNDP party and Viktor Orbán.

There are several ways in which political efficacy can be increased. An important pathway is through investing in good and independent media that can offer its users the high-quality news articles (Gastil & Xenos, 2010). Through this channel, people can gather information about the political situation in their country more easily and are able to spread this information. Moreover, they can discuss these articles with each other. Such discussions are also important for improving one's internal political efficacy since "the more one discusses politics, the more likely one is to come away from those experiences feeling more confident in their political skills" (Zúñiga, Diehl, & Ardévol-Abreu, 2017, p. 574). As such, organising events and occasions at which people can freely discuss their political views and ideas would help in improving their internal political efficacy. Furthermore, education is also a major influencer of political efficacy. Educated citizens, on average, are more enlightened and engage more in politics (Rasmussen & Norgaard, 2018, p. 39). Thus, offering better education or focusing more on the humanities in educational programmes would allow people to enlighten themselves. We believe that attention should be devoted to improving the situation in these fields. By doing this both the internal and external political efficacy of young people may be boosted, allowing them to both believe that they themselves have the necessary skills for engaging in politics and that their actions will actually influence the situation.

8.4 The event

All in all, three important issues have been discovered limiting the participation of young people in politics, being the countryside-city division, the lack of a sense of community between young people in the country and the low levels of political efficacy. We propose an event to show young people from both the city and countryside how they could have an impact on politics. Instead of politicians, ordinary young citizens from all parts of Hungary would be the target group of such an event. During this event there would be workshops, presentations and experiments concerning the topics of democracy, human rights and political involvement. Although this has not been a focus of the FMS, we do believe that an event can help young people deal with the three problems we have identified. The event would focus on workshops that allow participants to learn how to engage in a tolerant yet effective debate. Most of the Hungarian youth seems to lack these skills due to a very hierarchical culture, in which the opinion of the authority is most of the time simply accepted as the truth. That the lack of a discussion culture and the know-how for a political debate is a problem was confirmed by Gulyás, the leader of the “Country for all movement” (M. Gulyás, personal communication, April 20, 2018). He took action to solve this problem by organising the first real political debate with all parties on national television.

In the manual *becoming a better politician*, the section about debating gives excellent advice about the nuances of debating such as non-verbal communication and tone (Foundation Max van der Stoel, 2009, pp. 53-59). However, it is neglected that some young adults lack very basic debating skills such as phrasing an argument in such a way that the other party will understand the message. We suggest that, after basic discussion skills have been learned, the more advanced skills such as non-verbal communication and tone should be addressed. To learn these basic discussion skills, we would suggest organising a workshop in which participants engage in a series of exercises to improve these skills. Moreover, they can acquire knowledge about advantages of and possible causes of difficulties in a debate. The skills to be learned should include but are not limited to: the correct phrasing of arguments, reinforcing arguments with objective source material, reacting to counterarguments and giving feedback to fellow debaters.

Participants should also gain knowledge about basic group dynamics which can occur during discussions and should acquire techniques to detect counterproductive behaviour in debates. A very important point in designing exercises for the workshop is that they need to engage the participant, address their emotions and let them utilise their new knowledge. This will help the participants to incorporate their new skills and knowledge into their everyday behaviour and ensures that the exercises will stay in the mind longer and more vividly.

By engaging in debate with each other we believe that participants can both form communities, which also helps in bridging the countryside-city differences, and are able to improve both their internal and external political efficacy. However, in order to properly and effectively organise the proposed event there are several considerations that need to be taken into account.

Firstly, it is necessary to take into consideration that social networks are not widely available in the countryside. Therefore face-to-face, mail and poster promotion would be beneficial and should be considered when organizing an event to promote interaction. The goal is to bring young people together from all parts of Hungary, which could be mediated through schools, universities, local organizations and city councils. It is important to note that no specific political party or viewpoint except for democracy is mediated during this event. It should be open towards all opinions while emphasizing the discussion on democracy. This will ensure that there exists no bias towards certain political views or exclusion towards young people who might not consider themselves as interested in the political process.

Secondly, (online) platforms for people to discuss and engage with each other should be built so that communication can continue after the event. In order to facilitate such platforms, the availability of digital infrastructure is of vital concern. If such infrastructure is not widely available, investments should be made to improve upon the availability of this infrastructure. The platforms themselves do not need to be highly sophisticated. For example, simple Facebook groups could keep young people connected. Making connections through discussion platforms is vital for continuous progress, as ideas that started at a possible event can grow and evolve through such a platform.

Finally, it is important to be creative and understandable when reaching out to young people. As such we specifically recommend that such effort be done in a “catchy”-fashion, so as to attract as many young people as possible. For instance, lengthy documentaries about democratic values will not attract the interest of many young people while brief but informative videos might do so.

8.5 Further recommendations

Apart from the discussed event there are further activities that could be undertaken by the FMS in order to bridge the gap between the countryside and the city, to stimulate a sense of community and to improve the political efficacy of young people:

1. Establishing an internet platform that broadcasts news regarding politics and allows for political discussion;
2. Organising an exchange programme for high school children from the countryside and the cities;
3. Writing a manual for ordinary citizens explaining them how to get active in politics or do something for their community;
4. Writing a manual teaching how to differentiate between reliable and untrustworthy information in the media.

Since some of these proposals may be out of reach for the FMS due to budgetary and physical constraints, it might be helpful to cooperate with local organizations. Such organizations can be very diverse in type. For instance, to improve the (digital) infrastructure, political institutions, local politicians, or the regional development committee of the EU can be addressed. Moreover, to

stimulate communication, it might also be fruitful to address different associations, such as sports associations (take for instance Magyar Cserkészszövetség, a scouting organisation) or churches since these associations might already have some kind of infrastructure that can be utilised by the FMS. Finally, local civil society organizations can be approached, in order to cooperate on organizing events.

8.6 Conclusion

In general, the main advice comes down to improving the infrastructure, in terms of (digital) media, communication, and interaction, leading to a greater sense of community and political efficacy.

Especially young people should be reached and integrated into the political sphere. Although this seems broad, we think it is worthwhile to invest in (digital) infrastructure, since a lack of communication seems to be the main problem standing in the way of democracy. This can be done on multiple different levels: either small scale through the FMS, or broader through an EU framework.

Appendix: Interview summaries

Interview Daniel Berg

20-04-2018

Daniel Berg is Chief of the International office for Momentum, a Hungarian political party with a strong focus on young people.

Networks

Main problem about campaigning and main thing about the regime of Orban is that they have an important guy in every sector; so, there is one responsible for the biggest tv-channel in the country, there is one controlling the important paper etc. It is a network of oligarchs; political scientists have called it a mafia state basically.

The EU

The commission has been pretty critical, and they have started looking at the corruption; they are doing all they can, since they are attacking a MS. The real problem is the Parliament. The EPP is still very strong and supporting Orban and that is politically damaging. A CDU voter for example is not pro-Orban.

Orban would in the end not advocate a Huxit in the end though. It is unlikely, he has more leverage being the populist and divisive nationalist in the EU; country tend to follow that, look at Poland and the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This illiberal populist rhetoric can work, as well as the communist rhetoric did.

Youth

We try to get people, young people, involved. Maybe they do not see a party that suits their preferences right now, but that is what Momentum is trying to do. We have a lot of local community level activities for them to participate in. We have a program advocating for expanding the Erasmus program and for more funding for student debt. It really community level engagement that can show politics is not just people in suits making backroom deals.

A lot of people have been disillusioned by politics; and we have a lot of people who want to leave the country. Young people want to leave the country.

Over time it will hopefully show that Momentum has an advantage over Fidesz by having more young voters. However, there is still a lot to do to get people to vote. But demographically there is an advantage. Fidesz voters are between 40 and 60 years old, so that is not going to continue. They are stable now, but they do not really get new voters. They have the same 2 million voters and now they were better in mobilizing their voters.

Opposition

Most of the campaign they have been talking about how to collaborate, in order to get rid of Fidesz. I think people need more than just people saying we need to get rid of Orban, that is not enough. The question is how we actually wanted to work together then. It is not a real view of the future. They could have talked more to the actual people than to one another about coordination about who is going to step back in which districts. They had too much interparty politics.

Future of Momentum

Momentum now needs more voters and needs to also concentrate on the EP elections and the local elections before the next elections in 4 years. They also need to professionalize more and structure it more. Now we had been existing 1 year and campaigned straight away.

We get some sending from the government, but we also get money out of crowd funding with specific projects (women in politics) and membership fees.

Social media is our main channel, state media is controlled, so that gives another idea. Facebook is our main channel, but we also talk a lot to people too.

We are with around 25 to 30 people; most of them are with communication, but we also have some lawyers.

The countryside is harder to reach, here in Budapest people have their alternative media.

We do have a program; our focus will be on finding a good counter narrative and finding something that does appeal as much to the people as this migration narrative for example does. A sort of positive populism. We have to find a good, positive rhetoric.

Future of Fidesz

Fidesz will probably attack civil society even more, they really want to control the whole society. The problem is that there is no real checks and balances; for the judiciary, the chief-prosecutor is an old party member for example.

The average voter does not really think about ideology and so on, so Orban can say that he wants an illiberal democracy, you really need to have some knowledge about this stuff. He plays on fear of people, like the migrants situation. He frames it like they will take over. People vote out of fear; they vote for stability.

The opposition did not have a real overarching message. They only said “we want to get rid of Orban”, but that is not enough. They did not really have programs either.

Nationalism play a huge role; Hungary is a super homogenous country, one of the most homogenous in Europe. And having this history with communism, where people did not get much of a worldview or world perspective about other cultures; so that is a strong appeal. If you vote for the socialists, they will work with Brussels and that will destroy the Hungarian society.

Russian influence

One of the biggest issues we have up here are actually the Russian influence. Orban is Putin’s Trojan horse into the EU, and this internal division in the EU is obviously good for Putin, economically they can’t do anything because of the sanctions and everything. They have gas, but will that be a thing in the future? The only way they can weaken the EU is to weaken it from the inside. That is why you see Putin meeting with Le Pen, with Orban, with populist, right-wing people.

Future opposition

This two third majority might influence the opposition to be more active actually. And it is a virtual majority; more people voted against Fidesz than for Fidesz. I think it is really dangerous to say that you have a 60% majority, while you do not actually have one. You can do whatever you want, but in the end of the day more people hate you than like you. So if I were Orban, I would be very careful. But we have seen that they have become more aggressive and arrogant, so yeah...

Constitution

They can change the constitution with this majority now, he does not need to disband they parliament in order to do that. He can modify it with the two third majority. I think he will not change it in substantial areas; he already basically did that the first time. Everything he needed in place for expanding his power he already has. We do not even have a constitution, we have something called the fundamental law, which is a really interesting document because it has some weird normative things like Hungary is a Christian nation, or they put in an amendment that we will not accept any migrants from the EU. It is not really like a legal document, it is more like a propaganda piece or a party manifesto.

Interview Arom Demeter

20-04-2018

Arom Demeter is working at Amnesty International in Budapest.

Amnesty International in Hungary

NGOs in Hungary are having a hard time at the moment. The 2/3 majority of Fidesz in the last elections will mean that NGOs will fear to be shut down. The government claims that there are 'good' and 'bad' NGOs. Other international NGOs are giving some support to Hungarian NGOs, but especially the EU is not fast enough to take actions. Also if the EU will act upon the new law, that restricts NGOs, it will not be very effective.

Amnesty International's main audience are well-educated women between 25 and 45, who are Budapest-based, work in the private or international sector, have a good income and speak English. They are able to go out into the world and look at other sources of information instead of the state-media. Demeter explained that it is especially women who support Amnesty International as men are less receptive. A second relatively large audience are young people from 18 to 25, who are discovering the world outside of school.

Use of media

The media landscape in Hungary is biased by pro-government media, which makes it hard for independent journalists to work and for citizens to get 'real' information. NGOs are always reaching the same people, namely the ones that already agree with their positions. NGOs are restricted in their media use, as they are not invited to the state media. This influences to a great extent where and how many people are reached. Moreover, the government responds to messages, which does not always have a positive effect.

Projects

At the moment, Amnesty International in Budapest is mainly concerned with surviving. In the past they were active in many different areas, they for instance occupied themselves with refugee issues, hate-crimes, racism, homophobia and transgender campaigns. Examples for forms of projects are education work, public communication, advocacy to the EU and UN and campaigning.

Fidesz' strategy

Orban is the leading voice in the anti-refugee tendency. He creates a narrative in which migrants are a threat and Hungary defends Hungary itself, Europe, the Christian world and thus acts as a hero. This thought is spread throughout the countryside at which the people have not even had any contact with migrants or people from abroad. People on the countryside are very poor, some even starving, and corruption is very present. Besides these problems their main fear is that of migrants, which was created by the government with its good story telling. The government claims that they might indeed steal money but that it therefore protects the citizens from migrants. Many people from abroad do not believe that such a simple story is believed, but it is not the case that people from the countryside are stupid, they are simply exposed to this thought all day, without any alternatives. Moreover, in many villages the citizens work for the village. As the mayor is often supporter of Fidesz and the people do not want to lose their job, they vote for Fidesz. Although there is some cheating in every election, that wouldn't change the fact that Fidesz wins. Not only did Fidesz create fear with its narrative, the party also 'bought' votes by giving free food to the people, giving vouchers to pensioners and/or cutting heating bill costs. This strategy was invented by Arthur Finkelstein, who advised Orban. His theory was that people do not care about the health care system but about that they are protected so the tactic is to give them an enemy. Thus, "fighting against the non-existing enemy".

Amnesty International is supporting Ahmed H., which was depicted by the government as a terrorist. The government could thereby support his claim that 'all Arabs are terrorists', so Ahmed's case acted as a symbol case which was represented to the public.

Failure of the opposition

The main problem is that opposition parties are not present in the countryside, only Fidesz is. This is based on the thought that it is not necessary to go to the people in person because media will represent the party. The opposition has not as many resources, in form of money or networks, as the Fidesz party to campaign. Moreover, the opposition parties are mainly fighting against each other instead of doing actual campaigns and meeting people. The oppositions' only agenda is to get away Orban, but they do not have real messages to change anything. They might say that the health care system is bad, but they don't provide a solution to it. Thus, their messages are too simple and do not present a real idea. In fact, Fidesz does also not provide a solution to such issues but its excuse is that they do not have any time as they are fighting migrants. Fidesz is therefore more professional than others although their only message is that the opposition works with Soros.

What could help?

Demeter is of the opinion that education on human rights is very important and may help the country, but it needs a lot of time to affect something. It could lead to the next government being more open-minded, but this effect would only occur in 20-25 years. He also made clear that there is a difference between activism and politics. They focus on raising peoples voice who think that they can change something in the environment, not necessarily in politics.

It is important to educate young people, as changing adults' opinions is impossible. Amnesty aims to educate young people on which values are important so that they themselves can make up their mind about which party they want to support. Many opposition parties have mostly communicated to elderly people in a rather boring fashion. In order to attract young people it is important to have simple but brave messages and to use channels that the youth uses. A physical or virtual space must be created in which young people can get together and share what they think. Many are of the opinion that they cannot change anything and feel powerless. Coming together with others who share the same viewpoint might change this feeling of powerlessness. Thus, it is important to join forces and to present real messages.

In conclusion, one new thought is:

“Don't change the government, but change the opposition”

Interview Molnar Gergely

21-04-2018

Molnar Gergely is the vice-president of the youth party of Societas. Societas is currently the largest left-wing opposition party in the Hungarian parliament.

The Societas is the largest left-wing socialist party in Hungary. Gergely is part of the youth movement of this party and acts as the vice-president. Before the 2018 elections the Societas was the largest opposition party in the Hungarian parliament. Before 2010, the party governed during one term (from 1994-1998) and two consecutive terms (from 2002-2006 and 2006-2010) before being overtaken by the Fidesz party during the 2010 elections. During the first term of Societas the party enjoyed a 2/3rd supermajority in parliament. During the consecutive terms from 2002-2010 the party engaged in a coalition with the liberal party of Hungary in order to gain a simple majority. The party's position was destroyed during the 2010 elections because of leaks that implied that the party had not governed well during the first term.

Gergely believes that the electoral system is constructed in the favour of the Fidesz party. During the 2010 election Fidesz won fairly, mostly due to the leaks in Societas. However, when they had a supermajority they quickly passed a series of laws and constitutional changes in order to modify the electoral system. The new system was a dual electoral system, in which districts (worth 106 seats) and party ballots (worth 93 seats) determine the distribution of the parliament. The district votes are based on a First past the Post system and are thus also winner-takes-all. However, the difference between the winner in a district and the candidate that was ranked second are counted towards the party ballots. Thus there is an additional bonus for the winning party in a district, skewing the electoral system in favour of the winning party. During the 2018 elections this party was Fidesz, which was able to capture 2/3 of the parliament's seats with only 48% of the votes.

Also, Fidesz has a sort of patrimonial system with which they are able to control parts of society. The personal network of the prime minister Viktor Orban is installed in several key functions in the country, such as the judicial court and media outlets. Through such channels Fidesz is able to control most of the media outlets in the country. Critical media outlets are often repressed due to one-sided use of fines by the government. Moreover, international networks such as RTL do not readily engage in political matters. Also, those channels are often not supported on the countryside away from the main cities. Thus, it is difficult for people in the countryside to get access to independent media.

Gergely states that coordinating all opposition parties was very difficult during the elections. There are several left-wing parties that all compete for the same votes. Furthermore, there is the large right-wing party Jobbik which is part of the opposition against Orban but does not hold compatible views to the left-wing parties. Gergely also believes that the Jobbik party is reasonably sure of a victory in subsequent elections and is therefore not willing to bind itself in a coalition with left-wing parties. He does believe however that a coalition of all opposition parties would have been able to defeat Fidesz and gain a majority in parliament. Should this happen however, the coalition would be very fragile since it would be composed of a myriad of parties. The only option that would be possible would be to win the elections in order to change the constitution and the electoral systems and subsequently step down from the government, triggering fresh and fairer elections.

Gergely believes that the EU should refrain from engaging in punitive measures against Hungary, since this might provide support to Fidesz's rhetoric about the infringement of national sovereignty. Punitive measures would only make the problem worse. Also, the population of Hungary would suffer from any sanctions levelled on Hungary while the key actors in Fidesz would remain relatively unscathed.

Societas believes in the potential of young people and their involvement in politics. They give lectures in schools in order to make sure that people will be more involved in politics. Also they try to appeal

to young voters by focusing on those things that are important for them, such as good work, high wages and housing.

The current focus points of *societas* for the next years is on the streets instead of the parliament. There is no possibility to make progress in parliament since Fidesz controls a supermajority. *Societas* wants to organise protests and demonstrations and aims to ensure that the divide between the cities and the rural areas are not enlarged.

Interview Márton Gulyás

23-04-2018

Márton Gulyás is an activist and the leader of the country for all movement. The movement wants to educate voters on politics in general.

1. Can you tell us a little bit about your work? What does the country for all movement do?

He is a youtuber, film maker and theatre director. The movement wants to educate voters by organising discussions with all parties, organising workshops and protests.

2. What did inspire you to become an activist?

Victor Urban was his main inspiration, because he is such a treat to all who want democracy. During his reign all who want democratic values have learned that they need to fight for them and become active, because they are no longer self-evident.

3. How does it make you feel that you are called an official enemy of the state?

It sounds way more dangerous as it actually is and it is just there to threaten people. This is just the way the regime does its PR and just a use of threatening rhetoric, but they will not actually do something.

4. You tried to throw paint at the president and got into jail for it. Did that change anything about your opinions or are you more careful now?

It was just 72h and not a bad time, because you have a lot of time for yourself. You can read and think about a lot of things.

5. Would you consider yourself a rebel?

He does not like that people call themselves a rebel

6. A lot of young well-educated people do leave your country. What do you think about it and what could be done about it?

The Hungarian government does not provide any cheap housing or scholarships for students. And even after finishing your degree you earn very little while cost of living are very high. So it is a very reasonable decision to move to other EU countries where you earn so much more or where it is much cheaper to study.

7. Why do you think Hungary in particular struggles to become a liberal democracy?

Hungary has a very fragile opposition that does not dare to speak up against the leading parties. In addition, the society lacks clear values so that people do not protest against violation of basic rights and values.

8. What do you think about the Eurosceptic, nationalistic developments and the lack of civil society in your country and what could be the roots of this?

Euroscepticism is not a problem caused by anything specific to Hungary but is a problem of the entire EU. The EU is not a political project as it should be but just an economic one. That's why economically weaker countries in the east do not feel as a part of the EU and not equal to the countries in the west. In order to change that one would need lots of educated people that advocate a political union, but at the moment there is no party, politician or government that find that important or advocates it.

Those who are very nationalistic have no other choice or alternative, because they only know this belief system. They are not in contact with the rest of the world that would show them other opinions, instead they live in a bubble in which only information selected by the government reaches them. However, if this bubble would be destroyed they would not have an alternative narrative/belief system, but they need something like that to navigate through life. Therefore, one needs to destroy this bubble but also offer an alternative for these people.

In order to get an alternative narrative, education is greatly needed in schools as well as different kinds of media. As many different kinds of education channels as possible would be great. These different kinds of education have to fit with the different positions and intellectual capacities of the addressed people. While doing this education and projects one has to try to reduce the gaps between different social classes and age groups to form unity between all Hungarians.

9. How could the foundation do help the Hungarians

They need to change doctrine of the government, for instance female rights and roles in society. They should also support already existing NGOs in terms of legal and financial means.

Interview Alexandra Kowalski

23-04-2018

Alexandra Kowalski is an assistant-professor in sociology and social anthropology at the Central European University.

Her main message was that the urban/country side divide that has always been there, has deepened over capitalism, and that this is the main problem. Country side votes for Orbán, vs. Budapest, where there is a broad base for liberal politics. The opposition does not ally its forces, and they do not reach the audience they need. To campaign on the country side, there is an infrastructure needed. The youth could be a hopeful solution, but the youth is also split as well. To address them, you need to think about who the youth is today, and what their prospects are in life. However, young people are more connected, so young people in cities and on the country-side could maybe be connected as well → country side needs to be stitched up.

Mobilization is difficult, as the space to do this is hollowed out, for instance: Universities, art, civil society. Orbán does not want to get rid of all educated people: He prioritizes technically skilled education, also economically. However, he wants to get rid of the intelligentsia, the kind that talks, and writes, and speaks up. He thus works very targeted. The brain drain is made up of people 'like us' as well, so she was not sure how sorry they actually were about educated people leaving the country.

The way he does this is by defining hero actors, by bolstering institutions that are loyal to him, and to create a healthy market. However, she expects the regime to blow up at some point, because people cannot be fed with illusions forever. At this point, the middle class is still getting by, but at some point there are no more jobs, they will get impoverished too. They will need to give something in return at some point. His power in Hungary also rests upon the EPP, this prevents the EU from stepping in. Also, German companies have been advantaged in Hungary. Right now, the EU is not assertive enough. This is also difficult, because Hungary has two roles in the EU

Interview Levente Littvay

20-04-2018

Levente Littvay is a professor in political science at the Central European University.

- Voting statistics are not available yet but will become available in about a month.
- The way we are looking at populism is too one sided (i.e. too much focussed on right wing populism). This is not the real case, it only happens to be how things played out in western-Europe.
- CEU might have to move to Vienna, as it becomes quite impossible to stay in Budapest with the new regulations.
- Countryside is hard to reach (Budapest vs. the rest of Hungary).
- Back to communist days (in terms of information availability).
- Nationalistic attitudes are somewhat normal.
- No one could help at this point.

Voting statistics

Firstly, I asked mr Littvay about the statistics he might have regarding the voting behaviour of young people in Hungary. However, unfortunately such statistics are not available to mr. Littvay or his university (Central European University). Therefore questions regarding this topic were not fruitful. However, mr. Littvay did say that the ECU was looking in to obtaining such statistics from external sources and he said that it was likely that voting behaviour of young people in Hungary would be no different from that of young people elsewhere in Europe.

Populism

When asked about right wing populism mr. Littvay initially answered that populism in Hungary was the same as it is in all European countries (including the Netherlands) and that the focus within the research on populism was far too much centred on right-wing populism. Although this seems to be a prevailing movement right now in Europe he mentioned that populism in Greece for instance is done by an extreme left-wing party. Therefore populism is not something that should be attributed necessarily to right-wing groups. Things that populists often use, such as nationalistic sentiments and symbols, might be something that the right is more prone to do than the left, but we cannot be entirely certain of this.

Central European University

Mr. Littvay is, obviously, not happy about the idea that the CEU might have to move elsewhere. The most likely location, he says, is in Vienna. Mr. Littvay doesn't like Vienna and says that the location that is being looked in to will not be suitable for the vibe that the CEU always brought with it. The CEU is currently spread out in the city centre of Budapest, which gives it a certain atmosphere. In Vienna however, there would be a campus which would be quite far outside of the centre of the city. This would not suit the style of CEU says mr. Littvay. Other locations have been considered but Vienna is the most likely to win. Mr. Littvay is not sure if he would like to work in Vienna, although he says he will have to, and doesn't want to live in Vienna.

Countryside

The countryside is hard for political organisations to reach, as internet is scarce there and the TV channels that people watch is mostly government controlled. The CEU sometimes tries to get their students who are from the countryside to go back and inform people but this is not done at a large scale. It is also not common for people from the countryside to come to Budapest, as living there is quite expensive. Therefore communication between the countryside and the city is quite bad. Additionally, mr. Littvay talks about how bribery does still play a role in the country side electoral process. In some ways, mr. Littvay claims, this might be a return to the days of communism. This is due to the fact that all media that the people in the countryside receive is controlled by the government, which now tries to enforce more pressure on its entire population.

Help from outside

When asking mr. Littvay what would help Hungary he seemed rather pessimistic about the matter. In his view it is too late to help Hungary, as the recent elections have furtherly firmed the grip that the government party has on the people, and the CEU is likely to be forced out of the country soon.

Interview Szabolcs Szalay

23-04-2018

Szabolcs Szalay is member of the Jobbik party and assistant to a member of parliament for the Jobbik party. The Jobbik party is a right-wing party.

History

The Jobbik party was founded as a conservative youth organisation of students in 1999.

Since 2003 they are a political party. At the last elections they gained 20% of the votes on the party list and 30% of the votes on the person list.

What program does your party follow?

The Jobbik party is a conservative and right-wing peoples party. Our party is a party for all segments of all people. The party tries to address young people because of their history. Furthermore, they claim that Hungarian young people have conservative values. These values are building a family, owning a house and having good job security. Young people strive for better positions and better living standards. For young people the message that the Jobbik party is not corrupt and fights against corruption. Additionally, the inequalities between rich and poor become bigger and bigger. We also focus on making them smaller again.

The Fidesz-party (who is currently leading) focusses on immigration. The Jobbik-party focuses on the real problem: emigration. Many young and/or educated people leave Hungary to more western countries, because they can earn there more money and live a higher living standard. This leads to a generation loss in parts of the country.

Next to these things the old parties create an atmosphere of strong division between all parties (Fidesz and the socialist parties). The new parties (Jobbik, Momentum founded after 2000) have to bring new input.

Our first step has to be to name problems (corruption: where's EU money?) and the second step to provide solutions for the problems (create jobs; increase quality of education system).

How does the Jobbik-party think about the EU(-membership)?

First the Jobbik-party was against the EU because in the early 2000 there was no real debate or discourse about/ in the EU it was only one tendency. This has changed in the last years. Now the member states talk about problems in the EU and start rethinking and changing things. The EU is now a guarantee for democracy.

Within the EU Hungary, Poland and the Ukraine got in a competition who will provide the cheapest labour market. This has also lead to the low living standards.

What do you think about the current political situation?

Fidesz makes it hard to change things, because they have 2/3 of the seats in the parliament. As largest oppositional party the Jobbik-party has some influence. All state offices/organs are occupied by Fidesz party members or loyal people.

Additionally, the Fidesz-party gave the opposition in total only five minutes in the state media for campaigning. The rest of the time was used by the Fidesz-party for campaigning. Media that what to present views that are not based on what the Fidesz declare as "good" has difficulties to find sources of income. They have difficulties finding companies that want to present their advertisement on these channels.

How does your party deal with the mentioned restriction in media?

Since the Jobbik-party can not use TV, because the only channels that can also be received on the countryside are from the government, they rely on personal contact.

This seems to work well, because the strongest support for the party comes from the people in the countryside. There the Fidesz and Jobbik are the most important parties. The Jobbik-party tries to accomplish the expectations of the voters and to find stable solutions.

What role does nationalism play in your party?

Neither the party nor I are nationalistic but we are patriotic. Patriotism is hard to describe in a rational sense. It is comparable with the love parents have for their children. You belong to the nation and that's why you are proud of what people achieved, the history of Hungary. Additionally, we share a culture and a language (important value). No political chauvinism Hungary is not better than other nations. But you have to respect your own nation to be able to respect other nations.

Do you also feel to be a EU-citizen?

Since Hungary is a part of the EU I of course also think that I am an EU-citizen. The EU shares many values that of course also Hungarian values. The EU is defined by Roman law, Greek philosophy and Christian values.

What can the opposition do against the current political situation?

The opposition has to coordinate itself. There was the idea that the oppositions build a coalition but that would lead to an unstable government and that would lead to more mistrust in the population. Currently the opposition starts protest and demonstrate together against the current situation. That is the best cooperation that the opposition can currently do.

We heard that young Hungarians are generally not interested in politics. What do you think is the reason for that?

Education misses to teach about politics. Politics are a taboo theme especially for young people. That's why young people are not that informed or interested in politics.

Which role do civil societies play in a democracy?

There are many civil societies. You cannot generalize anything about them. They can be good to be an active person in the democracy.

What is the point of view of your party regarding refugees?

One has to make a distinction between refugees and migrants. Refugees flee from their country because of life threatening circumstances as war or political pursuit. Migrants leave their country to earn more money or to live under higher standards. Refugees are welcome in Hungary. But we also think that the first safe countries next to the countries from which the refugees flee have to take care of them. This is in line with international law. For example when in Yugoslavia was civil war we welcomed every refugee but the people that are coming now are just migrants who are not in need and only come from economic reasons. As a state we have the right to state who we want to live with.

How do you define democracy?

Democracy is consciousness, the ability to form/to work on/ to have a say in my own future, to fulfil my rights and duties and to give back something to the society.

Interview Viktoria Takacs

20-04-2018

Viktoria Takacs is working for the foundation for democratic youth. This organization wants to engage young people in politics without representing a certain political party.

The foundation does not have its own political agenda. They do not focus on political messages, but rather put their centre of attention on democratic skill development: They train the skills needed to be democratic citizens, which in their opinion are missing in the current education system in Hungary. The changes the foundation attempts to bring about are not about the structure of the political system itself, but about the people living in the system. In order to achieve a change within the population, the foundation creates democratic experiences.

Because politics have a very negative image in Hungary's youth, the foundation attempts to bypass the issue by not talking about politics at all.

Young people

Young people in Hungary are not interested in politics. The image of politics is extremely negative in this group. Politics are 'disgusting' and 'boring'. Mostly, if young people become active, they do so by signing petitions or at most joining a protest. Most young people do not become active at all. Additionally, young people do not learn to express their opinion on any matter, let alone political issues.

The participants in the foundation's activities are mostly open-minded, caring people, which means that they partly already have the skill.

Local Democracy

Local Democracy is the main project of the Foundation for Democratic Youth. Its goal is to build communities and encourage young people to become active within these communities. Within the project, new projects about social problems are created in a democratic way. The issues approached within these projects do not have to be groundbreaking. The important thing is, that they are approached in a democratic way: The young participants are encouraged to step out of their 'bubble' and re-evaluate their opinions constantly while debating about local topics. The main objectives of these activities are skill development and community building.

New NGO law

Viktoria Takacs' view on the future is pessimistic, because of the new NGO law. Protests about the law do not help. While NGOs do experience some support from the society, some people actually support the new law. A new financial support system for European NGOs concerned with democratic matters initiated by the EU might save the foundation, but it might come too late.

Interview Patrik Török

22-04-2018

Patrik Török is the international secretary for Fidelitas, the youth party of the leading Fidesz party.

Fidelitas is the youth organization of Fidesz. It was created in 1906 and has nowadays 90.000 members. They organize a number of events, gather money for poor people and other projects, join press conferences or support signature collections for party projects. A main point of Patrik Török, board member of the European Democratic Organization and deputy international secretary of Fidelitas, is the importance of the youth involvement. He also made clear that Prime Minister, Orban, relies on young people for support through their family policy for example, but also by paying the first language certificate or their driving licence until a certain age. For the third child the student loan is being payed and students receive a tax reduction when having a baby.

Scandal 2006

Through the scandal of the socialist party in 2006 where the prime minister lied to his voters, the party lost most of their votes and Fidesz started rising. This scandal made them lose their credibility and they haven't regained it since, especially in the countryside.

Young people

With regard to the Brain Drain issue, the problem is that the income is too low but that people need to be patient as only with enough economic growth the income will rise to ensure no depth. Currently, he assures that Hungary is on the right path. In order to get young people more involved, schools should teach in an objective manner what democracy is, what functions there are and how the political system functions. Also he does not think that civil societies would help to get young people more involved but rather political youth parties could enforce this. As communication strategy they not only use social media and general mass media but value door to door, calling and leaflets. The most efficient way is personal contact.

Opposition, freedom of speech

He does not believe the opposition has a disadvantage concerning as any country has state media but they still have other channels and he rates some messages they post on platforms as "disgusting". All in all, freedom of speech is still present in Hungary. Same goes for freedom of protest, as seen during the last weeks.

EU and refugee crisis

In what concerns the EU, the relationship is rather critical and even if the criticism by the EU is listened it is not accepted without scepticism. Issues such as the refugee crisis, should in their opinion be dealt internally in the country with no involvement by other institutions. The party considers previous refugees entering the country as "migrants" as they crossed five borders and this is stated in the international law. Even with their critical position towards the EU, they do not want to leave but think that the European Commission has too much power and mainly focuses on Germany and France.

We asked about the right-wing movement in Europe and some reasons could be the migrant crisis with countries refusing the quota. He claims that the EU should do what the people want and that a referendum could be an option.

Illiberal democracy

Orban mentioned about an illiberal democracy, in Patrick's opinion democracy should not be labeled and as liberal democracy is having some issues changes are needed. With regard to the popularity of Orban, he thinks that he listens to the people by helping the poor people for example. Even if the Health system is not going that well and there is a lack of doctors they are trying to make changes, but the renewals and income raises are expensive.

He doesn't believe in nationalism but patriotism, and Hungary is definitely patriotic. Nevertheless, in Hungary there is no feeling of superiority, anti-semitism etc.

Russia

When talking about Russia, Europe can only be strong with Russia as it is a world power and Hungary stands by the EU when it concerns the sanctions but individually they need to maintain a good relationship as they cannot afford being on bad terms due to the need for gas for example but also because Hungary is a very small country. For him the government always showed willingness to talk and mutual respect. Even if Hungary will clearly defend their own position they are always interested in discussion. A problem during the election was the lack of consensus between the left and right parties.

Definition of Democracy:

So many elements

Human rights, equality men and women, tolerance, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, rule of law, representing the majority within framework, peace, no corruption, discussion is essential

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