



WiseEuropa

Beneath the surface of illiberalism:

The recurring temptation of 'national democracy' in Poland and Hungary – with lessons for Europe

In order to better understand the phenomenon of PiS and Fidesz, we need to analyse the historical trajectories of nation-building processes in both countries, the identity politics of both parties and their politics of memory. In this study, we focus on three specific domains in which the shift in the understanding of the nation is most visible – namely in the attitudes towards the State, democracy and the West. Lessons that stem from these two case studies can serve as a 'warning call' for the rest of Europe.

Adam Balcer



POLITYKA ZAGRANICZNA I STOSUNKI MIĘDZYNARODOWE



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Warsaw, February 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last years, the support for right wing national populists increased substantially in more than half of the EU member states, due to very different local reasons, as has been demonstrated by various elections, opinion polls and referenda. Right-wing national populism is strongly intertwined with ethnic nationalism – as opposed to civic nationalism. Certainly, civic nationalism cannot be mechanically presented as a positive antithesis of ethnic nationalism. Nevertheless, it is not an accident that civic nationalism constrained by the rule of law protecting the individual rights and national minorities gained the status of official nationalism in Western countries after World War II. National populists try to present themselves as the defenders of nations against supranational and federal European utopias. However, the main ongoing confrontation is between ethnic nationalism promoted by national populists and civic nationalism which constitutes the key pillar of the EU. It means that the acceptance of the main proposals of national populists in regard to the definition of the nation will signify the beginning of the end of the EU.

Against this background, Poland and Hungary are unique cases in Europe because they are ruled by single party governments of “soft” right wing national populists, namely the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland. We believe that in order to better understand the phenomenon of PiS and Fidesz, we need to analyse also the historical trajectories of nation-building processes in both countries, the identity politics of both parties and their politics of memory how they are framed by various intellectual and political traditions. Particularly taking into account, that nation-rebuilding has become the *spécialité de la maison* of PiS and Fidesz. In this study, we focus on three specific domains in which the shift in the understanding of the nation is most visible – namely in the attitudes towards the state, democracy and the West. We finish by formulating lessons that stem from these two case studies and can serve as a ‘warning call’ for the rest of Europe.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RISE OF RIGHT WING NATIONAL POPULISM

Political scientists and journalists have invested heavily in uncovering the roots of contemporary political change in the Western world, usually looking for a common denominator for a variety of events: from the victory of Donald Trump in the US and the Brexit vote in the UK, to the rising support for Marine Le Pen in France, for Geert Wilders in Netherlands or for the AfD party in Germany. Scholars have reached for various concepts but focused particularly on the rise of populism to account for the events in question. However, populism is probably the most ambiguous and pliable notion in political science. In most cases, it is defined as a pattern of relationships that directly connects elites to followers without running through political institutions. The problem to reach a compromise on the more detailed definition of populism stems from the fact that it has a very wide scope of forms running through the entire political scene from the extreme left through the centre to the extreme right.

We focus on right-wing national populism which is rooted in ethnic nationalism

In our report, we focus on right-wing national populism which is rooted in ethnic nationalism. Indeed, populism can be easily merged with an ethnic and primordial variety of nationalism¹. Identity politics, division and exclusion constitute the basic foundations of populism and ethnic and primordial nationalism. According to Erik Jones, an American political scientist:

Populists rely on 'identity-based political mobilization': they tend to divide the world into 'us' and 'them'. Such divisions are a necessity not a preference. Identity matters whenever and wherever politicians make a direct appeal to voters because identity is a big part of what personalizes the relationship between elites and their followers in a populist framework. (...) When politicians make a direct and personal relationship with the voters based on some identifiable characteristic, they automatically leave other parts of the electorate out by implication. For the 'in' group, the sense of being special or selected becomes an important part of the relationship. For the 'out' group, the sense of being rejected is hard to forget or to forgive².

Apart for that, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser, populists often perceive "politics to be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people"³. Populism supports popular sovereignty and majority rule. In consequence, populists assume the

¹ Ethnic primordialists regard the nations as essential, natural and organic qualities which are defined in the nativist, quasi-biological (blood, *Volk*) and ahistorical terms.

² E. Jones, *Trump, populism, and the identity of Europe*, January 2017, <http://esharp.eu/opinion/trump-populism-and-the-identity-of-europe>

³ C. Mudde, C. R. Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge 2012, p. 8.

existence of a demos above and beyond the divides and diversities of social class, religion, gender and generation. Populism defines people through a Manichean division into good and bad, friends and foes. The latter elements in all these oppositions can be defined in the easiest way through xenophobia in ethnic terms. In fact, such a transformation (when it occurs) makes populism particularly assertive and appealing and, in consequence, very destructive.

Particular attention should be paid to the way in which the meaning of the 'nation' is being framed and reframed in Western countries.

Therefore, without questioning the significance of other explanations of the contemporary political change in the Western world, in this study we suggest that particular attention should be paid to the way in which the meaning of the 'nation' is being framed and reframed in Western countries, both by their political elites and at the societal level, by way of references to each country's repertoire of national myths and intellectual historical traditions. We thus intend to complement the on-going discussions dedicated to the turmoil in the West that often stop at the level of appearances without entering deeper into the historical and cultural foundation lying beneath contemporary processes. We carry out an in-depth analysis of two national cases – of Hungary and of Poland – whose recent developments, while being very specific, are also, in our opinion, relevant not only to the broader Central Eastern European region, but for several Western European societies as well. More specifically, we argue that the way in which the meaning of a given nation is being framed and defined can translate into the kind of democracy that is being promoted at home and, consequently, into the version of European integration that is supported by the country in question.

We also argue that the rise of right wing populist and national parties constitutes the most important political phenomenon in the populist wave observed within the West. Ruth Wodak created the most appropriate definition of these parties which we think should be quoted here in full length:

Right-wing populist parties focus on a homogenous demos, a populum (community, Volk) which is defined arbitrarily and along nativist (blood-related) criteria, thus endorsing a nativist body politics⁴. Second, and related to the former, right-wing populist parties stress a heartland (or homeland, Heimat) which has to be protected against dangerous outsiders. In this way, threat scenarios are constructed – the homeland or 'We' are threatened by 'Them' (strangers inside the society or from outside: migrants, Turks, Jews, Roma, bankers, Muslims etc.). Protecting the fatherland (or heartland, homeland) implies belief in a common narrative of the past, where 'We' were either heroes or victims of evil (of a conspiracy, evil enemies, enemies of the fatherland etc.). In this way, revisionist histories are constructed, blending all past

⁴ The nativist body politics should be defined as a perception of the nation through the prism of biology (nation as an organism).

woes into success stories of the Volk or stories of treachery and betrayal by others. 'They' are different and are conspiring against 'Us'. Conspiracies are part and parcel of the discursive construction of fear and of right-wing populist rhetoric. Such conspiracies draw on traditional antisemitic and anti-elitist tropes – conspiracies are, it is believed, organized by bankers, the media, oppositional parties, traitors to the fatherland and so forth. Furthermore, apart from nationalism and nativism as well as the populist agenda, right-wing populist parties endorse traditional, conservative values and morals (family values, traditional gender roles) and want to maintain the status quo. They also support common sense simplistic explanations and solutions (anti-intellectualism), and need a saviour, a charismatic leader who oscillates between the roles of Robin Hood (protecting the social welfare state, helping the 'man and woman on the street') and 'strict father'. Such charismatic leaders necessarily require a hierarchically organized party and authoritarian structures in order to install law and order and to protect the Christian Occident against the Muslim Orient⁵.

The mechanism of 'scapegoating' (singling out a group for negative treatment on the basis of collective responsibility) constitutes an important feature of the right-wing populist national parties. The discursive strategies of scapegoating are closely intertwined with those of 'self-victimization'. Through this sort of witch-hunting anyone can potentially be framed as a dangerous 'Other', should it become expedient for specific manipulative purposes. It is quite easy because right-wing populism employs a political style that can relate to various ideologies, not just one. Last but not least, this kind of national populism is predominantly characterized by Euro-scepticism or at least a lukewarm approach to the EU integration process. Certainly, not all right-wing populist parties endorse all the above-mentioned positions. Moreover, even if they do, the level of support for any of the typical stances depends on the specific context of a given country. We can thus differentiate more moderate and more radical trends among national populists.

An unfriendly attitude towards new potential members of the nation distinguishes ethnic from civic nationalism.

Right-wing national populism is strongly intertwined with ethnic nationalism – as opposed to civic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism treats the language, culture, religion or common ethnic roots as the main pillars of national identity, while civic nationalism puts more emphasis on the state and citizenship. The attitude towards new potential members of nations constitutes an important difference between ethnic and civic nationalism. The former assumes the nation has an organic character so certain individuals, because of their ethnic or religious background, can never be assimilated. Meanwhile, the latter perceives the nation in a voluntarist way and does not exclude a priori the assimilation or integration of any individual.

Certainly, civic nationalism cannot be mechanically presented as a positive antithesis of ethnic nationalism. In fact, as Anthony Smith, a prominent theoretician

5 R. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, London 2015, pp. 66-67.

of nationalism, pointed out “nationalism is not just Janus-headed, it is protean and elusive, appearing in a kaleidoscopic variety of guises”⁶. Civic nationalism may often remain only a beautiful idea. Nevertheless, Smith admits that “the civil nationalist project requires a degree of sophistication and mass political tolerance, and a sufficient degree of political solidarity to hold together various ethnic and regional segments of society”⁷. In fact, it is not an accident that civic nationalism constrained by the rule of law protecting the individual rights and national minorities gained the status of official nationalism in Western countries after World War II.

The emphasis on the past in the narratives of national populists suggests that Mark Lilla, an American historian of ideas, may be right when describing national populists as reactionaries of our times rather than conservatives. According to Lilla:

Reactionaries reject [the] conservative outlook. They are, in their way, just as radical as revolutionaries and just as destructive. (...) The revolutionary sees the radiant future, and it electrifies him. The reactionary thinks of the past in all its splendor, and he, too, is electrified. (...) This explains the strangely exhilarating despair that courses through reactionary literature and political rhetoric, the palpable sense of mission. (...) The reactionaries of our time have discovered that nostalgia can be a powerful political motivator, perhaps even more powerful than hope. Hopes can be disappointed. Nostalgia is irrefutable⁸.

Over the last years, the support for national populists increased substantially in more than half of the EU member states, due to very different local reasons, as has been demonstrated by various elections, opinion polls and referenda. In certain cases, national populists entered the parliament or government coalitions and substantially influenced the course of internal politics. However, their popularity varies substantially among the states. In most of them the level of support for these parties does not exceed 15% (Germany, Italy, UK, Greece, Finland, Latvia, Bulgaria). In some countries it oscillates around 20% (Slovakia, Sweden, Netherlands). Only in France and Austria is the support for national populists significantly stronger. In France, Marine Le Pen, the leader of *Le Front National*, would have the support of around 35-40% of the population in the runoff of 2017 presidential elections against the most probable rivals. Meanwhile, a candidate of the Freedom Party of Austria (which ruled the country in a coalition between 2000 and 2006) received over 45% of votes in the presidential elections of 2016; even if he lost in the end.

Against this background, Poland and Hungary are unique cases in Europe because they are ruled by single party governments⁹ of “soft” right wing national populists, namely the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland. Moreover, in the most recent elections in both countries (2014-2015) the combined vote for all right-wing populist parties exceeded 50% in Poland and 65% in Hungary (even 70% in 2010). In the years preceding the electoral victories, Fidesz and PiS shifted considerably to the right (nationalism, conservatism). Therefore, an analysis of Poland and Hungary is particularly relevant for Europe at the time when it is faced with the rise of the national populist right.

6 A. D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, Cambridge 2004, p. 243.

7 Ibidem, p. 244.

8 M. Lilla, *Our Reactionary Age*, *New York Times*, 6.11.2016

9 In fact both parties established electoral coalitions with very small right wing parties.

Certainly, various internal economic and/or political factors enabled the electoral victories of both Fidesz and PiS. These issues have been relatively well researched in recent years. However, right wing national parties in Poland and Hungary achieved their electoral success despite the fact that the economic, political and social problems were not as dramatic as in many other countries of the EU. The case of Poland (which used to be perceived as an economic success-story) is particularly striking in comparison to many Mediterranean EU member states.¹⁰

Poland and Hungary are unique cases in Europe because they are ruled by single party governments of “soft” right wing national populists.

Therefore, we believe that in order to better understand the phenomenon of PiS and Fidesz, we need to analyse the historical trajectories of nation-building processes in both countries, the identity politics of both parties and their politics of memory. In this study, we focus on three specific domains in which the shift in the understanding of the nation is most visible – namely in the attitudes towards the State, democracy and the West (Part 2). We finish by formulating lessons that stem from these two case studies and can serve as a ‘warning call’ for the rest of Europe (Part 3).

¹⁰ However, according to the opinion polls, a great majority of Poles was disappointed with their personal material situation. Despite the fast pace of growth, according to the Polish Statistical Office, the unemployment in Poland remained on the level of 10-14% between 2007 and 2015. The wages were increasing much slower than the GDP growth. In comparison to the other EU countries, the highest proportion of Poles (above 20%) was employed on temporary contracts.

2. THE ALLURE OF 'NATIONAL DEMOCRACY' IN POLAND AND HUNGARY

Many reports and policy papers have already been published about the dismantling of the foundations of liberal democracy and the rule of law in Hungary and Poland. However, if we scratched the surface and read carefully the speeches of leaders as well as the programmatic documents of the governing parties in both countries, it would turn out that what occupies a central place in the ideology of both governments is the nation defined in a narrow, ethnic sense. What is the most important, Fidesz and PiS aspire very decisively to rebuild the real nation by making it more in line with their own vision.

For example, Victor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary (in his famous speech in Băile Tușnad / Tusnádfürdő in Romania in July 2014) expressed that the illiberal State that he was building in Hungary was, first of all, the State of Hungarian nation defined in the communitarian way:

The Hungarian nation is not simply a group of individuals but a community that must be organized, reinforced and in fact constructed. And so in this sense the new State that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach¹¹.

According to Victor Orbán, liberal democracy must be rejected because it challenges the very idea of the existence of national interests.

Moreover, in Orbán's opinion, liberal democracy must be rejected because it "challenges the very idea of the existence of national interests".¹²

Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) which is currently ruling in Poland, fully subscribed to these opinions. The most important purpose of the state is, according to him, the protection of national sovereignty which he defines as the capacity of the nation to realise its interests through the state. The PiS programme states that:

For us Poles, our own state has also another meaning – no sovereign Polish state existed for 123 years. We could not decide our own fate, which is why we have recognised

¹¹ The Hungarian Government, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp, 26.07.2014,

<http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches>
prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp

¹² Ibidem

*the Polish state as a value of the highest order, and any forms of undermining its sovereignty or existence are unacceptable, dangerous to the nation and a threat to Polishness in its current and historical dimensions*¹³.

Several public figures affiliated to the party have recently published a book on the "Re-polonisation of Poland". Such re-polonisation would demand making Poland and Poles genuinely Polish again.¹⁴ According to PiS, „the Nation is a real community connected by ties of language and by an entire broad semiotic system, culture, historical fate and solidarity”¹⁵. This semiotic system is very closely tied with Roman Catholicism. The nation is above all an organic cultural and historical community and only then a political entity (a community of citizens). The nation plays a key role in social life as the main reference point defining the sense of life for every living human being. Thanks to the nation, „the individual could exist as a person, his life has taken on a meaning and – through the democratic mechanism of the nation state – he has also gained sovereignty in the community”¹⁶. These formulations underline a decisive predominance of the nation over the state and the individual. The central place of the nation is confirmed by the fact that Kaczyński and his followers use the term *sovereign* in a personalised meaning, as an equivalent of the nation, or use both terms together in a coined phrase “nation-sovereign”. In consequence, the state is an expression of the sovereign will of the nation. Meanwhile, terms such as *individual freedom* or *human rights* almost never occur in the party's vocabulary.

The central place of the nation in PiS's political imaginarium is confirmed by the fact that Kaczyński and his followers use the term “sovereign” in a personalised meaning, as an equivalent of the nation.

The definition of the nation preferred by Orbán was formulated in the constitution endorsed in 2011 and is very similar to the one promoted by Kaczyński. National unity occupies a crucial place in the constitution. This situation stems to a large degree from the fact that substantial Hungarian minorities live in the neighbouring countries. The constitution states that “WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE HUNGARIAN NATION (...) promise to preserve the intellectual and spiritual unity of our nation torn apart in the storms of the last century”. According to this document, “individual freedom can only be complete in cooperation with others”

13 *The Law and Justice Party's Program 2014*, p.11, <http://old.pis.org.pl/dokumenty.php?s=partia&iddoc=164> (in Polish)

14 *Repolonizacja Polski*, ed. Jolanta Sosnowska and Leszek Sosnowski, Cracow 2016.

15 In the official party's documents, this word is often written with a capital letter; see i.a. J. Kaczyński: *Raport o stanie Rzeczypospolitej*, 31.03.2011, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/111772-jaroslawn-kaczynski-raport-o-stanie-rzeczypospolitej-tylko-u-nas-fragmenty-programowej-publikacji-prezesa-pis>

16 Ibidem

and “the family and the nation constitute the principal framework of our coexistence”. Moreover, “the Hungarian nation has a sense of responsibility for every Hungarian”. The constitution also assigns to the state very important obligations concerning the national identity. “We commit to promoting and safeguarding our heritage, our unique language, Hungarian culture”¹⁷. The nation even defines the specific duty of the constitution concerning the process of the organization or construction of the nation that Orbán described in his speech: “The Fundamental Law (...) shall be a covenant among Hungarians past, present and future; a living framework which expresses the nation’s will and the form in which we want to live”¹⁸. Christianity is mentioned several times as the basic pillar of the Hungarian national identity.

The specific version of nationalism that Orbán and Kaczyński promote inevitably has an influence on the shape of democracy in Hungary and Poland.

It is no surprise then that Kaczyński and Orbán use the words *nation* and *national* very often. Almost every event, new institution or activity is currently called “national” in both countries. At the same time, they both stimulate directly or indirectly a high level of xenophobia which proved instrumental in their way to consolidating power.

All in all, the specific version of nationalism that Orbán and Kaczyński promote inevitably has an influence on the shape of democracy in both countries. The vision of a homogenous nation based on sovereign will which should remain unlimited is difficult to reconcile with human rights, individual freedoms, the rule of law and the separation of powers. Moreover, it may be expected that the redefinition of national identity, because of its relevance to social life, will have more serious implications for the functioning of democracy than the mere changes in the institutional framework.

That is why researching illiberalism in Poland and Hungary requires paying particular attention to the issues of identity politics and nationalism. In fact, the phrase ‘national democracy’ or ‘national-Christian democracy’ is the most appropriate term describing the strategic goal that Orbán and Kaczyński would like to achieve. As will be shown, these terms possess a very relevant historical relevance in the case of Poland and Hungary. The first basic precondition to comprehend identity politics in both countries, is to realize that the model of the nation promoted by Fidesz and PiS is rooted in certain Hungarian and Polish historical traditions.

¹⁷ The Hungarian Government, *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, <http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibidem

2.1 The State and the Nation

A continuous state tradition; a proper balance between the state and the nation or proto-nation (a sort of autonomy between them); and the heritage of efficient state institutions – these three factors are essential for the successful building of civic national identity. However, the history of Polish and Hungarian statehood provides a mixed picture with regards to all these elements.

On the one hand, Hungary and Poland experienced dramatic changes concerning their size, borders and status (e.g. the loss of independence and sovereignty) in recent centuries¹⁹. In the history of both nations catastrophic defeats often came at moments of high self-confidence (e.g. Poland in 1939, Hungary in 1914-1918). State structures were much weaker in pre-modern Hungary and Poland than in many countries of Western Europe.

In both countries, the historical legacy provides an inexhaustible fuel for nostalgia for the past glory and the lost territories.

On the other hand, Hungary and Poland (in comparison to many other European nations) possess long lasting state traditions. Moreover, both countries achieved in certain periods a position of main regional or even continental powers. This legacy provides the inexhaustible fuel for nostalgia for the past glory and the lost territories. As Jęrzý Jedlicki, a Polish historian of ideas, has noticed:

In the 19th century, the Polish culture lived with memories and was imbued with nostalgia. Both noble traditionalism and romanticism perpetuated this past-driven orientation. It prolonged in the next decades and become a constitutive feature of Polish spiritual life. The intellectual, picturesque and mythological richness of all species of Polish historical writing is striking in comparison to poverty and schematism of visionary and futuristic thinking. Disputes about the future have never achieved this emotional temperature that disputes about what the past did, because Poles felt only as the masters of their past. The independence was imagined even by revolutionaries largely as a restoration of ancient laws and borders, but without "caste" barriers²⁰.

The fight for independence or resistance against foreign domination have become the main features of the self-perception in historical memory of both nations. They have created favourable conditions for the mix of self-victimization (the cult of suffering, martyrdom, self-image of innocent victims) with the vision of noble heroism. However, Poles and Hungarians had not only the experience of becoming colonized but also that of being colonizing powers in the past. Thus, putting the self-perception

19 At the end of the 18th century Poland lost its independence through three partitions among the neighbors. It was an unprecedented event in the modern history of Europe. Poland is also a unique case in Europe because of the fact that the country that was the third largest state on the continent was erased from its map.

20 J. Jedlicki, *Świat zwyrodniały. Lęki i wyroki krytyków nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2000. p. 91.

as victims and heroes first allowed the mainstream of Polish and Hungarian elites and societies to avoid a serious confrontation with their difficult pasts. In historical memories of both countries, the tradition of uprisings merged with the romanticism which glorified defeats defined as moral victories. This mix strengthened an irrational inclination of Polish and Hungarian nationalism, standing in the way of a much-needed self-criticism which had to fight an uphill battle to gain the ground in culture of both nations. The loss of territory, sovereignty or even independence became a deeply rooted trauma in historical memories of both nations which fed their sensitiveness concerning their position on the international arena.

Putting the self-perception as victims and heroes first allowed the mainstream of Polish and Hungarian elites and societies to avoid a serious confrontation with their difficult pasts.

The building of modern state institutions in Europe and, in consequence, the institutional environment favourable to the rise of civic nationalism was – in case of most European countries – strongly linked to the development of absolute “enlightened” and centralized monarchy. Poland did not go through that experience. To the contrary, in the second half of the 17th century it turned into a very loose federation of aristocratic mini-states which mostly controlled local municipal communities of petty gentry. It is very symptomatic that the word state (*państwo*) in Polish language – in difference to all the other Slavic languages – originates from the word (*Pan*, namely Lord, Sir) and was used at the beginning as a name of the aristocratic estates.²¹ In case of Hungary, the historical memory of the absolute monarchy is strongly connected to an allegedly completely foreign power (the Habsburg dynasty). It was imposed from above and met with a stubborn resistance of many Hungarian nobles who, after several uprisings, succeeded in bringing the restitution of Hungarian sovereignty in 1867.

In the 19th century – that is during the crucial period of the modern nation building in Europe – Poles did not have their own state. In consequence of the loss of independence, the perception of state as an alien and repressive institution strengthened among the Poles. The critical attitude towards the state was entrenched by the Polish romanticism which gained predominance in the first half of the 19th century and has maintained a huge influence on the Polish identity until today (although, the positivist trends often managed to offset the role of Romanticism). Most importantly, in Polish romanticism the nation was placed in opposition to the state. Nations were presented as God's eternal creations in opposition to the state which was an artificial human institution. Moreover, the nation underwent in the Romantic period the process of sacralisation through the vision of Poland as a suffering 'Christ of nations'. Romanticism was very universalistic

21 *Helikon sarmacki*, ed. A. Vicenz, Warsaw 1989, pp. LV-LVI

("For our freedom and yours") but the idea of the radical prominence of the nation over the state favoured the development of the ethnic version of nationalism in the future. Additionally, as Krystyna Kersten, a prominent Polish historian, rightly noticed, "in the vision of Poland as a heroic martyr and the victim of the indifference of the world and of conspiracies of external powers there is no place for criticism towards its own national past"²².

In Polish romanticism of the 19th century, the nation was placed in opposition to the state.

The loss of independence by Poland and enormous efforts to regain it resulted in an emergence of totally opposite trend to perceive the state as a value which should be saved at any price, including by authoritarian methods. Marshall Józef Piłsudski who played a key role in the re-establishment of Poland after World War I, embodied that approach despite having originated from a romantic and insurgent tradition. He was a great supporter of a very strongly civic, state-orientated Polish national identity. It is very symptomatic that the constitution of April 1935 (which should be considered as the political testament of Piłsudski) did not mention the word "nation" even once while tens of times it referred to the "state" defined as the commonwealth of all its citizens. This term was used almost 20 times. Piłsudski treated ethnic Polish nationalism – promoted by his political opponents from the National Democracy (Endecja) – as an eternal threat to the state. In consequence of his disappointment with the flaws of Polish democracy (e.g. the assassination of the first Polish president by a far-right extremist) and by the political rise of Endecja, he carried out the *coup d'état* of 1926²³. Under the pretext of the preservation of the state, Poland initially became a semi-authoritarian state and in the 30's a fully-fledged authoritarian regime.

Meanwhile, the failure of 19th century uprisings fighting for the recreation of the Polish state and the repressions that followed contributed to the development of the Polish ethnic nationalism. The National Democracy (*Endecja*), the driving force of this kind of nationalism, based its political ideology on the rejection of the insurgent tradition and of self-victimization. It promoted an organic and pragmatic work for the development of the nation. The independent state was supposed to become a natural outcome of that evolutionary process. Paradoxically, the "romantic" suffering of Poles under the foreign dominance and the repressions also benefited Endecja's position. Endecja identified gradually the 'Polishness' very closely with religion and language, which was strengthened by the fact that the discriminatory policy of Germany and Russia promoted Germanisation and Russification and attacked particularly the Roman Catholic Church in the Polish regions.

Efforts by Roman Dmowski, the leader of Endecja, to reject completely the romantic glorification of hopeless fight did not prevail among his followers. After World War II, the latter were substantially overrepresented in an anti-communist

²² K. Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem: Polska 1944-1956*, London 1993, p. VIII.

²³ After Italy, Poland was the second state in the interwar Europe whose democratic regime was toppled. However, the Polish authoritarian regime was much milder in comparison to the fascist Italy.

guerrilla (the Cursed Soldiers) which fought hopelessly until the last bullet against the communist regime. In fact, Dmowski represented one feature often linked with romantic thinking, namely a belief in conspiracies threatening the very existence of the nation. He merged Jews with Freemasons, liberals, communists, Germans, plutocrats and his political opponents – with foreign and domestic enemies.²⁴

After 1920, a sort of “post-Trianon stress disorder” became an integral part of Hungarian national identity.

A striking divergence of historical trajectories between Poland and Hungary concerning the attitude towards the state occurred in the 19th century. Hungary maintained a certain level of autonomy and institutional continuity (although with an interruption) and in 1867 regained de facto independence and the status of a regional power. Hungarians managed to build a relatively efficient unitary and centralized state using France as a source of inspiration. Habsburg Crown Prince Rudolf found in Budapest of that time the “vitality, revival, self-assurance and confidence in the future” in total contrast to a xenophobic and melancholic Austria.²⁵ However, the mood in Hungary changed dramatically in 1920 when, due to the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary experienced one of the largest losses of territory and population by any state in the modern history of Europe²⁶. In the national myth-history, Trianon was located within a deep memory of catastrophic defeats such as the overrunning of the country by Tartars after the Battle of Muhi (1241) and the rout of its army by the Ottomans at Mohács (1526) which brought the disintegration of the state. These events, interpreted through a quasi-religious narrative, were constructed as a cycle of victimhood, resembling the Passion of Christ (each one considered a “Magyar Golgotha”), which entailed a promise of a national resurrection. “Post-Trianon stress disorder” became an integral part of Hungarian national identity. Gyula Illyés, a famous Hungarian writer, stated that “Hungarian is this one whom Trianon hurts”. The support for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon became a massive social phenomenon. It engulfed all of Hungary’s social classes. Their united clamour for the revision gave birth to the famous motto: *Nem, nem, soha!* (“No, no, never!”) in the title of a poem written by Attila József, one of the country’s greatest poets. This creed soon became a national doctrine with an entire generation being raised in its spirit. In classrooms throughout Hungary the day began and ended with the common recitation of the new National Creed (*Hiszekegy*):

²⁴ He called David Lloyd George, the prime minister of Britain and Woodrow Wilson, the president of the US, “agents of Jewry”.

²⁵ P.Lendvai, *Węrzy. Tysiąc lat zwycięstw w klęskach*, Cracow 2016, p. 482.

²⁶ Its population decreased by around 65 % and its territory shrunk by more than 70 % (excluding Bosnia which was an Austrian-Hungarian condominium) Around 30 % of ethnic Hungarians found themselves in the neighbouring countries. About half of them lived in compact blocs contiguous with Hungary’s new borders.

*I believe in one God,
I believe in one Fatherland:
I believe in a divine eternal justice,
I believe in Hungary's resurrection!
Amen.*²⁷

The collateral damage of this national memorization of suffering had to disturb the standing of the post-Trianon Hungarian state in the eyes of Hungarians. Most of them perceived their state as an *ersatz*, a temporary or even artificial construct imposed by foreign powers.

The ambivalent romantic approach to the state re-emerged in both countries during the communist period.

This ambivalent romantic approach to the state re-emerged to a large degree in both countries during the communist period because of the non-democratic character of the regimes which were again imposed through foreign intervention. In Poland, the primacy of the nation over the state was promoted by the Roman Catholic Church which became the main institution balancing the state domination. Primate Stefan Wyszyński, an uncontested leader of the Church and the most important authority for the great majority of Poles, put the nation as such above the state in his speeches.

Initially, in Hungary the communists were very reluctant to play the Trianon card which seemed discredited after the country's World War II collaboration with Nazi Germany. However, the communist regime gradually started to show interest in the fate of co-nationals living in the neighbouring countries. The issue became one of the most important topics for the regime because of the persecution of Hungarians in Romania. In the 1980s, communists decided to demand (in vain) that Bucharest improve the situation of their co-nationals – a highly unusual behaviour in the Soviet Bloc. The national issue started to re-emerge as an even more relevant subject than the democratization. In 1988 the largest demonstration since the Revolution of 1956 attended by up to 200,000 people was organized in the name of the solidarity with the Hungarians in Romania. The demonstration was endorsed by the communists and surpassed four times the pro-democratic rallies which were held at the same time.

After the fall of communism in democratic Poland and Hungary, the ambivalent attitude towards its own state because of political calculations persisted and has been entrenched for good as an integral element of the political landscape. Instead of an often justified criticism of the deficiencies of the post-communist state, many

27 W. M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938*, Berkeley 1983. p. 342.

prominent public figures and politicians of the national right, including Jarosław Kaczyński in the 1990s, when being part of the opposition, used a radical narrative about their own state. Not just the government, but the state as such was the object of a very severe criticism. The democratic state was often presented in the discourse of the national right as the continuation of the communist state. Previous historical states were idealized in comparison to the current state presented in a very dark, one-sided way. This approach strengthened the nostalgia for the good old days. The current state was presented as alien, controlled by agents of Russia, captured by mafia and communist secret services.

After the fall of communism in Poland and Hungary, the ambivalent attitude towards the state has been entrenched for good as an integral element of the political landscape.

On the one hand, Poland and Hungary were presented as failing states (“Bantustan”, “banana republic”). But on the other hand, this did not prevent the national right from saying that the state ruled by the post-communists and liberals could very easily turn into a totalitarian regime. Moreover, national populists presented the state ruled by the mainstream as anti-national because it constituted a threat to the existence of national identity. In Poland of the 1990s, the use of such discourse reached a zenith during the debate on the new constitution. “Solidarity” (a trade union), which played a key role on the right part of the political scene, wrote in its announcement concerning a new constitution that “Anti-Polish constitution (...) destroys Polish economy, eradicates the sovereignty of Poles and Poland, rejects the Polish tradition and solidifies the rule of communism”²⁸.

The rejection of the state by the Polish national right reached its zenith after 2010 when the Smolensk airplane crash happened. The President Lech Kaczyński died in the crash and PiS accused the ruling party of the responsibility for the tragedy – a direct result of the “disappearance” of the Polish state under the Civic Platform government. The Smoleńsk plane crash also brought about the renaissance of romantic nationalism among many Poles (the conspiracy theories, Poland as the lonely victim of foreign and domestic enemies).

In 2000s, Orbán and Kaczyński were still in opposition and the discourse on the necessity to re-construct the State from scratch became a trademark of their political ideologies. Kaczyński called for the establishment of a ‘Fourth Republic’, though all the previous ones were created after very important events in Polish history. Similarly, before winning the elections in 2010, Orbán directed his criticism particularly to the question of the fate of Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries. Orbán criticized the Hungarian liberal democratic state because “it did not commit the prevailing government to accept that Hungarians

28 As cited in: A. Smolar, *Konstytucja a ideologia*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 30.05.1997, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,139586.html>

living throughout the world are part of the Hungarian nation and to try and reinforce this community”²⁹.

The current criticism of the internal political situation in Poland and Hungary by foreign actors is presented by the governments of Fidesz and PiS as an attack against the nation and the state.

Kaczyński and Orbán have often claimed that they are defending the state and the nation against foreign dominance. Particularly when being in the opposition in the past three decades, they presented themselves as fighters for independence. In a similar fashion, the current criticism of the internal political situation by foreign actors is presented by the governments of Fidesz and PiS as an attack against the nation and the state. Kaczyński and Orbán often exploit historical reminiscences in their rhetoric. Such argumentation leads to a very close identification between the state, the nation and the two governing parties. While being in the opposition, Kaczyński often referred to Poland as a German-Russian condominium or a German protectorate. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Kaczyński stated that the 2015 elections brought immediately the liberation of Poland from Germany's tutelage. Kaczyński compared the German criticism of his party to the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 and present-day Germany to the Weimar Republic, which evolved into the Nazi regime. His Minister of Internal Affairs, Mariusz Błaszczak, was even more outspoken in attacking German politicians with arguments referring to the legacy of World War II. He did not allow them to criticize Poland recalling that German state officials destroyed Warsaw in 1944, killing 50,000 Poles in three days in one city district.

Similarly, Orbán declared during one of his speeches that “We did not tolerate being dictated to from Vienna in 1848 nor from Moscow in 1956 and 1990 (...) Now we're not going to allow ourselves to be dictated to by anyone from Brussels or anywhere else”³⁰. On top of that, Kaczyński and Orbán position themselves as defenders of their nations against non-state external enemies by invoking conspiracy theories. This strategy presents the state as only one of the actors, certainly not the strongest one. Kaczyński believes that “our independence is today at risk, because to a large extent we are an exploited periphery of Europe, which feeds the world

29 The Hungarian Government, *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp*, 26.07.2014, Op.cit.

30 *Tensions between Hungary and EU rise*, *Budapest Business Journal*, 17.03.2011, http://bbj.hu/politics/tensions-between-hungary-and-eu-rise_56625

usury³¹. George Soros, a billionaire investor, became the common public enemy number one. Viktor Orbán accused him of being a prominent member of a circle of “activists” trying to undermine the survival of European nations by supporting refugees heading to the continent from the Middle East and beyond:

His name is perhaps the strongest example of those who support anything that weakens nation states, they support everything that changes the traditional European life-style. (...) These activists who support immigrants inadvertently become part of this international human-smuggling network³².

However, the best exemplification of thinking in terms of conspiracy theories is the belief that the Russian government brought down the President's airplane in Smoleńsk in 2010 with the cooperation of the then Polish government. Actually, this theory became the key element of the political identity for the hard-core electorate of PiS³³.

In the case of Orbán's Hungary, the predominance of nation over the state has been expressed particularly in the policy aimed at Hungarians living abroad.

In the case of Orbán's Hungary, the predominance of nation over the state has been expressed particularly in the policy aimed at Hungarians living abroad. Hungary decisively intensified its relations with Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries through direct regular contacts of Fidesz politicians and officials with them, mostly bypassing the authorities of the countries where they live. Thus, the Hungarian state became a sort of an intermediary within the Hungarian nation. The Constitution of 2011, in a very detailed way, defined the protection of Hungarians living abroad as the main duty of the state³⁴. The difference between Hungarian minorities and the state was even more diluted when in 2011 Fidesz

31 Janusz Szewczak, *Bez suwerenności ekonomicznej nie ma prawdziwej Niepodległości, a tę Polska w ostatnich 20 latach w znacznym stopniu utraciła*, wpolityce.pl, 12.11.2013, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/170725-bez-suwerenności-ekonomicznej-nie-ma-prawdziwej-niepodległości-a-tę-polska-w-ostatnich-20-latach-w-znacznym-stopniu-utraciła>; Janusz Szewczak (MP of Law and Justice and the chief economist of SKOK banks which finance the party) considers that international *banksters* and a lobby of speculators and moneylenders is attacking Poland. Szewczak has recently published a book under the title *Banksters. Behind the global conspiracy*. The term *banksters* was coined by Leon Degrelle, a Walloon far right politician and Nazi collaborator.

32 Andras Gergely, *Orban Accuses Soros of Stoking Refugee Wave to Weaken Europe*, Bloomberg, 30.10.2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-30/orban-accuses-soros-of-stoking-refugee-wave-to-weaken-europe>

33 According to opinion polls, currently around 40% of Poles do not exclude completely that possibility. Their numbers have increased substantially in recent years.

34 The constitution states “Bearing in mind that there is one single Hungarian nation that belongs together, Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, and shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities; it shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the assertion of their individual and collective rights, the establishment of their community self-governments, and their prosperity in their native lands, and shall promote their cooperation with each other and with Hungary.” In the previous constitution this paragraph was formulated as follow: “The Republic of Hungary bears a sense of responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living outside its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary”; The Hungarian government, The Fundamental Law, Op.cit.

endorsed a new Hungarian Citizenship law that allowed all ethnic Hungarians to apply for simplified naturalization. Until Summer 2016, 800,000 Hungarians from abroad have received Hungarian citizenship. It is estimated that by the time of the next parliamentary elections in 2018 this number will have grown to one million. Meanwhile, the entire population of Hungarians in the neighbouring countries does not exceed 2,5 million. By taking care of the co-nationals abroad, Orbán unyieldingly promotes an agenda which can be defined as a soft version of post-Trianon revisionism. In fact, the visual and material cult of anti-Trianon resurfaced after 1989, sporadically, at the beginning, but with the increasing vigour after 2000, namely after the 80th anniversary of the Treaty during the first tenure of Orbán.

Through this policy, Orbán gave a boost to the rise of romantic self-victimization and nostalgia. He calls the Trianon Treaty a *diktat*, evoking the term used in Germany during the interwar period to describe the Versailles Treaty. Immediately after the victory in 2010 he established The Day of National Unity³⁵ (*Nemzeti Összetartozás Napja*) commemorated during the anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon. The text of the Law establishing this public holiday stipulates that "Hungarians subordinated to the authority of several states form part of a united Hungarian nation, whose cohesion across state borders is a reality and the defining element of their personal and community identity"³⁶. The main words in Orbán's vocabulary concerning Hungarians became 'reunification', 'unity' and 'survival'. Orbán uses also a quasi-religious language describing the Hungarian nation: "What God created as a single whole cannot be torn apart either by Trianon or by communism"³⁷.

Orbán's politics could count on a huge and solid social support. In 2010 in the opinion poll conducted on the occasion of the anniversary of the Trianon treaty the great majority of Hungarians described it as a great injustice. Meanwhile, a small minority considered that a wrong policy towards the national minorities was a main reason of the division of the Kingdom of the Crown of the Saint Stephen. A substantial part of Hungarians declared that the only compensation for the injustice of Trianon would be the return of lost territories.³⁸

The historical state tradition is also used in order to facilitate the reunification of the nation. The Hungarian constitution of 2011 states that "We do not recognise the suspension of our historical constitution due to foreign occupations."³⁹ At the same time, Orbán's government supported the erection of hundreds of Trianon monuments which mostly use the motif of the map presenting the pre-Trianon Hungary.

Compared with Hungary, the proportion of Poles living in the regions lost by the country after the World War II is much smaller⁴⁰. In consequence, this issue could not gain a comparable position in the politics of identity as it did in Hungary. Yet its importance is rising. On a number of occasions, PiS politicians have criticized

35 In fact, the most appropriated word *Összetartozás* should be translated as a process of "unification".

36 *Trianon in all but name*, Budapest Times, 09.06.2010, <http://budapesttimes.hu/2010/06/09/trianon-day-in-all-but-name/>

37 The Hungarian Government, *Members of the Hungarian Reformed Church community are familiar with the path of survival and preservation*, 25.06.2015, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/members-of-the-hungarian-reformed-church-community-are-familiar-with-the-path-of-survival-and-preservation>

38 Gy. Csepeli, I. Murányi, G. Prazsák, *Új tekintélyelvűség a mai Magyarországon. Társadalmi csoportok hierarchiájának látásvizsgálata*, Budapest 2011.

39 The Hungarian government, *The Fundamental Law*, Op.cit.

40 The Poles and people with certain Polish origin living in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine account for less than 5% of the population of Poland.

The government's new focus on the Polish diaspora happens at the time when the society experiences a rising nostalgia for the territories lost after World War II.

previous governments for neglecting the fate of the Polish diaspora. Besides, upon winning the elections in 2015, they launched a new strategy of foreign policy, making governmental institutions (even those which traditionally deal with foreign policy in a classical meaning) responsible for taking care of the Polish diaspora. Their policy towards Poles living in Lithuania resembles, in many ways, the Hungarian position on Hungarians in Romania – in both cases the diaspora is treated as an extraterritorial part of the nation. All that happens at the time when the Polish society experiences a rising nostalgia for the 'Kresy' (territories lost after World War II) as demonstrated in a huge number of movies, TV series, books, street names and monuments. This kind of approach to Kresy is gaining a particular support in the ranks of PiS. Professor Jan Żaryn (the MP of PiS who is currently one of the main proponents of the politics of identity) believes that previous elites "killed" half of Poland in the name of good relations with the country's neighbours. He thus proposes to "give Poles a chance to remember, after two hundred or three hundred years, that Lviv is a beautiful Polish city"⁴¹. A project prepared by the MPs of PiS in February 2016 concerning the National Memorial Day of the Martyrdom of the Poles from Kresy constitutes a good exemplification of this trend. According to this project,

The legacy of Kresy is a fundamental element of Polish national identity. We should remember that Kresy are ingrained in the Polish tradition as an area of peaceful coexistence and interpenetration of different nationalities, cultures and religions. It was an area marked by the true tolerance of free men mutually respectful of their identity⁴².

Since the 2000s, we have also observed a dramatic rise in importance attached to the Cursed Soldiers in the Polish historical memory. This reflects the return of the great Romantic thinking to the Polish politics, which can be compared to post-Trianon nostalgia in Hungary. The popularity of the Cursed Soldiers is the strongest in the electorate of the national right (PiS and Kukiz15), and may be connected with their very critical approach towards the current Polish state presented as an heir of communist Poland. The Cursed Soldiers waged a hard-line but absolutely hopeless guerrilla war against the communists. They were the last representatives of the Polish Romantic insurgent tradition. Paradoxically, however, it was that "hated post-communist" Polish state that launched, without serious nuancing, the

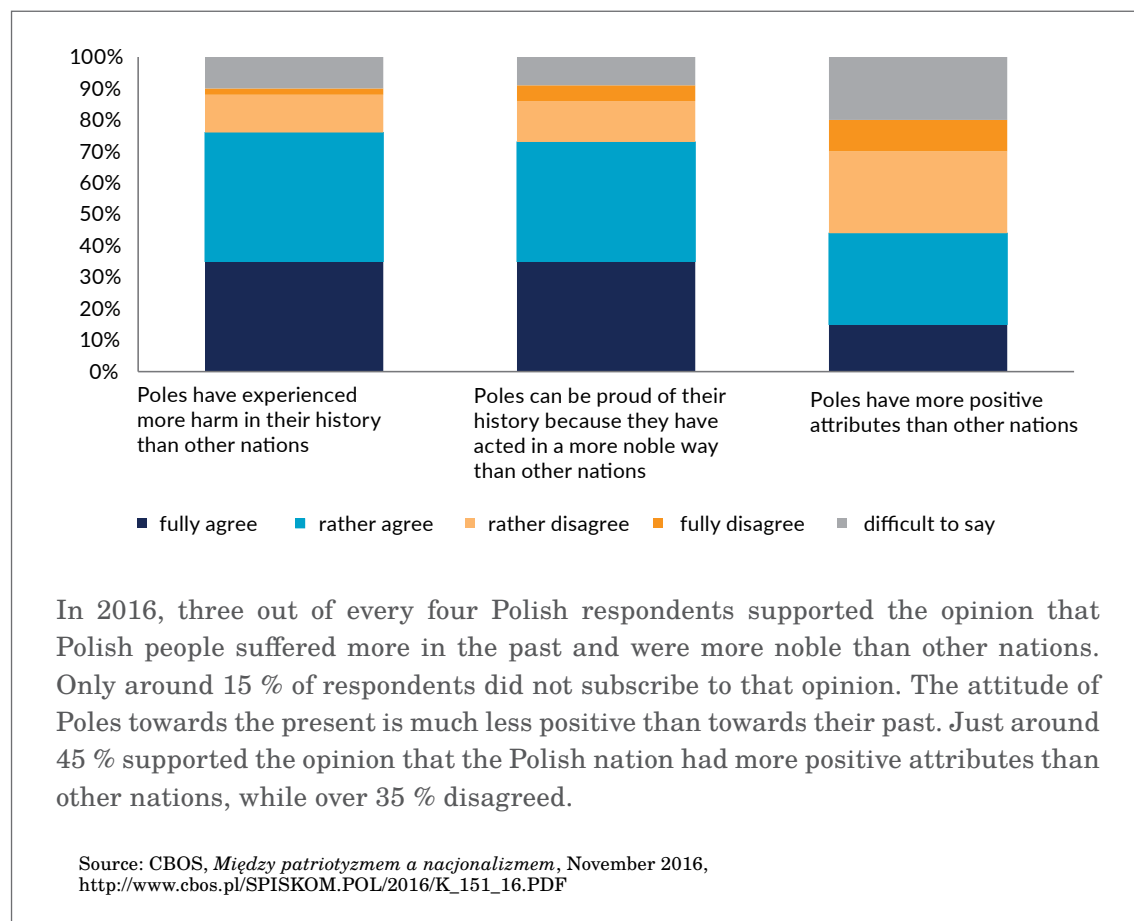
41 *O co się spieramy? – fragmenty debaty Arcanów*, Arcana, 04.11.2014, <http://www.portal.arcana.pl/O-co-sie-spi-eramy-fragmenty-debaty-arcanow,4282.html>

42 Sejm RP, *O ustanowieniu Narodowego Dnia Pamięci Męczeństwa Kresowian*, 12.02.2016, [http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki8ka.nsf/0/4E7A9ABFC5155269C1257F65003B143A/\\$File/284.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki8ka.nsf/0/4E7A9ABFC5155269C1257F65003B143A/$File/284.pdf)

cult of Cursed Soldiers⁴³. After PiS's electoral victory, this relatively small guerrilla movement which, proportionally speaking, was radically less numerous than similar organizations in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Western Ukraine⁴⁴, gained the status of the main heroes within the right wing historical narrative. For instance, Kaczyński placed them as a group and separately one particular fighter on a list of his five leading historical authorities.

All in all, the ambivalent attitude towards the state present in the history of both nations and the roller-coaster of their state traditions favour the popularity of ethnic nationalism whose supporters perceive the nation as a definitely more important thing than the state. In this case national populists define the state as subordinated to the nation and believe that it should be controlled by them as the national avant-garde. Today's societies of both Poland and Hungary have, to a large degree, failed to undertake a serious self-reflection about their Romantic self-image of victims⁴⁵ and heroes, about the legacy of Romantic traditions and the nostalgia for the lost glory and territories (see Box.1).

Box 1. The noble past



43 Units supporting authoritarianism and religious nationalism were considerably overrepresented among the long-est fighting guerrilla groups of the Cursed Soldiers.

44 After the war the number of the Cursed Soldiers who fought in the forests did not exceed 13-17 thousand. By comparison, the Forest Brothers in Lithuania which had at time over 10 times less inhabitants than Poland approached 30 thousand.

45 Many nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia with whom Polish and Hungarian society is quite familiar, suffered indisputably much more in the 20th century than Poles and Hungarians (for instance, Bosniaks, Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Crimean and Volga Tatars, Russians, Armenians, Kazakhs, Caucasian nations).

2.2. The deep roots of illiberal democracy

Regular and uninterrupted participation in the political and social life of a democratic state as a conscious citizen is perceived by the theorists of nationalism (e.g. Anthony Smith) as a basic foundation of civic nationalism. In Poland and Hungary the conviction predominates that both countries possess a very rich and old democratic tradition which makes them immune to the risk of authoritarianism and which served favourably the nation-building process by way of civil engagement.

However, if we scratch the surface, the situation turns out to be much more complex. In the 16th and 17th century, Poland and Hungary distinguished themselves in Europe by a huge proportion of very internally diverse nobility (around 8% in Poland and 5% in Hungary) who gradually became mostly linguistically-assimilated Hungarians and Poles. The high proportion of nobility is often presented in both historiographies as evidence of their strong democratic credentials. According to that argumentation, such a level of political participation (i.e. democracy) was achieved in Western Europe only in the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, Polish and Hungarian nobility, particularly in the 16th and the first half of the 17th century, operated within the framework of one of the most efficient democratic premodern political systems in Europe⁴⁶. However, Polish democracy degenerated later into an oligarchy of powerful aristocratic families and became a synonym of political dysfunctionality in Europe. This found the most spectacular exemplification in the *liberum veto*: an unanimity voting rule that allowed any member of the legislature to force an immediate end to the session and nullify any legislation that had already been passed⁴⁷. Meanwhile, the Hungarian democracy was decisively curbed by the absolute Habsburg monarchy⁴⁸.

In Polish and Hungarian noble democracies, the minority was supposed to surrender to the majority: not only legally, but also morally, by giving up their right to a dissenting opinion. According to Andrzej Walicki, a prominent Polish historian of ideas, for a noble democrat a genuine freedom was not associated with privacy but realized itself in a public field. It was not an individual freedom from the state (civil liberty) but collective freedom in the state (political right of participation, the will of sovereign noble nation). Between the 18th and 20th century, the heritage of Polish and Hungarian noble democracy based on the myth of a uniformed 'will of the people' maintained a huge popularity because it played a key role in mobilizing massive social support for the resistance against foreign domination and contributed to the protection of national identity when external pressure was the strongest. "However, at the same time it was used frequently as a tool of relentless moral-political pressure aiming at total conformity – not only external, but also internal, intellectual and moral"⁴⁹.

The idea of an unlimited sovereign will of the noble nation made Polish and Hungarian gentry reluctant to accept the rule of law. According to Walicki, it was

46 It is worth reminding that Polish and Hungarian nobilities maintained very close relations and inspired each other. A Polish word *rokosz*, namely civic disobedience, originates from a field located close to Budapest where Hungarian tribes met in order to elect their chiefs.

47 Between 1668 and 1764 out of 42 sessions of the Polish parliament only 12 were not disrupted. Andrzej Walicki proposes to rethink the character of *liberum veto* which "was often interpreted as an extreme manifestation of "Polish individualism. In reality, however, the right of veto originated rather from archaic collectivist ethos, represented the reverse side of the belief that the decisions regarding the community should be undertaken unanimously." A. Walicki, *Naród, nacjonalizm, patriotyzm*, Kraków 2009, p. 352.

48 Between 1687 and 1867 the Hungarian parliament met only 19 times. The longest break between the sessions lasted even 25 years.

49 A. Walicki, *Op.cit.*, pp. 363-364.

not an accident that the Roman law met with a decisive resistance of the Polish nobility and it did not take roots in Poland. The nobles feared that Roman law could be used to limit their collective omnipotence and support the proponents of royal absolutism. Accordingly, they rejected the idea that the law could be interpreted or commented on by independent professional lawyers. Last but not least, they rightly feared that the Roman law, highlighting the absolute character of private property and the inviolability of private contracts defined as an agreement between equal individuals, could significantly strengthen the legal position of burghers and thus limit the power of the noble "caste".⁵⁰

Contrary to many European countries, the cities, free military servicemen and peasants in Poland and Hungary lacked any significant representation in national parliaments. In fact, the dominance of the gentry over the cities and peasants was cemented during the golden age of Polish and Hungarian premodern democracy. In consequence, the scope of non-political civil liberties enjoyed by the entire population, such as freedom of movement, the right to acquire properties, the right to defend before an independent court and the freedom of speech and assembly were radically wider in England or France in the first half of nineteenth-century than in Hungarian and Polish noble democracies among the lower layers of society. The Hungarian and Polish peasants constituting a great majority of population were relegated to the category of serfs (semi-slaves). This strictly hierarchic organization of society was legitimized in the 16th century by the ethno-genesis of Polish and Hungarian nobles that presented them as separate nations predestined to rule over townspeople and peasants.

The legal emancipation of the peasants in both countries took place only in the middle of the 19th century and met with a stiff resistance of substantial part of nobility⁵¹. However, the genuine social, economic and political empowerment of Polish and Hungarian peasants took several more decades. For instance, a fully-fledged land reform was implemented in both countries only after World War II. Moreover, gentry dominated among the political elites until the middle of the 20th century and some post-feudal "relics" (such as over-representation of former nobles in the political class) have survived until today, particularly in Poland⁵². The most visible exemplification of this "specificity" in social development was an emergence of an anachronistic "guided democracy" controlled by the conservative gentry in the second half of 19th century in Hungary and then in an autonomous part of Poland (Galicia). In Hungary, this kind of democracy survived until 1944.

The free and fair elections based on universal suffrage and secret ballot constitute one of the main pillars of civic nationalism because they provide nations with the most efficient instrument of social mobilization and inclusion of individuals as members of a political community. Meanwhile, before 1990 Poland and Hungary had a very limited experience of such elections. In the Polish case, such elections were organized only once in 1922 and in Hungary the elections close to fulfilling such requirements took place in 1945⁵³. The foreign rule often had a negative im-

50 A. Walicki, *Op.cit.*, p. 355.

51 Nevertheless, the Hungarian and Polish insurgents, mostly of noble origin, announced the abolishment of the serfdom at the beginning of uprisings in 1848 and 1863, respectively.

52 The best exemplification of this phenomenon is the fact that the key leaders of the communist *junta* which imposed martial law in 1981 originated from petty gentry (Wojciech Jaruzelski, Florian Siwicki). After 1989 four of six presidents of democratic Poland had at least partly noble roots (Jaruzelski, Kwaśniewski, Kaczyński, Komorowski).

53 The vote was denied to the ethnic Germans and anybody charged with pro-Nazi activities. On the other hand, women attained the full suffrage for the first time.

pact (though to a very various degree) on the development of modern democracy in both countries and by default – on civic nationalism. Between 1795 and 1918 most Poles lived in Tsarist Russia that had not experienced free and fair elections based on universal suffrage. In cases of both Poland and Hungary, the communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union delayed substantially the development of democracy. However, both historiographies often underestimate the genuine public support for the communist party which was sometimes quite high.

Before 1990, Poland and Hungary had a very limited experience of free and fair elections.

In the case of Hungary, the guided democracy operated despite (or even “against”) very rapid modernization of the country. In the same period, social and economic processes resulted in most of the Western European countries – even if after many ups and downs – in the establishment of fully fledged democratic states. This discrepancy between the socio-economic modernization and the obsolete character of the political system resulted in a very serious crisis immediately after World War I. In less than a year (1918-1919) Hungary experienced failed liberal and communist revolutions and a successful national-conservative counterrevolution⁵⁴. These developments determined Hungary's history in the interwar period. As Paul Lendvai, a Hungarian historian, underlined, “the abdication of liberals in favor of the communists partly accounted for the rejection of liberal democracy, a predominantly reactionary complexion of the Hungarian politics until 1945 and a tolerance of right-wing extremism”⁵⁵.

As the Western European experience shows, the development of civic democratic nationalism was, in the modern period, often strongly correlated with the vibrant bourgeoisie which evolved into the middle class of the 19th and 20th centuries. Meanwhile, for many centuries most townspeople in Poland and Hungary were ethnically non-Polish or non-Hungarian (predominantly Germans and Jews)⁵⁶. The domination of gentry was one of the main reasons of economical backwardness of Poland and Hungary in comparison to the most developed Western European countries. The modernization of Hungary and Poland started much later than in most Western European countries. The phenomenon is best expressed by the fact that the majority of Poles and Hungarians became literate only at the end of the 19th century. Moreover, the level of urbanization of Poland and Hungary was substantially lower than in Western Europe until the 1960s⁵⁷. Most importantly, World War II

54 The communist revolution was a genuine Hungarian phenomenon and enjoyed a quite strong social support. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was the second communist state in world history.

55 P. Lendvai, op. cit., p. 541.

56 On the other hand, Hungarians and Poles were greatly overrepresented among city dwellers in certain regions. In fact, the level of urbanization of Poles and Hungarians, though much lower than in many Western European regions, was higher than among many nations living in Centre-Eastern Europe.

57 Hungary and Poland still distinguish themselves by a lower level of urbanization, 70 % and 60 % respectively, in comparison to the most developed countries of Western Europe (80-90 %). Hungarian cities, excluding Budapest with the metropolitan area where one-third of the entire Hungarian population lives, are small. The second largest city has around 200 thousand inhabitants, the third one approximately 160 thousand.

and, to a lesser degree, communism resulted in the extermination, expulsion, social degradation or emigration of most of the “old” townspeople in both countries. Their place was occupied by a freshly urbanized new middle class without ethos, roots and certainty concerning their class identity, fate and property. Andrzej Walicki⁵⁸ underlines a striking difference between the liberal bourgeoisie model of democracy developed in England or the Netherlands (two premodern Europe parliamentary democracies), and noble democracy of the Hungarian or Polish republics:

Nobility enforce their freedom in the public forum, in noisy meetings of local assemblies, in the parliament and on the election field. Its distinctive cry was “kupa mości panowie, kupą” [as a mass, gentlemen, as a mass]. Classical liberalism was born in completely different social conditions and was correlated with other values. Its ethos was the ethos of Puritanism and thus of individualism and hard work⁵⁹.

The beginning of ethnic proto-nationalism in Poland and Hungary can be traced back to the 17th century.

In England and the Netherlands a substantial part of public life, particularly in the economic sphere (private property), gained autonomy towards the state institutions. Meanwhile, according to Walicki, in Poland the parliament was supposed to control every sphere of life. The bourgeois system of values met with contempt on the side of the majority of Polish and Hungarian gentry. In the 19th century this legacy of noble democracy mixed with Romanticism further hampered the process of adaption of Polish and Hungarian noble elites to modernity which was identified with the urban system of values. Still, it should be remembered that the awareness of the necessity to improve the position of city dwellers was present in the political thinking of the Polish and Hungarian nobility already in the 16th century and gained a wider support in the 18th century. The apogee of this trend was the Polish Constitution of 1791. It was the second constitution in the world, though substantially less progressive than the American and French ones in the content. Polish enlightened reformers of noble origins, against a stiff opposition of the conservative noble majority (through a *coup d'état*), endorsed the new constitution which substantially enfranchised townspeople. The essence of this enfranchisement was the introduction of the rule of law defending the rights and property of the bourgeoisie. In the case of Hungary, the empowerment of the townspeople was achieved through the reforms launched by the enlightened absolute Habsburg monarchy.

In both countries, the beginning of ethnic proto-nationalism which considered the peasants, nobility and townspeople as a part of one community can be traced back to the 17th century when the Roman Catholic Church started to promote the linguistic-religious identity uniting Poles or Hungarians from all social classes,

⁵⁸ Walicki's research has been focused on the Polish case, however because of substantial similarities between Polish and Hungarian political and social systems in premodern period, it remains relevant to a large degree to Hungary's case.

⁵⁹ A. Walicki, *Op.cit.*, p.352.

excluding however non-Roman Catholics.⁶⁰ Piotr Skarga, a Jesuit who was one of the most important political thinkers in Polish history, criticized harshly the nobility for the discrimination of the peasants and townspeople and promoted the vision of a nation as a body in which both hands, namely the gentry and the commoners, have to be healthy. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century Roman Dmowski, the father of Polish modern ethnic nationalism and leader of Endecja, also distinguished himself as a radical critic of noble democracy. He believed that premodern Poland was an anomaly in Europe. He wanted to see the modernization of Poland and the development of the Polish bourgeoisie. He believed that a classless nation based on the national solidarity is the most successful instrument of social integration of the Polish society above very serious economic and political tensions. However, Dmowski was hardly a democrat and certainly not a liberal one. In his opinion,

The main foundation of patriotism is a moral union with the nation independent from the will of a person. The union ties the person through generations to his or her own nation. In consequence, the person in a certain and wide sphere of deeds does not have a free will, but has to obey the collective will of the nation⁶¹.

In consequence, Dmowski believed that the nation should be based on “physical and moral tyranny” exercised by the “healthy part of the nation” over the “non-national part of society”, defined with contempt as a “race of half-Poles”. Dmowski defined them as people for whom the nation was not “a living and organic union with a separate soul and distinct needs but only “a loose assemblage of individuals, groups or layers, having only in common the fact that they inhabit the same territory”. For Dmowski, “the race of half-Poles [had] to be destroyed”.⁶² By default, he was the opponent of universal suffrage including national minorities, women and... the race of half-Poles. Dmowski was also an anti-elitist, treating the elites of that times as too soft and naively cultivating the memory about the heritage of a multiethnic Poland.

Dmowski: “The person does not have a free will, but has to obey the collective will of the nation”.

Dmowski's main political opponents were the patriotic Socialists headed by Józef Piłsudski who cooperated closely with a Left agrarian party. Endecja excluded them mentally from the national community by calling them Jews, Bolsheviks and Masons. During the Russian revolution of 1905-1907, Poland became an arena of bloody confrontations between Endecja and the Socialists that took the lives of several thousands of Poles. According to Walicki, due to the above-mentioned legacy of noble collective democracy (the will of the sovereign nation), Dmowski did not encounter any strong social opposition while he made moral tyranny towards

60 The Roman Catholic church was the only public state institution accepting peasants into its ranks, though to lower places in the hierarchy.

61 R. Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*, Wrocław 2002, p. 91.

62 As cited in: A. Walicki, op. cit., p.498.

individuals one of the main principles of Endecja. Paradoxically, the party which played a key role in the empowerment of Polish masses, definitely the first formation with such a widespread social support, did not have solid democratic credentials⁶³.

When Poland regained independence in 1918, Centre-Left parties successfully pushed for one of the most progressive legislations concerning human rights in Europe including universal suffrage (also for women)⁶⁴. Despite the authoritarian elements in their political program, Endecja operated as a member of the ruling parliamentary coalitions in the democratic political milieu until 1926. However, it provoked the most severe crisis of the Polish democracy at that time. In 1922 the first Polish president Gabriel Narutowicz was assassinated by a far-right nationalist immediately after being elected to the post. The perpetrator was inspired by Endecja whose later condemnation of the deed was half-hearted ("yes, but"), as they could not accept that Narutowicz had won the elections thanks to the vote of national minorities. The perpetrator said openly that he wanted to assassinate Piłsudski. In 1926 Piłsudski conducted a coup d'état which resulted in the gradual political alienation of many Poles. It was a bitter paradox, because Piłsudski claimed that the putsch was organized against the exclusive politics of Endecja.

Although Hungary remained in the interwar a sort of a post-feudal museum, certain politicians from the ruling elite tried to reconstruct the state through the incorporation of the masses in the public life within the model of corporatism and populism. The main representative of this trend was Gyula Gömbös, a sort of Hungarian Peron, the prime minister of Hungary (1932-1936) who probably coined the term "national socialism". He renamed the ruling party "the National Unity Party" and, as the first politician in the modern history of Hungary, created a mass political movement. In terms of economic policy, Gömbös preached a work-based society (his government's program was named The National Work Program) and promoted the adoption of many progressive measures favourable to the lower classes. However, his plans to introduce universal suffrage were unacceptable for the post-feudal political elite, which was one of the key reasons behind his fall.

In consequence, the Hungarian equivalent of Endecja had to be a more radical force. This was the position taken by the fascists. In the elections of 1939 fascist parties won almost one quarter of all votes. However, their real support in the society was much higher. The electoral law openly discriminated them. Where they were on the ballot, they usually got between one third and half of the votes. Among the far right parties the Arrow-Cross Party headed by Ferenc Szalasi achieved the best result (around 15%). Because of serious social problems in Hungary, Szalasi was more socialist than other fascist movements, advocating worker rights, the nationalization of industry and a radical land reform, a gift for his favourite class – the peasants. Again, it was a huge paradox that the fascists (anti-democratic by nature) turned out to be the main supporters of a fully-fledged equality before the law (against feudal privileges) and of the empowerment of the "excluded" masses through the universal suffrage. Szalasi rejected the post-feudal hierarchy in the name of national unity. According to the Arrow Cross Catechism, "the most important guideline of national socialism is the creation of the internal unity of the people (totality). (...) It creates the concept of equality on the idea of social

63 In the only completely free and fair elections in interwar Poland, which took place in 1922, Endecja achieved the highest result gaining around 45% of the votes of ethnic Poles.

64 Thus, women in Poland gained the right to vote earlier than in most Western European countries.

justice.”⁶⁵ Not by accident, the word *work* occupied a key place in Szalasi's political vocabulary. As Aron Szele, a Hungarian historian underlines, “Szalasi was opening the door for the masses to enter history, but under his strict fascist supervision”⁶⁶. The new nation was supposed to be egalitarian but ruled by a non-democratic elite that totally excluded from the national community (on the “racial” basis) the already assimilated Hungarians of Jewish origin as well as the ruling elite's political enemies.

The building of a civic nation is often substantially more difficult when a country possesses a highly multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure which makes the demarcation of borders of political community particularly challenging. Indeed, Poland and Hungary were for several centuries very multi-ethnic and multi-religious⁶⁷. On the one hand, the level of ethnic and religious heterogeneity differentiated them substantially from Western Europe⁶⁸. On the other, the changes of borders, the Holocaust and forced exchanges of population of the 20th century placed Hungary and particularly Poland in the category of the most ethnically homogenous countries in Europe⁶⁹. Few countries in Europe experienced such a drastic change of ethnic composition and radical rupture with the past as Poland and Hungary. This rupture remains a serious challenge for the historical memory of both nations (the tension between the praised multi-ethnic past glory and the preferred homogenous ethnic “ordinary” present).

The legacy of relations between Poles and Hungarians and other nations that lived within the same state for centuries is very mixed (coexistence, confrontation). For dozens of decades Poland and, to a lesser degree, Hungary (Transylvania) managed to construct a unique multi-religious and multi-ethnic political system of premodern democracy. However, correlation between religion, ethnicity and social classes organised hierarchically became a characteristic feature of this ethnic milieu. In the modern era, this phenomenon often hampered the attempts to assimilate or integrate various ethnicities within the same state and thus to construct a common democratic political community. The ethnic/national question also sealed the fate of Polish and Hungarian statehood⁷⁰. Given the multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of Poland and Hungary, Poles and Hungarians constituted relative majorities in their states. Moreover, both states could be more or less divided into two parts: the centre, inhabited by the majority of ethnic Poles or Hungarians, which was relatively more ethnically homogenous; and the borderlands/peripheries where the majority of population was made of non-Poles and non-Hungarians. However, the latter regions played a key role in the history of both Poles and Hungarians.

65 As cited in Aron Szele, *The Arrow Cross, The Ideology of Hungarian Fascism*, Budapest 2015, p. 124.

https://www.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/attachment/event/14210/thesisbookletszele_0.pdf

66 Aron Szele, *Ibid*, p. 208.

67 The mutual assimilation processes, mixed marriages, multilingualism, migrations, changes of ethnic structure through the centuries and emergence of multilayer identities make the multiethnic heritage even more complex and rich in certain regions.

68 Poland and Hungary were homes to one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe. The Jews accounted for around 5 percent of the Hungarian population and for around 10 percent in case of Poland.

69 In case of Poland, after the World War II massive movements of uprooted people who were settled in the former German parts of the country (and rather loosely connected to the Polish history) created additional challenges to national identity.

70 Inability to integrate the Ukrainians was one of the main reasons behind the civil wars in Poland in the 17th century which brought about the fall of an independent Polish state in the 18th century. The unresolved national question contributed decisively to the total rejection of Hungarian statehood after World War I by the majority of non-Hungarians who felt discriminated.

In the Polish and Hungarian history, ethnic composition translated into serious tensions between three options: federation of various nations, civic nationalism (more inclusive and secular) and ethnic nationalism (more exclusive and based on religion). In fact, the two latter options aspired through very different methods to the same general goal, namely: the decrease of ethnic diversity. A consistent pursuit of such a goal required forced assimilation that undermined the democracy or, at best, resulted in a great underrepresentation of national minorities in the political life⁷¹. In consequence, the issue of multi-nationality, wrongly approached in the age of nationalisms (minorities as a fifth column) had a negative impact on the development of democracy in Poland and Hungary in the modern period. The undemocratic electoral franchise in force in Hungary and Galicia were designed inter alia to maintain the Hungarian or Polish character of each of the countries. In Poland, the negative attitude of Dmowski towards universal suffrage may be explained by his hostility towards national minorities. What is even more important, in both countries the mobilization of masses into the modern democratic politics was organized through xenophobia directed at the outside (already mentioned foreign dominance) or towards the inside. The main problem that emerged was that of the borders of the nation and of the political community. The so called Jewish question became the key issue.

The civic secular nationalism which assumed that everyone could become a Hungarian triumphed during the Austrian-Hungarian period (1867-1918). Due to the massive assimilation of various nationalities, Hungarians became one of the most multi-religious nations in Europe⁷². Particularly impressive was the empowerment of the Jewish community which completely Magyarized and contributed tremendously to the development of the country. Raphael Patai, a Hungarian historian of Jewish origin, considers that "by the end of the 19th century, the Jews as a group had achieved a power position in Hungary unmatched by their co-religionists in any other country"⁷³. At the same time in Poland antisemitism – which was a key element of Endecja's identity – gained a strong foothold. Dmowski defined Jews in racial terms. According to him, "the Jewish population is undeniably a parasite on the social body of whichever country it inhabits"⁷⁴. Dmowski believed that "the Jewish race has a 'physiognomy of the psyche' that is too alien to ours, which makes it too difficult to break with it and come to our side"⁷⁵. Dmowski maintained that even assimilated and converted Jews could never become Poles. Moreover, if such an integration was ever attempted, it could destroy the Polish nation from within. Endecja gained such social popularity because it was often supported by the Roman Catholic Church in the interwar period. In contrast, Piłsudski opposed the exclusive antisemitism of Dmowski and tried to prevent it from becoming part of the state politics. He believed that Jews had a rightful place within the civic

71 In pre-World War I Hungary and in the interwar Poland national minorities made around 45 percent (in Hungary without Croatia) and 35 percent of population, respectively. But in the Hungarian parliament the number of MPs from minorities was smaller than 5 percent. Meanwhile, no member of a national minority has ever become a minister or a centrally-appointed governor of a Polish province or even a county.

72 At the beginning of 20th century Roman Catholics accounted for almost 60 percent of Hungarians and Calvinists for above 25 percent. 7 percent professed Judaism and 8 percent to other religions (mostly Lutherans and Greek Catholics).

73 R. Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, Detroit 1996, p. 374.

74 As cited in: B. Porter – Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, Chichester 2014, p. 55

75 As cited in: S. Goldin, Jews as cosmopolitans, foreigners, revolutionaries. Three images of the Jew in Polish and Russian nationalist ideology at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, [in:] *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and the Jews of East Central Europe*, ed. M. L. Miller, S. Ury, New York 2015, p. 101.

community based on the state and Polish as a language of communication between various nations. In fact, most of Jews voted for Piłsudski's party in certain elections and a substantial part of them thought of themselves as Poles of Jewish origin. When Piłsudski died, part of the ruling elite, taking into consideration the popularity of far right (the Camp of National Right–ONR, All-Polish Youth) among the young Polish people accepted the ethnic nationalism and started to court them.⁷⁶

The exclusive and discriminatory attitude towards Jews gained pre-eminence in Hungary in the interwar period. The ethnic and conservative nationalism in a mostly ethnically Hungarian country replaced its pre-war civic, liberal and secular variant of multi-ethnic Hungary which aspired to assimilate as many non-Hungarians as possible. In this period elites defined the state as National-Christian (in other words: non-Jewish). The overrepresentation of Hungarians of Jewish origin among the communist and liberal revolutionary elites (which can be explained by their very high level of urbanization) served as a pretext for the state-sponsored antisemitism. In 1920 Hungary became the first country in Europe to implement *numerus clausus* in universities directed against Jews. The social support for anti-Semitism rose radically during the Great Depression which particularly benefited fascist parties. The government, partly because of sharing the anti-Semitic prejudices and partly reacting to the social mood, in 1939-1941 endorsed three new laws against Jews which shifted criteria from religion to "race" and were even more severe than the Nuremberg Laws⁷⁷. According to Randolph Braham, a historian of the Holocaust in Central Europe,

*(...) the ever-harsher anti-Jewish measures of the late 1930s prepared the ground for the acceptance and successful implementation of the Final Solution program after the German occupation*⁷⁸.

The extermination of Hungarians of Jewish origin should be recognized as the most radical stage of the ethnicization of a civic nation taking place within the "guided democracy".

Indeed, after the quick and bloodless German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, which did not meet with any Hungarian resistance but with the support

⁷⁶ The name of the ruling party was changed into the Camp of National Unity showing its fascination with the idea of an ethnically monolithic nation.

⁷⁷ On the other hand, the Horthy regime banned the Arrow Cross party on the outbreak of World War II, forcing it to operate underground.

⁷⁸ Randolph Braham, *The Reinterment and Political Rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy*, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/randolph-l-braham-the-reinterment-and-political-rehabilitation-of-Miklós-horthy/>

of many of them, the fastest Holocaust in Europe took place⁷⁹. In several weeks, more than half a million Hungarians of Jewish origin were deported from wartime Hungary to death camps. The carrying out of this operation would be impossible without a huge engagement of the Hungarian state still headed by Horthy. After October 1944, Hungary turned into a German puppet state ruled by the Arrow-Cross Party who takes a direct or indirect responsibility for the death of over 90 thousand people, mostly of Jewish origin.

The extermination of Hungarians of Jewish origin should be recognized as the most radical stage of the ethnicization of a civic nation taking place within the guided democracy. This also showed that the ethnic nationalism in its extreme form can undermine the foundation of the nation as such. Hungarians of Jewish origin belonging to the multi-religious nation were exterminated by their fellow citizens despite having “fulfilled” all the basic criteria of national identity (Hungarian language, patriotism, citizenship).

Polish involvement in the Holocaust was dramatically smaller than in the case of Hungary, however its scale is still decisively underestimated in current Poland.

The negative impact of the Endecja's antisemitism on the Polish society was the most visible during the World War II. According to the research conducted by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research⁸⁰, Poles in great majority were coldly indifferent to the extermination of Jews and their attitude towards them remained negative through the war. Certainly, Polish involvement in the Holocaust was dramatically smaller than in the case of Hungary, however its scale is still decisively underestimated in current Poland. In 1941, the North-Eastern Poland (a pre-war bastion of Endecja) turned into an arena of tens of anti-Jewish *pogroms* encouraged by Germans in which several thousand Jews collectively accused of collaboration with the Soviets perished. The Germans also used the Polish police, labour battalions, firefighters and *ad hoc* organized groups and individuals (denunciators) in the destruction of Polish Jewry. Summing up, in the opinion of the Centre for Holocaust Research, Polish Jews experienced more suffering at the hands of Poles than assistance and help.

The communist dictatorship in both countries which was assumed to abolish all class divisions while at the same brutally persecuting the class enemies. However, in order to build a new monolithic community, Polish communists coined the term of

79 The Holocaust in Hungary could not have been so swift without the willing assistance of the Hungarian state, especially the Gendarmerie, who rounded the Jews up, forced them into ghettos and onto the trains. The main charge against Horthy is his inaction during the deportation of Jews from the Hungarian countryside in 1944. The fact that Horthy was able to prevent the deportations of the Jews of Budapest shows that he could have tried to stop the deportations from the countryside. It should be also admitted that even before the occupation of Hungary by Germans in March 1944, more than 40 thousand Hungarian-Jewish men perished in forced labor battalions subjugated to the Hungarian army. Horthy also deported almost 20 thousand Jewish refugees to the German occupation zone where they were then shot by the Nazis.

80 The Polish Center for Holocaust Research, <https://www.holocaustresearch.pl/?l=a&lang=en>

the “political and moral unity of the nation” which was used until 1989. Hungarian communists under Janos Kadar also tried to establish a community as wide as possible through the motto “who is not against us, is with us”. This inclusive formula promoted the social conformism of individuals towards the community (“us”) ruled by an undemocratic elite. It should be underlined that in the 20th century the undemocratic regimes in Hungary differed from the Polish ones by their higher level of stability. Between 1918 and 1988 and excluding short periods, Hungary was ruled by just three politicians (Miklós Horthy, Mátyás Rákosi, János Kádár).

In 20th century Poland, the Church contributed a lot to the promotion of the idea of the nation as a monolith.

In the case of Poland, the Church contributed a lot to the promotion of the idea of the nation as a monolith. The Primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński was very strongly influenced by the teachings of Piotr Skarga. Wyszyński claimed that nations are eternal and were created by God. He defined the nation as an organism whose members constitute its integral “organs”. According to him, any nation divided internally ceased to be a nation. That is why the quest for national unity and overcoming differences between social classes was a patriotic duty. In Wyszyński’s teachings, in line with the old tradition, national unity was imagined as a classless community based on a clear social hierarchy (the spiritual leadership of Roman Catholic Church, the patriarchal model of family).⁸¹

The ethnic nationalism did not fade away with the allegedly international communism. To the contrary, in Poland communists used the establishment of ethnically homogenous country as the main argument for the legitimacy of their rule, presenting such a composition as a basic guarantee of national security. According to Marcin Zaremba, a historian of that period, Polish communists did not manage to create a coherent national ideology. They established a sort of patchwork of various ideas. They borrowed a lot of ideas from the National Democracy and the pre-war extreme right of various periods (e.g. the ideal of ethnically pure and centralised national state, anti-Semitism directed towards Poles of Jewish origin which were mostly expelled from Poland in 1968).⁸² Moreover, the most national and authoritarian factions of the communist party established a close cooperation with the far-right intelligentsia which was tolerated.⁸³ In case of Hungary the legacy of the collaboration with Germans made such a flirt with ethnic nationalism much less feasible.

The fall of communism brought about a genuine democratization of Poland and Hungary which became (with just few shortcomings) liberal democracies based on the rule of law and a respect for individual human rights and the rights of national

81 M. Osa, *Solidarity and Contention: Networks of Polish Opposition*, Minneapolis 2003.

82 Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2005.

83 Bolesław Piasecki, a former leader of ONR became a prominent political activist in communist Poland.

minorities⁸⁴. Indeed, Poland and Hungary for the first time in their history experienced a regular sequence of free and fair elections. All these changes resulted in an unprecedented individualization and diversification of both societies with regards to the system of values and life-styles. However, as social researches showed at the same time, both societies have been torn between the values belonging to the pre-modern, modern and postmodern systems⁸⁵. Identity problems were felt in a particularly intense way within the middle class, the backbone of liberal democracy and of civic national identity in the Western Europe. Middle class substantially strengthened but in comparison to the most of Western Europe remained considerably weaker. At the same time, the third sector (i.e. NGOs) which contributed substantially to the democratization of both countries remained considerably weaker than in most of the Western European countries. Despite the diversification and individualization of both societies, the ethnically defined national identity remained the main point of reference for the most people (see Box #2).

After 1989, Poland and Hungary for the first time in their history experienced a regular sequence of free and fair elections. However, serious identity problems emerged.

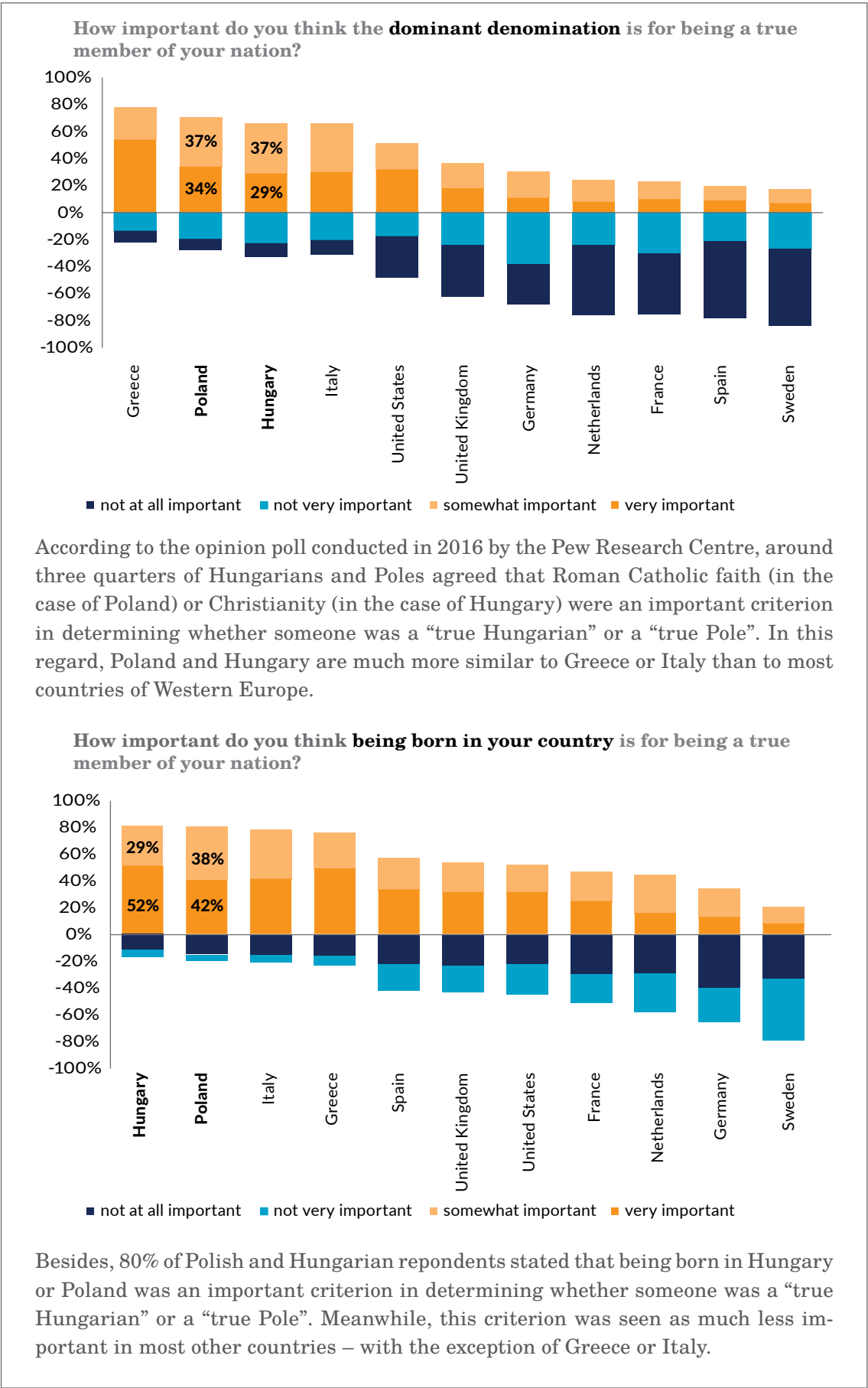
Moreover, the establishment of an inclusive political national community met serious obstacles in the form of a low-level of political participation or a very deep polarization. The turnout in Polish parliamentary elections (1990-2015) has been one of the lowest in Europe (only sporadically exceeding 45%). In Hungary, political participation has been definitely much higher (usually around 65%). The polarization of the political scene expressed itself in its bipolar character in Poland between 2006 and 2015 and in Hungary between 1998 and 2010. In Hungary, the two biggest parties won in sum around 85% of votes in the elections in 2002 and 2006. The difference between the two parties was only at the level of 1%. In Poland, two main parties gathered around 75 % and almost 80 % in elections of 2007 and 2011, respectively⁸⁶. The polarization gained also various regional and social dimensions (place of residence, level of education, age, material status, profession, religious practice).

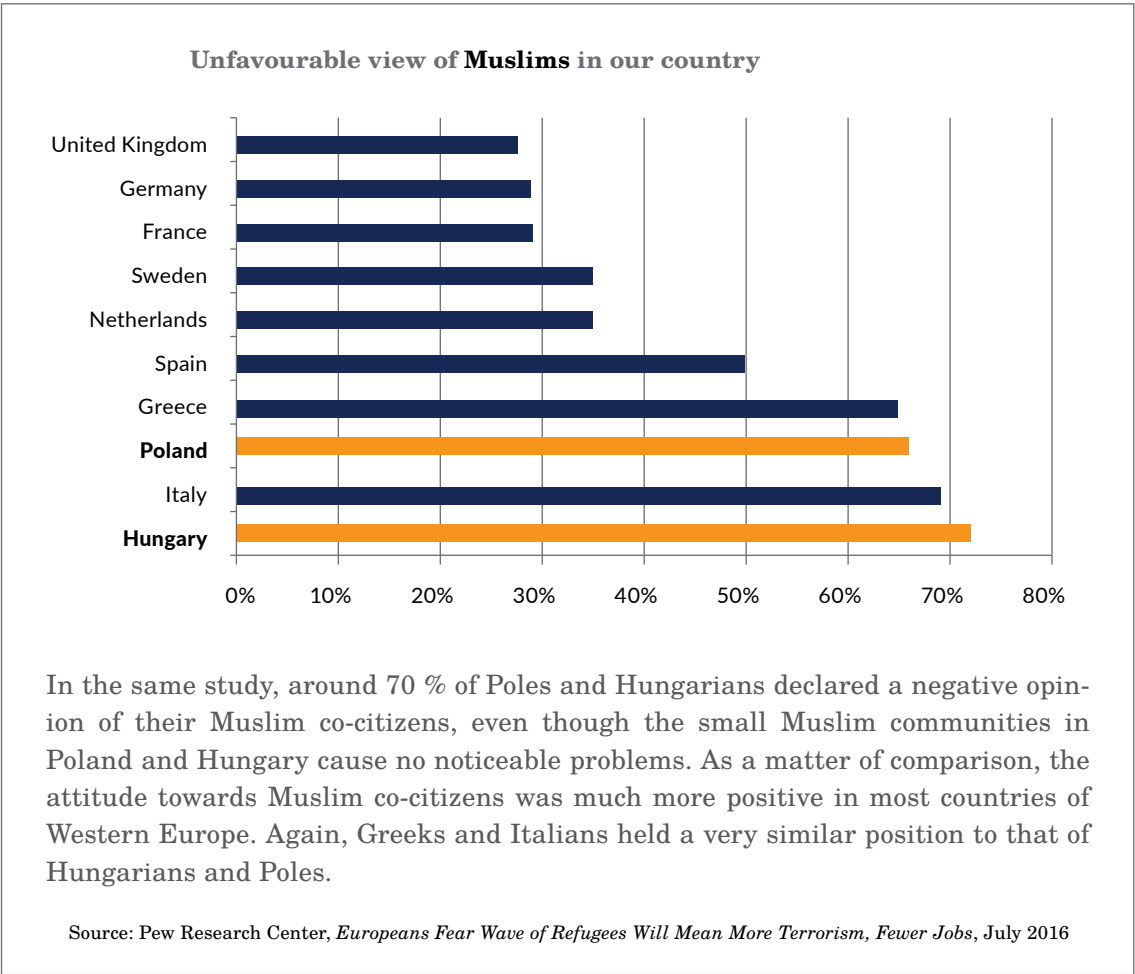
⁸⁴ This evaluation was shared by all important watchdogs and international organizations.

⁸⁵ As Andrzej Leder, a Polish philosopher rightly points out, the Polish middle class (this opinion is also relevant in the case of the Hungarian one) either “burrows” in nostalgic fantasies about its quasi-noble past, the manor houses, acres of land, uprisings and cemeteries, or “flies away” toward hyperglobal patterns.” A. Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja*, Warsaw 2014, p. 7.

⁸⁶ By comparison in the Czech Republic in 2010 two biggest parties won above 40% of total votes and almost 40 % in 2013, respectively.

Box 2. “True Poles” and “true Hungarians”

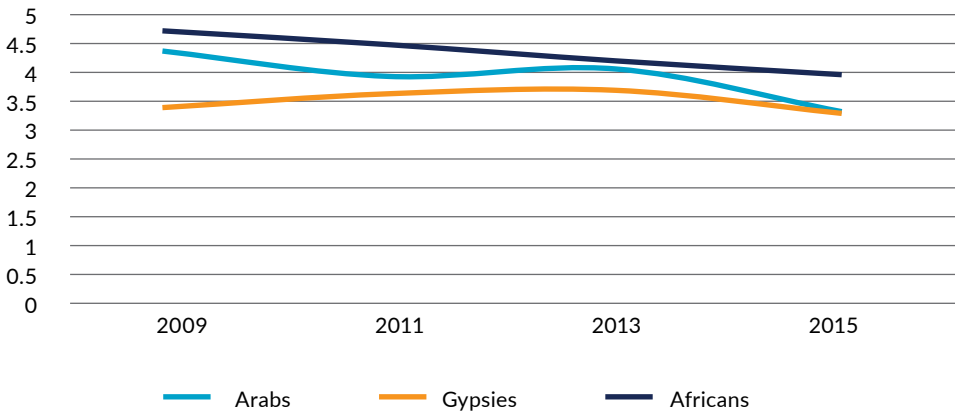




The deepening of economic and political crisis in Hungary, raising political tensions (the factor of the Smoleńsk plane crash) in Poland and instability in Europe (the Russian 2014 aggression against Ukraine, the Eurozone crisis, radical Islamic terrorism) resulted in an emergence of xenophobia (scapegoating and the fear of Others) as a new main mobilizing force in democratic life (see Box #3). In both countries xenophobic opinions are over-proportionally supported by young people which were particularly hard hit by the unemployment. In the elections of 2010 and 2014 the spectacular rise of Jobbik in Hungary originated from its anti-Roma discourse. In 2015 the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks in Western Europe (allegedly strictly intertwined, according to Fidesz and PiS propaganda) resulted in a radical rise of Islamophobia in Poland and Hungary which was exploited by Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, and PiS, Kukiz15 and Korwin in Poland. Currently, Orbán and Kaczyński use the refugee issue as a political weapon against the opposition accusing their political rivals of readiness to accept an unlimited number of Muslim refugees and in consequence of putting national security at grave risk.

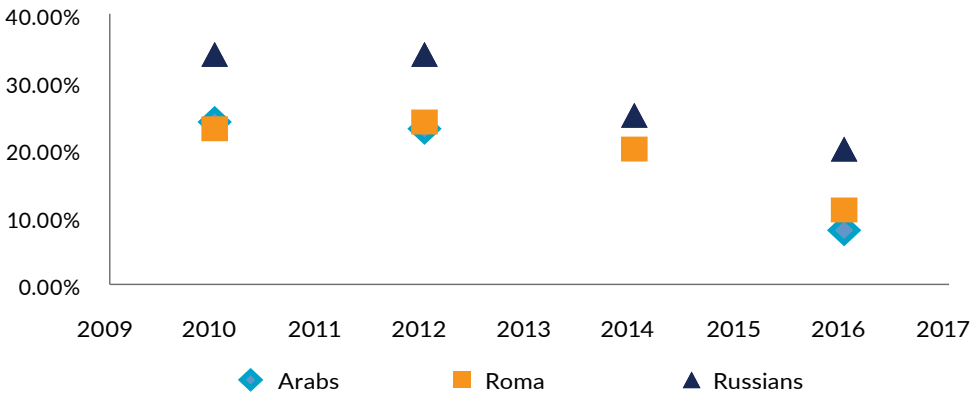
Box 3. The renaissance of xenophobia

Hungary – sympathy towards Arabs, Gypsies and Africans on a scale of 9

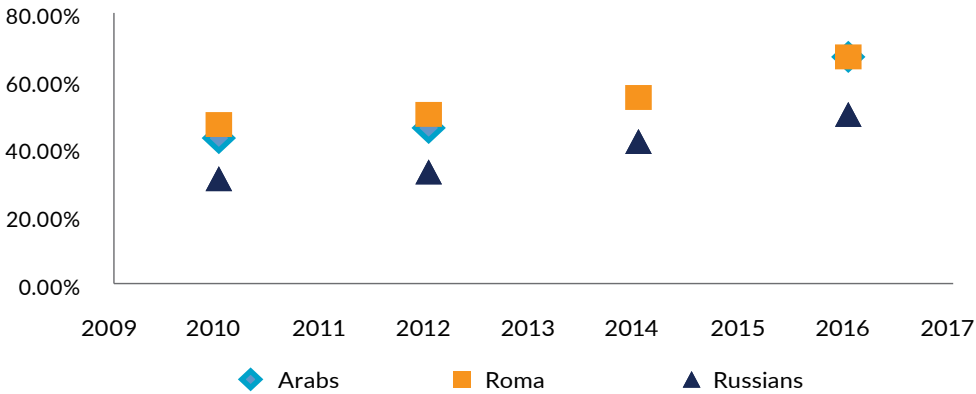


Source: Endre Hann, Dániel Róna, *Anti-Semitic Prejudice In Contemporary Hungarian Society - Research Report*, Action and Protection Foundation, 2016

Poland – sympathy towards other nations (in %)



Poland – antipathy towards other nations (in %)



Source: CBOS, *Stosunek do innych narodów*, April 2016

It should be underlined that the further rise of radical Jobbik coincided with Orbán's tenure as prime minister and took place despite the improvement of economic situation. In 2010 Jobbik won 16% of votes and in 2014 more than 20%. Additionally, in certain opinion polls in 2015, Jobbik gained the support of almost 30% of decided voters and almost 20% of respondents (mostly from Fidesz) nominated it as a party of their second choice. In 2016, the support for Jobbik decreased to above 20% and the party started to move towards the centre. However, simultaneously Fidesz radicalized its national discourse in order to attract the "abandoned" Jobbik voters and launched an anti-Jobbik propaganda campaign. Generally, these ideological nuances did not change the basic fact that the political scene in Hungary decisively tilted towards the national right. This shift is supported by both parties because it favours their interests. That is also why they often voted together in the Parliament.

In today's Poland, PiS is providing the far right with a place in the mainstream which they have never had before.

In Poland of today, PiS is trying to "neutralize" the far right by pulling them into an asymmetric collaboration. However, at the same time, it is providing them with a place in the mainstream which they have never had before. PiS politicians describe the members of far-right organizations as young patriots. The latter are courted by local PiS politicians who organize "patriotic" events, parades or lectures together with them. The public and private pro-government media serve as their purveyors. The prosecutor office is very "liberal" concerning investigations and hate-crime proceedings which are often discontinued.

The first stage of post-communist transition in Poland and Hungary regarding identity politics was dominated by debates on the communist legacy. The national right wanted to unite the nation after the dark ages of communism. They created an imaginary national unity which could be called an 'invented tradition' as it was achieved by putting radically opposite political options in the same basket (for instance Dmowski and Piłsudski in the case of Poland). However, they defined themselves very assertively as the only representatives of the entire Polish and Hungarian patriotic traditions. Kaczyński continues this strategy by defining himself as an heir of both Dmowski and Piłsudski. In Poland, PiS coined the term to describe themselves as the patriotic camp or even the independent camp, suggesting that Poland is an occupied country. Meanwhile, for a long time they called the post-communists (the reds) and the liberals (the pinks) "traitors" in the former case or "potential traitors", as a political force ready to cooperate with the post-communists, in the latter. This process was particularly evident in Poland during the debate on the new constitution in 1997. Marian Krzaklewski, the then leader of the right, declared that he would not participate any more in the works on the new constitution because a genuine patriot could not cooperate with people betraying their own country. He described the project of constitution as inspired by

Targowica, which is a synonym of national treason in Poland (it is a city in Ukraine where the aristocrats in 1792 asked Russia for help because they were against the Constitution of May 3rd 1791).⁸⁷

Kaczyński and Orbán draw from this politics of exclusion which was initiated at the beginning of the 1990s. Orbán and Kaczyński describe regularly their political opponents as communists even if they are former activists of the anti-communist democratic opposition or started their political careers after 1989 and surely do not share communist political views. Kaczyński and many other PiS politicians often use the term Targowica against the opposition because the latter dare to criticize the internal situation of Poland at the international level. Minister Beata Kempa has even declared recently that they were not Poles because a genuine Pole would not criticize its own country (i.e. government) abroad.

PiS and Fidesz often define their opponents as people without national identity – as European cosmopolitans.

PiS and Fidesz often define their opponents as people without national identity – as European cosmopolitans. According to PiS official program, the Polish national identity is threatened by groups “presenting an entirely un-national, European point of view”⁸⁸. The proponents of such ideas are also seen as supporters of the civil society. Already in 2006 Kaczyński defined them as people who are afraid of massive national activism of Poles. In his own words:

*These dissident groups did not want a strong state and strong politics. They feared the mobilization of citizens and were afraid of awakening – as it was called in the late 1980s – of a widely understood tradition of National Democracy (Endecja). The idea of a civil society was to serve primarily as a tool to counter this political awakening*⁸⁹.

Thus, Orbán and Kaczyński perceive NGOs mostly as representatives of foreign interests. In his famous speech from 2014, Orbán referred to the NGOs in the following way:

*We are not opposing non-governmental organisations here and it is not non-governmental organisations who are moving against us, but paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary. Therefore, it is extremely justified that the Hungarian Parliament has formed a Committee to regularly monitor, record and make public foreign influence so that all of us, including you, can know precisely who the real characters behind these masks are*⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ A. Smolar, op. cit.

⁸⁸ The Law and Justice Party's Programme 2014, p. 29, <http://old.pis.org.pl/dokumenty.php?s=partia&idoc=164> (in Polish)

⁸⁹ PiS nie jest partią niezadowolonych, wywiad Cezarego Michalskiego z Jarosławem Kaczyńskim, *Dziennik*, 21.04.2006

⁹⁰ The Hungarian Government, *Prime Minister's Speech*, op. cit.

On another occasion Viktor Orbán talked about NGOs receiving grants from abroad:

There is no doubt, however, that Hungarians, working against our own national interests, also play a prominent role in enabling the operation of such networks⁹¹.

The liberal elites in democratic Poland and Hungary did not have the courage to deconstruct historical myths.

After the fall of communism, mainstream parties did not succeed in creating a new, cohesive state narrative about the past of their countries which would promote a more civic, state-oriented and inclusive story about the history and the nation, while at the same time enabling a necessary confrontation with the national myths and the dark pages of history. Under pressure of the national right, the ruling elites did not openly admit that some traditions (with certain objections) are definitely more compatible with the modern society than others (e.g. Piłsudski rather than Dmowski)⁹². In fact, Dmowski was accepted by almost the entire political spectrum as a great hero in the national pantheon⁹³. In the 2000s, the research on shameful events in the history of Poland and Hungary (particularly concerning antisemitism) was pursued by some historians – though, sometimes in a too radical way – but it did not leave a serious imprint on the historical memory of the societies at large. The political elite did not have the courage to decisively reform high school history textbooks and deconstruct some historical myths. They surrendered to a large degree to a narrative of national populists which named any attempt to confront the dark side of their past as “pedagogy of shame” aimed at the undermining of national pride. The passivity can be explained to a certain degree, particularly in the case of Hungary, by the post-communist character of the Centre Left. The post-communists often behaved as if they accepted that their party did not possess as a former communist force sufficient democratic and patriotic credentials to conduct assertively its own politics of memory and identity.

Volkhard Knigge, a German leading expert on history didactics, rightly noticed that “if you want to establish a real democratic culture, you cannot

91 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 6th meeting of the Hungarian Diaspora Council, 30.11.2016, <http://www.miniszerelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-6th-meeting-of-the-hungarian-diaspora-council/>

92 The liberal intellectual elites focusing too much on the confrontation with the dark pages did not understand that such a settlement of the past should be accompanied by a second track - namely the promotion of a historical narrative that would foster civic nationalism. Gazeta Wyborcza published rightly many articles about Polish crimes committed against the Jews during the World War II. However, it wrote very randomly about overrepresentation of Poles of Jewish origin in the patriotic Polish Socialist Party in the interwar period.

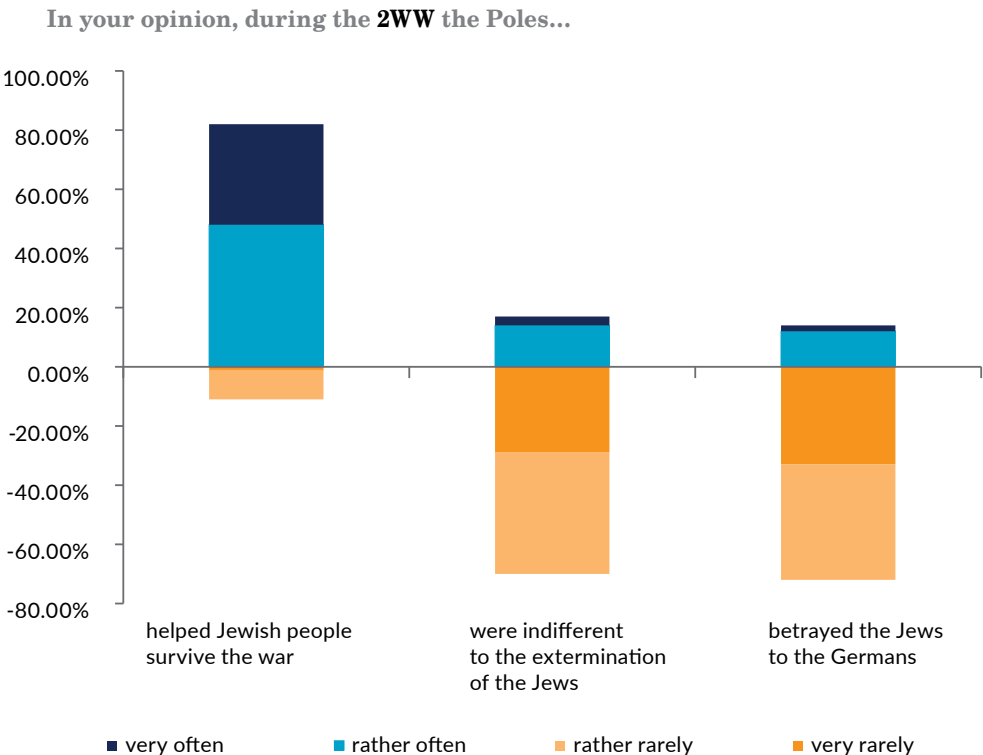
93 In 1999, the Polish Parliament by an overwhelming majority (almost 80 % “for” and less than 10 % “against”, 10% abstaining) endorsed a completely apologetic resolution recognizing Roman Dmowski as one of the greatest Poles in history. The entire moderate centre right, nearly all centre MPs and almost half of the left MPs voted for this resolution. Just less than one fourth of Left MPs voted against.

avoid the self-critical view on your own past, even if it hurts—and it hurts.”⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Hungarians and Poles have a serious problem – with more relevant consequences in the case of Hungary – to reconcile with the difficult past, believing very strongly in their own innocence and suffering (see Box #4).

Box 4. The painful past

Only a tiny minority of Poles accept the fact that their co-nationals were the main perpetrators of the *pogrom* in Jedwabne carried out against the Jewish residents in 1941. Moreover, the great majority of Poles are not aware that tens of such *pogroms* took place during the Second World War in the North-Eastern Poland. Recently, several examples of a revisionist research on the Polish involvement in the Holocaust have been carried out; however, they did not translate into a more truthful collective memory.

According to a study commissioned in 2014 by the Museum of the Second World War, over 80 % of Poles believed that Poles helped Jews survive the war and were moved by their terrible fate. In a different study, respondents in Poland considered Poles (88%) and Jews (82%) as the two nations which suffered the most during the Second World War.

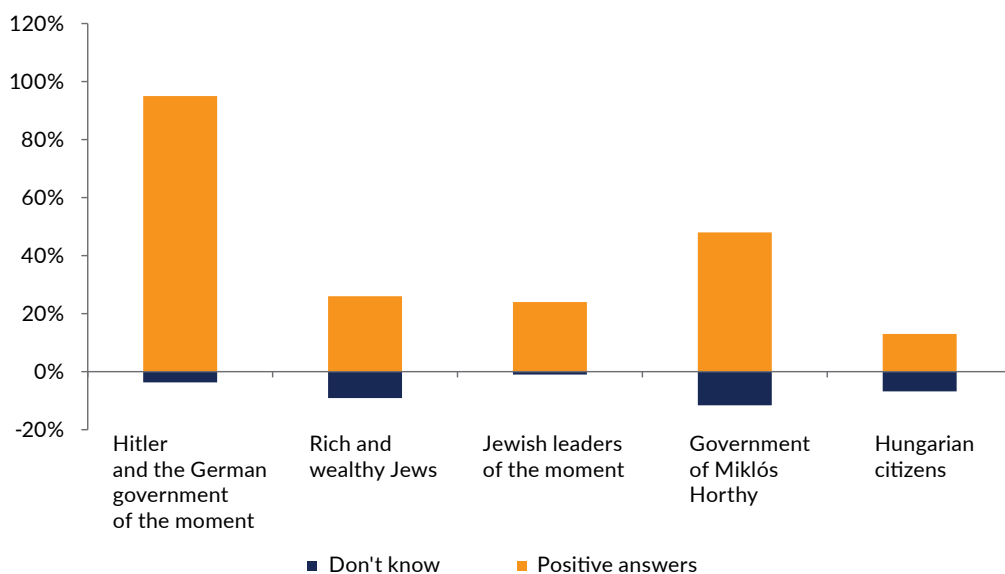


Sources: TNS Polska, *II wojna światowa w pamięci Polaków – w 75 lat od wybuchu*, 2014; TNS Polska, *Czy jesteśmy zwycięzcami? Polacy o przeszłości i o II wojnie światowej*, 2015

94 Paul Hockenos, *Can Germany Help Central Europe Confront Its Dark Past?*, 04.03.2012, http://www.operation-lastchance.org/HUNGARY_137-44.htm

The discrepancy between the reality and the self-perception is even more prominent in Hungary. A lasting controversy concerns the Hungarian responsibility for the Holocaust of the Jewish co-citizens. In 2010 less than half of respondents believed that Miklos Horthy's regime should be blamed for that event. By comparison, almost all Hungarians put the responsibility on Germany. Less than 15 % of Hungarians accepted the responsibility of Hungarian citizens.

Who takes responsibility for putting the Hungarian Jews in ghettos and deporting them to Auschwitz?



Source: Gy. Csepeli, I. Murányi, G. Prazsák, *Új tekintélyelvűség a mai Magyarországon. Társadalmi csoportok hierarchiájának látásvizsgálata*, Budapest 2011

In Poland and Hungary under PiS and Fidesz, the politics of memory is based on two foundations: the idealization of the past (pedagogy of pride) linked to nostalgia for the past glory, and amnesia or relativism in the memorization of the dark sides (particularly antisemitism). Orbán generally condemns antisemitism but simultaneously he has allowed the process of creeping rehabilitation of Horthy's regime to gain speed and promotes the policy which waters down the Hungarian involvement in the Holocaust. The latter process reached a new stage in 2011 when the new constitution stated that in March 1944 (German occupation) Hungary ceased to exist as a nation able of self-determination for 56 years. This formulation suggests wrongly that Hungarian state institutions were not autonomous and therefore Hungary cannot be blamed for its involvement in the Holocaust. In 2014 the Memorial to all the victims of the German occupation was erected in Liberty Square in downtown Budapest to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Nazi occupation of Hungary. It depicts Hungary as the Archangel Gabriel being attacked by the German imperial eagle. The memorial presents Hungary as an innocent victim of German aggression which, as has been already mentioned, did not meet with any resistance. Again, the responsibility of the Hungarian state for the cooperation with Germans in the Holocaust is diluted and the suffering of Hungarians of Jewish origin covered under an enigmatic term all victims.

The gradual process of rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy started already at the beginning of the 90s. When in 1993 Horthy's body was returned to Hungary, tens of thousands of people, as well as several ministers from the national right cabinet, attended the reburial ceremony. The Prime Minister József Antall praised Horthy as a "patriot" in several interviews. Meanwhile, the event was broadcast on state television. However, since 2012, Horthy statues and busts have been erected in quite numerous villages and cities. Quietly, many streets were renamed after him and other politicians from that period. At the same time, several writers, officials and politicians with very dubious records from World War II have been rehabilitated and/or praised by pro-government historians and Fidesz politicians and their writings added to the high school curriculum. Also Kaczyński is critical of anti-Semitism as such but rejects any serious reflections about the legacy of its Polish version. According to Kaczyński, the historical studies which recognized the prominent role of Poles in the anti-Jewish pogroms taking place in North-Eastern Poland during the war were an attempt to hide German responsibility for the Holocaust. In his own words:

*various types of operations, such as those that which were organized around Jedwabne where the crime that was actually committed, were portrayed in a way that did not have anything in common with its conduct and facts.*⁹⁵

The PiS government introduced a new legislation intended to "defend the good name of the Polish nation", which is waiting for the final endorsement of the parliament. It will impose prison terms on people "who publicly and against the facts, accuse the Polish nation (...) of being responsible or complicit in Nazi crimes committed by the III German Reich."⁹⁶ The new law, with its ambiguous and imprecise wording could gravely hinder debates which might be incompatible with the official, feel-good, version of the country's own national past. PiS also tries, through the politics of memory, to shift the attention from the dark legacy of Polish-Jewish relations into the positive historical experiences and the rescue activities of Christian Poles – presented in an idealistic way – during the German occupation. Jan Żaryn, a historian and PiS politician who promotes affirmatively the heritage of the Polish far right, is very active in this field.

The tradition of Polish noble democracy occupies a very important place in PiS politics of memory. PiS idealizes this tradition and exploits it as an argument on the international arena to counter the criticism of its internal politics. Antoni Macierewicz, the Minister of Defense and one of PiS's most influential politicians, during his lecture in March 2016, responded to critical opinions of the US on the developments in Poland by saying:

*The people who built their state in the 18th century will tell us what democracy is? To the nation which had representative and democratic structures in the 13-14th century and was a source of democracy for the entire Europe?*⁹⁷

95 Jarosław Kaczyński o pogromie w Białymstoku: to była wina państwa niemieckiego i narodu niemieckiego, *Wirtualna Polska*, 27.06. 2016, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1019391,title,Jaroslaw-Kaczynski-o-pogromie-w-Bialymstoku-to-byla-wina-panstwa-niemieckiego-i-narodu-niemieckiego,wid,18398092,wiadomosc.html?tid=11887c>

96 As cited in: *Kary za naruszenie dobrego imienia Polski i Polaków coraz bliżej. O co chodzi w ustawie*, *Tvn24*, 14.10.2016, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/o-co-chodzi-w-ustawie-o-ochronie-dobrego-imienia-polski,683382.html>

97 Antoni Macierewicz atakuje Stany Zjednoczone: chcę nas uczyć demokracji, *Wirtualna Polska*, 14.03.2016, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Antoni-Macierewicz-atakuje-Stany-Zjednoczone-chca-nas-uczyc-demokracji,wid,18212563,wiadomosc.html>

Similarly, according to Andrzej Nowak, a historian who is one of the main authors of current government's politics of memory, without the Polish democracy even the United States would not have been established.

Kaczyński: “The state based on the rule of law does not have to be a democratic state. In a democracy, the only sovereign is the nation”.

PiS has often described the repeated protests of opposition as well as the Constitutional Court verdicts as a rebellion (*rokosz*) or *liberum veto*. In consequence, PiS positions itself as an heir of the reformers who, at the end of the 18th century, wanted to modernize and save the country under the motto “internal freedom of the nation and external independence” within the framework of the Constitution of 1791. However, as has been already pointed out, that constitution was revolutionary because it increased dramatically the rights of townspeople bringing into the political system the rule of law protecting them. Meanwhile, Kaczyński represents the essence of collectivist heritage of noble democracy when he is declaring that:

(...) the state based on the rule of law does not have to be a democratic state. In a democracy, the only sovereign is the nation. The parliament and, in the Polish conditions, the President are its representatives. These two state organs are responsible for the creation of law. To these bodies belongs the control over our lives⁹⁸.

It was very symbolic when Kornel Morawiecki, an MP and father of the Deputy Prime Minister (though not a member of PiS himself), was greeted with a standing ovation from Kukiz15, Law and Justice MPs and Kaczyński himself because of his ardent speech during the key debate on the first law dismantling the Constitutional Court, which included the following sentences:

The good of the nation is above the law. If the law conflicts with that good, then we're not allowed to treat the law as something that we can't break⁹⁹.

Analogically, within the framework of Orbán's ideology we can observe certain inspiration with the Interwar corporatism. First of all, he uses the term *National-Christian* coined during the Horthy era. In his Tusnádfürdő speech he used the words “nation” and “state” as often as the word “work”. According to him, a new

98 Jarosław Kaczyński na kongresie PiS: Suwerenność jest wartością samą w sobie, jest sprawą godności narodu. Nie poddamy się koncepcjom Sorosa!, wpolityce.pl, 04.06.2016,

<http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/295423-jaroslaw-kaczynski-na-kongresie-pis-suwerennosc-jest-wartoscia-sama-w-sobie-jest-sprawa-godnosci-narodu-nie-poddamy-sie-koncepcjom-sorosa>

99 As cited in: Jan Cieński, *Poland's constitutional crisis goes international*, Politico, 24.12.2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/poland-constitution-crisis-kaczynski-duda/>

nation state which he is building in Hungary will be an upgraded work-based nation state:

Until now we have known three forms of state organization: the nation state, the liberal state and the welfare state. And the question is, what's next? The Hungarian answer to this question is that the era of the work-based state is approaching. We want to organize a work-based society that, as I have just mentioned, undertakes the odium of stating that it is not liberal in character¹⁰⁰.

Orbán: “We want to organize a work-based society that undertakes the odium of stating that it is not liberal in character”.

Orbán justifies his rejection of liberal democracy because it underperforms in the economic sphere. In his opinion,

Societies that are built on the state organisation principle of liberal democracy will probably be incapable of maintaining their global competitiveness in the upcoming decades and will instead probably be scaled down unless they are capable of changing themselves significantly¹⁰¹.

In order to compete successfully, the key duty of the work-based nation state is:

(...) to ensure that people's personal work and interests, which must be acknowledged, are closely linked to the life of the community and the nation, and that this relationship is preserved and reinforced.¹⁰²

In sum, the legacies of the republican noble democracy on the one hand, and of guided democracy on the other, favour the currently observed rise of right-wing populism in Poland and Hungary. The former political tradition is based on the assumption of the central place of the collective sovereign will of the nation which should be unlimited by the corset of the rule of law. The latter tradition brings the idea of national *avant-garde* which supposed to lead the nation which is not fully aware of its destiny. These traditions influenced substantially the nation-building process in both countries. This process took place in a very complex social, religious and ethnic context. In both countries in the modern period, the empowerment of the masses, and their enfranchisement, took place through the merger between populism and the ethnic nationalism realized by the political forces with very dubious democratic credentials or indeed openly authoritarian. The appeal of politicized massive ethnic nationalism stemmed from the fact that it promised to eradicate deep differences through the establishment of a monolithic nation. However, it resulted in profound social cleavages and an entrenchment of the politics of exclusion in the political life. The diverse historical trajectories in the development of

100 The Hungarian government, *Prime Minister's Speech*, Op.cit.

101 Ibidem

102 Ibidem

democracy in both countries have had a substantially different impact on how PiS and Fidesz put emphasis on their vision of relations between the nation and democracy. The legacy of the noble democracy was stronger in the Polish case, which is why an unlimited will of the sovereign republican nation occupies a key place in PiS ideology. Meanwhile, Orbán treats the necessity to harmonize the relations between the nation, the state and the economy as a central issue. It originates from the legacy of the longer endurance of feudal elements in Hungarian modern history which resulted in very serious upheavals and led to a starkly socialist flavour of the country's right wing populism. It is symptomatic that in his famous speech about the illiberal nation state he did not mention even once the words *sovereignty* or *sovereign*.

2.3. Ambivalent attitude towards the West

The complex attitude towards the West constitutes one of the key factors which influenced the development of Polish and Hungarian national identities. In both countries we can observe a very strong attachment to the West but at the same time a conviction about their own exceptionalism within the West. On occasions, the West is even perceived as a threat to national identity and to the political system.

When defending themselves against an inter-European 'Orientalism', Poles and Hungarians often fall into the same trap, only deeper.

Andrzej Wierzbicki, a Polish historian of ideas, underlines that throughout the 16th to the 18th centuries, Polish and Hungarian nobility perceived themselves as a part of Europe because of their self-image of defenders of freedom as the dearest European value. However, the ideology of noble democracy was based on two assumptions: Polish and Hungarian separateness from absolute royal Europe and the impossibility of borrowing other political models because of their incompatibility with the local social and cultural environment.¹⁰³ An ambivalence originates from the fact that Poland and Hungary are located on the Eastern border of Western Christianity. Most of their neighbours throughout the centuries were non-Western Christians (Orthodox Christians, Greek Catholics, Muslims, pagans, Jews, Armenians, Karaites and others). These contacts with the 'various Easts' had an enormous impact on Hungarian and Polish culture and identity. This fact is often

103 A. Wierzbicki, *Europa w polskiej myśli historycznej i politycznej XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw 2009, p.23.

trivialized in Poland and Hungary into an alleged traditional tolerance of Poles and Hungarians; an argument used particularly when both nations are accused of non-tolerance.

The “Eastern” (including Muslim) elements of Polish and to a lesser degree Hungarian culture are often poorly known, neglected or underestimated in both countries. Poles and Hungarians prefer to perceive themselves as benevolent carriers of higher civilization to some nations (a civilizing mission which implies the feeling of superiority). It is wrongly perceived that the affirmation of such heritage will give ammunition to the Westerners who sometimes question the Western credentials of Hungary and Poland (through a sort of an inter-European ‘Orientalism’). However, when defending themselves against this Orientalism, Poles and Hungarians often fall into the same trap, only deeper. In fact, in the Polish and Hungarian culture (regardless of the political position) the words “West” and “East” are often used as an absolute opposition (freedom and civilization vs. despotism and barbarity). This kind of a binary and simplistic worldview created favourable conditions for the birth and survival of *antemurale christianitatis* mythology, the bulwark of Christianity against Islam. In the 18th century it morphed into an opposition between the West and Europe *versus* the East and Asia (Russia), with only some historical references to the confrontation with Islam.

The myth of *antemurale* fits very well the Polish and Hungarian self-perception of noble heroism, martyrdom and self-sacrifice.

The myth of *antemurale* fits very well the Polish and Hungarian self-perception of noble heroism, martyrdom and self-sacrifice which can easily translate into the syndrome of self-victimization. *Antemurale* also goes well with the ethnic nationalism and its vision of big homogenous community (civilization as a prolongation of a monolithic nation). However, a different image – that of a bridge or a gate, or a meeting point of civilizations – was present from the Middle Ages in the Polish and Hungarian culture. It balanced, to a certain degree, the influence of the bulwark perspective. In fact, the motif of bridge sometimes co-existed or even intertwined with *antemurale* in Polish and Hungarian culture.

The idea of *antemurale* expressed an ambivalent approach of the Hungarian and Polish identities towards the West. On the one hand, Poles and Hungarians used this motif in their relations with the West in order to provoke the feeling of gratitude for their – as they believed – great contribution to Europe’s development (the protective shield) and to induce a bad consciousness in the West for its passivity, indifference or even complicity in the Polish and Hungarian suffering. The bulwark also served as an excellent excuse for their own backwardness towards the West and as an argument for why they should be provided with help. At the same time, it cultivated the feeling of grievance and distrust towards the West which, in the Polish and Hungarian historical memories, has almost never come to the rescue. Therefore, it reasserted a sense of loneliness or abandonment in

the self-image predominant in the Polish and Hungarian historical memories. The mission of the bulwark also gave the Polish and Hungarian nobility the justification to perceive themselves as nations chosen by God, and thus being 'exceptional'. Indeed, for a long time the Polish and Hungarian nobility believed that their countries belonged to Europe because they defended the freedom, that most European value. They also believed – particularly the Polish gentry – that their political systems were unique, and rejected any borrowing of political, cultural and social models from the "absolutist" Europe.

The secularization of the West caused that the more Poland and Hungary presented themselves as the *antemurale*, the more they became distanced from the West because of being perceived stereotypically as anachronistic... Easterners.

The bulwark will always maintain a certain religious flavour. Meanwhile, the secularization of the West caused that the more Poland and Hungary presented themselves as the *antemurale*, the more they became distanced from the West because of being perceived stereotypically as anachronistic... Easterners. At some point, in the Polish case, the bulwark started to be used to "defend the West against itself" because it allegedly had betrayed its own values. As Antoni Słonimski, a famous Polish interwar writer noticed, "we are a kind of bulwark, but a rotating bulwark towards the East or the West, depending on the situation."¹⁰⁴ This evolution was related to the rising divergences in the system of values between Poland and Western Europe. It meant that Polish exceptionalism was not based only on the political system but also on the specific form of religion.

Indeed, Roman Catholicism was perceived to play a role of the main insurance of the Western character of Poland. Paradoxically, however, it gradually started to serve as one of the key foundations of Polish exceptionalism *vis-à-vis* the West. The Polish-style Catholicism took shape in the 17th century, exactly when the myth of *antemurale* reached its zenith (the Battle of Vienna). In the words of Tadeusz Łepkowski, a Polish historian:

(...) many features of Polish Catholicism stem from the baroque era and from the counterreformation. Exactly in that period, (...) Polish Catholicism takes on the role of a militant and "border" religion, serving as a bulwark, defending Catholic Europe against Islam, Orthodox Christianity and Lutheranism¹⁰⁵.

104 As cited in: H. Markiewicz, A. Romanowski, *Skrzydlate słowa*, Warsaw 1990, p. 611.

105 T. Łepkowski, *Rozważania o losach polskich*, London 1987, p. 117.

Łepkowski described the Polish Catholicism from the counterreformation period as devout, fanatic and lacking an intellectual depth.

In the counterreformation era, the Church gained gradually unprecedented control over the private life of Poles, especially in comparison to 15th and 16th centuries. According to Andrzej Walicki, this intellectual environment strengthened the collectivist mentality based on conformity.¹⁰⁶ The legacy of counterreformation would later express itself in the modern period through problems with the acceptance of a transparent form of separation between the church and the state¹⁰⁷, and would result in the politicization of religion and the sacralisation of the nation. Walicki believes that these social phenomena hampered the development of secular liberal democracy in Poland and civic nationalism.¹⁰⁸ It is no accident that the counterreformation served as the main point of reference for the idea of the Catholic State of the Polish Nation promoted by Endecja in the Interwar period. This political concept assumed that Catholicism should be proclaimed the religion of the state and the entire legal system should follow religious dogma. However, it should be remembered that this kind of integralism always met with resistance of a substantial part of the Polish society. For instance, Piłsudski introduced the most liberal abortion law in Europe (excluding the Soviet Union) and Poland under his rule was one of the first European countries that decriminalized homosexuality.

The Hungarian nobility operated under the conviction that “*extra Hungariam non est vita, et si est vita, non est ita*”.

The distance between Poland and Western Europe in their systems of values reached the highest point in the first half of the 18th century. As Western Europe entered the Enlightenment era, in Poland counterreformation religiosity achieved a new unprecedented high. However, at the same time certain Poles acknowledged that the country was not – as most of the nobility believed – the best place on the Earth to live in, but a dysfunctional state under the Russian protectorate. For the first time since the Middle Ages, many Poles attributed to Western Europe the role of the source of inspiration for inevitable economic, political and social changes. Simultaneously, the same process of recognition of its own backwardness and of the necessity to reform in line with the Western model took place in Hungary. Until then, the Hungarian nobility operated under the conviction that *extra Hungariam non est vita, et si est vita, non est ita* (“There is no life outside of Hungary; and if there is life, it is not the same.”).

However, in the Polish case (due to a comparably greater influence of conservative Catholicism) the reformist ideas met with a much stronger resistance

¹⁰⁶ Walicki, Op.cit. p. 509.

¹⁰⁷ The Polish Constitution of 1791 in difference to the US and French equivalents from the same period recognized one of denominations (the Roman Catholicism) as a state religion and admitted certain privileges to the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Poland in difference to France and the US was much more multi-religious country. The Roman Catholics accounted for slightly above 50 percent of population.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, p. 320.

of the gentry.¹⁰⁹ Since then, in the Polish identity (and to a lesser degree in the Hungarian one) exists a strongly entrenched conviction that the secular, materialistic, liberal and cosmopolitan Western system of values constitutes a threat to the native, traditional, conservative culture. The West was also merged in the Polish and Hungarian post-feudal peasant and noble culture with the “alien” urban culture and, by default, with the Jews and Germans. In fact, this tension between the necessity to follow the Western path of development in the civilizational sphere (technology, institutions) but simultaneously the necessity to defend the culture (values) became the foundation of Polish and Hungarian proponents of ethnic and conservative nationalism.

The tension between the necessity to follow the Western path of development in the civilizational sphere but simultaneously to defend the culture became the foundation of Polish and Hungarian proponents of ethnic and conservative nationalism.

A good exemplification of that tension is the ambivalent attitude of Dmowski towards the West. He perceived Poland as an integral part of the West but at the same time believed that Poland shared a cultural affinity with the Roman Catholic nations. Moreover, in his opinion, nationalism should be a synthesis of the revolutionary Western concept of the sovereignty of the people, as opposed to non-national loyalties of the pre-modern times, with counter-revolutionary criticism of Western individual freedom. He called for the restoration of a traditionalist moral discipline and for a categorical rejection of the permissiveness of modern Western liberal societies. Nationalism appeared in this light as an important aspect of modernity (empowerment of entire society), and as a justified reaction against the allegedly negative consequences of modernization coming from the West.

In the 19th century, many Polish prominent Romantic writers went on the counteroffensive in their interaction with the West. The material strength of the West was interpreted by them as a harbinger of its spiritual decline. Already at the end of the 17th century, as a part of the Polish myth of *antemurale*, occurred an idea that Poland was a defender of the True Faith not only against infidels but in a global and eternal dimension as such. This conviction facilitated during the Romantic era the emergence of the image of Poland as a ‘Christ of nations’ who would play the role of the Saviour that brings freedom and spiritual revival. One of the main proponents of this Messianism was Adam Mickiewicz, a poet who left an enormous imprint on the Polish culture. Mickiewicz perceived Poles as innocent and spiritual, morally superior to the expansive and materialistic Westerners. However, a striking contradiction existed between the mystic obligation of Poles to bring salvation

109 In fact, Hungary, due to having a large Calvinist and Lutheran minority, maintained much stronger ties with Protestant countries (which, by the way, were also the most developed in Europe) than Poland did.

to Europe and their feeling of contempt and superiority towards the rest of the continent. Mickiewicz declared that “the entire political and philosophical trajectory of Europe [was] totally opposite to political and religious trajectory of Poland”¹¹⁰. At the same time, Cyprian Norwid, another great Polish Romantic poet, described Europe as “an old madwoman and drunkard. Stupid, infantile and rotting”¹¹¹.

The most popular form of distancing from the West in Polish culture is the argument saying that Poland is the “genuine West”.

The most popular form of distancing from the West in Polish culture is the argument saying that Poland is the genuine West. An alternative vision of Poland as a separate civilization uniting the Western and Eastern elements was much less popular. A third perception of Poland: as an Eastern country which did not belong to the West, played only a marginal role. Interestingly, the latter perception gained much stronger ground in Hungary in the form of Turanism: a Eurasian vision of cultural and political unity of Hungarians with Turan nations (including many Muslims). Turanism was highly popular between 1890 and 1945.¹¹² It regained popularity after 1989 among the right-wing parties, including Fidesz and especially Jobbik. However, during the 2015 refugee crisis Turanism was pushed into the corner by the *antemurale* motif. Turanism was based on the old tradition of remembrance of the Hungarian roots from the Great Steppe. This tradition stimulated the persisting vision of Hungarians as a unique island (linguistic and cultural exceptionalism) surrounded by very different and much more populous nations. The survival of the community was allegedly under a permanent threat – that fear being prominent in Hungarian culture through centuries until now. Sandor Petofi, the greatest Hungarian poet, stated that “among all nations on the Earth we are the most lonely” and declared “My home and my world are here, in the Steppe flat as the sea”.¹¹³

The communists propagated vehemently a very critical image of the capitalist and imperialist West. It struck a chord with the most fateful supporters of the regime. However, in both countries the majority gradually realized that the undemocratic communist regime was underperforming economically in comparison with the West.¹¹⁴ The communists persecuted religion in both countries but in Poland to a considerably lesser degree. Gradually, the Polish Church reconfirmed its status as the main institution of public trust. In fact, the scale of secularization of

110 As cited in: A. Wierzbicki, *Op.cit.* p. 106.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

112 N. Önen, *Turanî Hareketler: Macaristan ve Türkiye (1910 1944)*, Ankara 2003.

113 As cited in: László Kürti, *Remote Borderland, The: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination*, Albany 2001, p.84.

Before the revolution in 1848 Lajos Kossuth stated that “if the country cannot be united through Magyarisation, sooner or later the German and Slav elements will assimilate our nation and even our name will be forgotten”. As cited in: B. Cartledge, *The Will to Survive. A History of Hungary*, London 2006, p. 188.

114 For instance, in 1950 Poland had a substantially higher GDP per capita than Greece, Spain and Portugal. In 1990 these countries were more than twice as rich as Poland.

Polish society would probably have been higher if Poland had not experienced the communism rule. By comparison, in the communist period the secularization of Hungarian society went much further than it did in Poland.

As Brian Porter-Szücs underlines, “whether measured by the number of churches, parishes, or priests, the Church enjoyed more institutional strength and cultural influence during the late communist era than ever before, or since”¹¹⁵. The Church in Poland had at least an ambiguous approach towards the West. Generally it perceived the communist regime as a threat because of its atheist and totalitarian/authoritarian and non-Western character, but many bishops raised also their criticism towards the liberal West. In 1972 Bishop Kominek worried that “the so-called liberal life” had brought with it in the West “some sort of personal freedom, a freedom which very often manifests itself as lawlessness, which is not true freedom, because true freedom must be disciplined”¹¹⁶. In 1980, Bishop Kamiński argued: “We are in a slightly better situation than those in the West. In the West, the problem of freedom is taken to absurd lengths. In the West, people have too much freedom”¹¹⁷.

Some politicians from the national right and the far right as well as religious leaders in Poland and Hungary contested the accession to the EU on the grounds that it posed a danger to national values.

After 1989, democratization was intertwined with the EU accession process which enjoyed the support of a great majority of Poles and Hungarians. The transatlantic and European integrations were presented as the rightful return to the Western civilization, a natural place for both countries. However, certain politicians from the national right and the far right as well as religious leaders contested the accession to the EU, especially on the grounds that it posed a danger to national values. They were taken aback by Pope John Paul II who unequivocally supported Poland's accession to the EU. He also promoted the Polish national identity based on the Roman Catholicism but including all religions of premodern Poland (implicitly Islam and Judaism). On the other hand, he was sometimes very critical of the liberal West calling it even *the culture of death*. The Pope also shared the vision of Poland as *antemurale*.¹¹⁸

According to the opinion polls, Poles and Hungarians perceived the EU as the community of values (democracy, human rights, rule of law) and, to a much smaller

115 B. Porter-Szücs, Op.cit. p.293.

For instance, the number of churches increased almost twofold between 1945 and 1985 and the priests almost three times.

116 B. Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland. Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, Oxford 2011, p.193.

117 Ibidem

118 On the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Vienna John Paul II said that “the event saved the culture and Christianity of Europe (...) sealing its fate”.

degree than the citizens of most of Western European countries, as a community focused mostly on the economic benefits. In both countries, social conservatism weakened substantially after 1989. Still, in Poland the rise of xenophobia was preceded by a surge of declarative support for the conservative worldview between early 2000s and 2015. This kind of process did not take place in Hungary. It can even be said that, contrary to the conservative discourse of the Fidesz government, the Hungarian society has been becoming more liberal in the sphere of social values (e.g. abortion, homosexuality)¹¹⁹. However, it is interesting to observe that the rising declarative conservatism is taking place in line with a gradual decrease in the level of church attendance and obedience of the principles of Catholic morality.

The significantly higher level of social conservatism in Poland when compared to Hungarians and the vast majority of Europeans makes the Polish society much more receptive to the argument about Polish exceptionalism, often raised by PiS. In fact, Kaczyński promotes the idea of such a strong bond between Catholicism and the Polish national identity that without exaggeration it can be said that he attempts to reinvigorate the counterreformation tradition. The national right politicians of post-1989 Poland have promoted the idea of the nation defined in religious terms. However, none of them achieved such a strong social following as Kaczyński.

Kaczyński's position is that the Church is the bulwark of the Polish national identity, morality, law and the state, making Poland a unique case in Europe.

Kaczyński's position is that the Church is the bulwark of the Polish national identity, morality, law and the state, making Poland a unique case in Europe. According to PiS programme:

The Church has played a specific role in our history, one that differs from that of other nations. It not only created and civilised the nation, it also protected it. (...) The Church remains today the host and advocate of the generally accepted moral teaching in Poland (...) That is why it is fully true to say that in Poland the only moral alternative to the Church is nihilism¹²⁰.

119 In Hungary there is a liberal abortion law and the number of abortions is proportionally one of the highest in Europe. Same-sex partnerships are legal and there are many gay clubs in Budapest which plays the role of the European capital of porno industry.

120 Jarosław Kaczyński w Radiu Maryja: Dobra zmiana, o której mówimy to również pozbawienie pewnych środowisk przywilejów. „Mamy bunt korporacji - to swojego rodzaju rokosz”, wpolityce.pl, 30.12.2015, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/276606-jaroslaw-kaczynski-w-radiu-maryja-dobra-zmiana-o-ktorej-mowimy-torowniez-pozbawienie-pewnych-srodowisk-przywilejow-mamy-bunt-korporacji-to-swojego-rodzaju-rokosz?strona=2>.

Kaczyński declares regularly that there is no Poland without the Church. He has also pledged the readiness to defend the Church against its enemies:

*The foundation of the Polish identity is the Church and its teachings. Any hand raised against the Church is a hand raised against Poland*¹²¹.

On top of that, the absolute overlapping of the Polish national identity with the Roman Catholic Church lends this identity, according to Jarosław Kaczyński, “a special significance – a universal significance”, due to the universal character of the Church¹²². Certainly, such a worldview creates very favourable conditions for the renaissance of the myth of *antemurale*, Messianism and Polish exceptionalism. Jarosław Kaczyński believes that:

*Poland is defending what is best in the European tradition: the true freedom of speech. It is us who are the bulwark of real Europe*¹²³.

Kaczynski: “It is us who are the bulwark of real Europe”.

He imagines Poland as an island of liberty in undemocratic Europe dominated by the LGBTI, multi-kulti and political correctness. According to him,

*Poland is a country of freedom and so it must remain, even if we are an island of freedom in Europe and worldwide. It is our historic task. Freedom is the essence of our identity, of Polishness*¹²⁴.

During the refugee crisis, the vision of Poland and Hungary as *antemurale* returned to its original roots, after a long break lasting more than three hundred years; namely, to the defence of Europe against an Islamic ‘invasion’. Mariusz Błaszczak, the Polish Minister of Internal Affairs, declared that the West was under the attack of Islam. According to him, this was not a war against terrorism but one between civilizations. In this perspective, European Muslims are a fifth-column which cannot be integrated into the EU because culturally they are totally alien. Islam, in the pro-government media in both countries, is presented as a monolith, equivalent of Nazism and Communism, responsible for the Holocaust of Christians in the Middle East, trying to conquer Europe through the hordes of illegal migrants. European

¹²¹ 04.2013,

<http://www.rp.pl/artykul/998743-Kaczynski--Pamietajmy-o-parze-prezydenckiej--poslach-i-senatorach-PiS.html>

¹²² Pełne przemówienie Jarosława Kaczyńskiego na kongresie PiS: „Polacy mają dość systemu Tuska! Trzeba zadać pytanie: czy po sześciu latach rządów PO żyje się wam lepiej?”, wpolityce.pl, 15.02.2014,

<http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/185711-tylko-u-nas-pelne-przemowienie-jaroslaw-a-kaczynskiego-na-kongresie-pis-pola-cy-maja-dosc-systemu-tuska-trzeba-zadac-pytanie-czy-po-szesciu-latach-rzadow-po-zyje-sie-wam-lepiej>

¹²³ Jarosław Kaczyński w Radiu Maryja: Dobra zmiana, o której mówimy to również pozbawienie pewnych środowisk przywilejów. „Mamy bunt korporacji - to swojego rodzaju rokosz”, Op.cit.

¹²⁴ Kaczyński podczas marszu: Polska krajem korupcji i nepotyzmu, Rzeczpospolita, 13.12.2013,

<http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1072484-Kaczynski-podczas-marszu--Polska-krajem-korupcji-i-nepotyzmu.html>

During the refugee crisis, the vision of Poland and Hungary as *antemurale* returned to its original roots; namely, to the defence of Europe against an Islamic 'invasion'.

Muslims, formally co-citizens of Poles and Hungarians within the EU, are mostly presented as barbarian and wild rapists, terrorists and criminals. In fact, the discourse about them closely resembles the narrative about Jews in nationalist press before the World War II. Moreover, Orbán's and Kaczyński's declared belief that the multi-kulti West is imposing Muslim refugees on their countries in order to destroy their national identity, is an interesting phenomenon. During a party meeting Kaczyński said:

Poland today is the subject of pressure regarding the shape of our life, the situation of an average Pole; the shape of our society. We are being offered to radically change, to create a multicultural society, to create a new identity. (...) It is a matter of sovereignty. If we maintain it, we will defend ourselves. (...) The concepts of Mr. Soros, the concepts of societies that have no identity, these concepts are convenient for those who have billions because such a society is extremely easy to manipulate. If there is no strong identity, the society can do everything¹²⁵.

The anti-Islamic *antemurale* needs a retro-scenography. Therefore, it is not accidental that President Duda decided that within the Strategy of the Polish Politics of Memory (dedicated to "aggressive" promotion of Polish history abroad), the Battle of Vienna would occupy a central place. According to Duda,

Poland was saving Europe. Saving it not just from a big crisis, but we can say that from a disaster, like that time when the Polish army under the command of John III Sobieski stopped the Turkish onslaught of Vienna¹²⁶.

Orbán also used such historical analogies referring to the defence of Europe against Islam to justify its tough position towards refugees. At one point he called himself the János Hunyadi of our times and on another occasion a knight of a border fortress (*végvár*) from the Middle Ages (Hunyadi was an outstanding military leader of Romanian-Hungarian background who fought the Turks in the 15th century). Meanwhile, One of PiS MPs compared Orbán to Jan III Sobieski.

Viktor Orbán also created a narrative on the issues such as the nation, the West and Christianity that merged *antemurale*, exceptionalism and Messianism. A sentence was placed in the Invocation to the Hungarian Constitution underlining a special bond between the Hungarian identity and Christianity ("We recognize the

125 Jarosław Kaczyński na kongresie PiS: Suwerenność jest wartością samą w sobie, jest sprawą godności narodu. Nie poddamy się koncepcjom Sorosa!, wpolityce.pl, Op.cit.

126 Prezydent RP, Wystąpienie prezydenta na debacie NRR dot. polityki historycznej, 16.02.2016, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/art,29,wystapienie-prezydenta-na-debacie-nrr-dot-polityki-historycznej.html>

role of Christianity in preserving nationhood”). Another line reminds of Hungary’s role as a bulwark of Europe (“We are proud that our people have over the centuries defended Europe in a series of struggles”).¹²⁷ Orbán also presents himself as a defender of the nation, freedom and Christianity within the EU. During his speech on the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 he said:

*Today the task of Europe’s freedom-loving peoples is to save Brussels from sovietisation (...) We cannot accept that Europe wants to sever the roots which once made us great. (...) There can be no free, strong, authoritative and respected Europe without the life-force of its nations and the two-thousand-year-old wisdom of Christianity*¹²⁸.

The overlapping of identity narratives between PiS and Fidesz paved the way for an idea of conservative counterrevolution in Europe which should be undertaken together by both countries.

The overlapping of identity narratives between PiS and Fidesz paved the way for an idea of conservative counterrevolution in Europe which should be undertaken together by both countries. Already in March 2016 President Andrzej Duda, during his visit to Hungary, stated that:

In today’s Europe, in which there is, without a doubt, a crisis of values on which European civilisation has been built (and I am thinking about a civilisation with Latin roots supported by Christianity), (...) all these ideals are being lost in today’s Europe. They are being forgotten and trampled by other ideologies that debase the essence of humanity and the human being.

He added that Poles and Hungarians “have retained those values” and claimed that in the case of both nations

*(...) it is today our great responsibility and mission to carry those values to Western Europe and to defend those values against all the attacks we face*¹²⁹.

The final stage of this process was, so far, the Forum in Krynica in September 2016 where Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński pledged to wage together a “cultural

¹²⁷ The Hungarian government, *The Fundamental Law*, Op.cit.

¹²⁸ Prime Minister of Hungary, *We must save Brussels from sovietisation*, 24.10.2016, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/we-must-save-brussels-from-sovietisation/>

¹²⁹ Duda w Budapeszcie: ideały w Europie giną, Polacy i Węgrzy je zachowali, TvN24, 19.03.2016, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/prezydent-andrzej-duda-w-budapeszcie-w-europie-panuje-kryzys-wartosci,628650.html>

counter-revolution” in the EU. Orbán clarified this idea during his visit in Cracow in December 2016 when he explained:

I believe that in today's Europe, weighed down by immigration, the principle of “back to the roots” is still alive and important. Back to the roots: to the Christian and National roots¹³⁰.

All in all, the strict merger between the religion and the nation promoted by PiS and Fidesz makes the internal and external policy of both parties – but particularly that of PiS – much more based on ideology than it is in the case of mainstream European parties. The national populisms of Poland and Hungary are even more reinforced by the deeply rooted traditions of *antemurale*, Mesianism and exceptionalism. Such a strong bond between religiously motivated national discourse and a negative attitude towards the current “perverted” liberal West is a rather rare phenomenon in Europe. It gives a special quasi-millenarian and missionary overtone to the national populism *à la* PiS and Fidesz. The endurance of the *antemurale* motif makes a self-critical reflection about the national myths even more difficult in both societies.

130 Viktor Orbán w Krakowie: Europa Środkowa przeżywa swój renesans, Polskie Radio, 09.12.2016, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1702160,Viktor-Orban-w-Krakowie-Europa-Srodkowa-przezywa-swoj-renesans>

3. LESSONS FOR EUROPE

I. Legacy of the past

The first lesson for Europe from the Polish and Hungarian case is that in order to understand the rise of right-wing national populists, we should – much more than we did before – take into consideration the cultural factors and the legacy of the past. It will allow us to better grasp why certain countries can be more attracted by the allure of the national populism than others. Of course, the legacy of history and culture does not determine completely the fate of societies but its impact should not be neglected.

II. Politics of identity and memory

The second lesson concerns the importance of the politics of identity and memory conducted by the state and political forces. The politics of identity is so significant because the search for the feeling of belonging has become one of the main issues for so many ordinary Europeans but also for the so-called establishment and populist elites, respectively. It is not an accident that nation-rebuilding has become the *spécialité de la maison* of PiS and Fidesz. Memory politics is a very timely endeavour. The rebuilding of the present nation in order to maintain power in the future requires a cohesive narrative about the past which will legitimise the current politics. Thus, one of the most important tasks for PiS and Fidesz is to convince the society that nationalism and the narrative about the past that they pursue have no genuine alternatives in their history. The politics of memory promoted by PiS and Fidesz makes a critical reflection about the current shortcomings of their own countries which are rooted in history much more difficult. The success of PiS and Fidesz identity narratives stems from the fact that the attempts at politics of identity pursued by their predecessors, from the moderate centre-right to the left, were usually timid, reactive or inconsistent. Despite that fact, Poland and Hungary possess rich competitive historical traditions of identity which can serve as a solid base for a civic-oriented nationalism. Therefore, the popularity of national populists in both countries will mostly depend on the ability of the opposition parties to create an attractive narrative about the history and identity. It has to combine the political maturity to face the difficult past with the vision of the inclusive civic nationalism.

**Nation-rebuilding has become
le spécialité de la maison of PiS and Fidesz.
Memory politics is a very timely endeavour.**

III. Beware of the rule by nationalist populist

The third lesson from the Polish and Hungarian cases is that they can be treated as a warning call for other European countries about the negative implications that the rule of national populists may have on their democracies because of the politics of nation-rebuilding which envisages the ideal nation as a monolith. Since 2010, the democratic governance has been deteriorating systemically and substantially in Hungary. At the beginning of 2017 Hungary finds itself balancing on the edge between being a 'free country' and a 'partly free country', to evoke the Freedom House terminology. Moreover, Hungarian media were relegated to the latter category immediately after Orbán's victory and continued to slide towards the category of 'not free'. The Freedom House still recognizes Hungary as a free country but with the worst score in the EU and negative projections for the next year. If Hungary slips into the category of partly free countries, it will be the first such case in the history of the EU. In the case of Poland, just one year after PiS electoral victory, Freedom House issued a statement saying that "PiS has openly targeted Poland's basic democratic institutions – the media, the Constitutional Tribunal, nongovernmental organizations, and now parliamentary procedures. (...) These actions amount to a coordinated assault on the rule of law"¹³¹. In the report "Freedom in the World 2017" issued at the end of January 2017 Poland's civil liberties rating declined from 1 to 2. Moreover, it received a downward trend arrow. In fact, Poland – to a certain degree — and especially Hungary do not currently fulfil the Copenhagen criteria which serve as a basic requirement for the membership in the EU.

If Hungary slips into the category of partly free countries, it will be the first such case in the history of the EU.

These negative developments concerning the democratic system stem from PiS's and Fidesz's visions of the nation which, from their point of view, should be "primordialised" or (in other words) made more homogenous. These efforts are in the long term undemocratic. As Andrzej Walicki, a historian, notices,

The process of 'primordialisation of ethno-national identification is in fact a description of regress, a description of what must not be allowed under the threat of pushing the process of thinking into the trap of xenophobic 'identity politics'. This politics is intrinsically anti-democratic, because 'ours' are expected to vote for 'ours' in the name of an ideal 'only us', without making any political choice. And if such an identification includes a Catholic identity, it seems to possess an absolute, transcendent and well-established right. The nation becomes in fact the monopolist of "morality", which excludes not only the external "Others", but also all people individually,

¹³¹ Freedom House, *Poland: Law and Justice Party Should Stop Constitutional Crisis*, 21.12.2016
<https://freedomhouse.org/article/poland-law-and-justice-party-should-stop-constitutional-crisis>

independently-minded. "Primordialism" is thus by definition the ideology of closed identity, unable to tolerate. It is resistant against "communism" to the same extent as it is opposed to liberal democracy¹³².

The homogenous ethnic composition of both countries creates favourable conditions for at least a soft version of an ethnic national identity. In fact, the great majority of Poles and Hungarians perceive the current ethnic homogeneity of their countries as a great advantage and an insurance against instability. However, the assumption about the natural character of ethnic homogeneity does not take into consideration an unprecedented internal social and mental diversity of both nations, a result of their post-communist transformation. In fact, one of the reasons behind the rise of the appeal of homogenous ethnic community seems to be the fact that it has become a recipe for the tensions of identity created by the pains of modernization¹³³. However, in such a complex social environment, the assertive promotion of the vision of a nation as a monolith turns out to be dangerous for the cohesion of society. Instead of making it more cohesive, this brings a very sharp polarization which is undermining the community. In the name of the fight against the naïve and elusive *multi-kulti* and political correctness, national populists propose a total rejection of the complexity which is inherent to the social reality. The push for a national monolith, intertwined closely with hyperactive political activism (mobilization of the electorate, nation-rebuilding), favours the domination of identity discourse in internal politics (everything is national). The overlapping of the nation and political community transforms the internal political conflict into a quasi-civil war within the nation. In effect, political opponents start to be defined not as rivals (and thus, in theory, potential coalition partners) but as enemies whose belonging to the same nation is questioned or even rejected. They are described as traitors and finally excluded from the community as non-Poles or non-Hungarians.

One of the reasons behind the rise of the appeal of homogenous ethnic community may be that it has become a recipe for the tensions of identity created by the pains of modernization.

Unfortunately, the opposition in both countries has adopted the same language towards the ruling elite (e.g. calling them "traitors" or representatives of a "totalitarian regime"). This kind of mutual exclusion is by nature much more dangerous than a normal, "boring" political dispute. The exclusion can become even more

132 A. Walicki, *Odwieczny naród- czyżby?*, Gazeta Wyborcza, 21.02.2013,

http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,13438757,Odwieczny_narod__Czyzby_.html

133 According to the opinion poll conducted by CBOS in 2015, only 15% of respondents declared that there was more that united Poles than what divided them, while 40% had the opposite opinion and almost the same proportion said that there was just as much that united and as divided the nation.

serious if religion started to be used as a key element of identity. As Andrzej Leder rightly points out,

In Poland, the concept of political community¹³⁴ is not universally accepted. In fact, much of the Poles believe that political community is not something relevant. They think the community should be tribal, ethnic, national or religious. They do not accept the community, which is composed of different groups, but they want one dominant group, which has the right to judge and exclude others. Such a community usually is, moreover, managed by a fairly narrow oligarchy.¹³⁵

This assessment is also relevant in the case of Hungary.

IV. Friends or enemies of political participation?

The fourth lesson for Europe is related to the linkage between political participation in the democratic life and the rise of national populists. Certainly, Polish and Hungarian cases prove that a low political activism of the society and/or a profound political polarization create favourable conditions for the rise of national populists. Their entrenchment on the political scene gradually makes it unbalanced by weakening the Centre and the Left and brings a permanent shift towards the Right which is very difficult to reverse. Soft national populists, such as PiS and Fidesz, while in power, present themselves as the only force that can keep the far right politically in check. However, they also help the rise of the far right in the polls and legitimize their presence in the public sphere on an unprecedented scale through the domination of national language in the public discourse. In fact, gradually the “soft” national populists can relatively easily swap places with the far right.

National populists – who, while being in opposition, are usually very outspoken in their fight for the massive character of the politics – can become interested in the passivity of a substantial part of the society while being in power.

134 According to Andrzej Leder “the political community means that the sides who could hate each other and do not feel anything besides a community of fate, recognize that they would not kill each other or throw into prison. [...] Direct violence is replaced by political conflict within the democratic representation.”; *Jeśli klasa średnia jest za bardzo skupiona na sobie, to dostanie za to po uszach*, wywiad z Andrzejem Lederem, rozmawia Marek Górlikowski, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23.12.2016,

<http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,21165104,andrzej-leder-jesli-klasa-srednia-jest-za-bardzo-skupiona-na.html>

135 bidem

To be successful, the nation-rebuilding process requires at least several terms in office so the opposition should not be too strong. This requirement leads to efforts aimed at preventing the opposition from regaining power too fast by creating unfavourable conditions for a free and fair political debate (pressure on the media, the use of administrative resources, the politicization of judiciary). Nevertheless, if the political opposition is feeble, society does not see any further sense in participating in elections¹³⁶. As a result, national populists – who, while being in opposition, are usually very outspoken in their fight for the massive character of the politics – can become interested in the passivity of a substantial part of the society while being in power. Their electorate is often more disciplined than the supporters of the opposition, which is why a very high turnout is not in their interest. In fact, ethnic nationalism does not treat the massive democratic engagement of citizens as such a key issue as civic nationalism does. The reconstruction of a nation is a very ambitious project, so it requires a determined elite. Paradoxically, anti-elitist egalitarian national populists who in the name of democracy promote a larger political engagement of ordinary people, strive for a more hierarchic society.

V. Who accepts the rule of law?

The fifth lesson is that national populists, by promoting ethnic nationalism, undermine democracy with its rule of law. If the will of a sovereign nation expressed in elections is seen as the main foundation of democracy, the ruling party may have a serious problem to reconcile the political system with individual freedoms. The individual is perceived as existing only through the membership in the politicized nation. This means that their role in public life is mostly limited to political activism, especially voting. It is no accident, then, that Kaczyński and Orbán avoid the term “human rights”. The will of a sovereign nation does not like to be limited. Therefore, Kaczyński and Orbán share a very negative attitude towards the rule of law presenting it as undemocratic by nature (judges are not elected by the nation). The right-wing national populists define democracy as the rule of demos, namely of the *people-nation*. However, it is worth reminding that the word *demos* originates from the Indo-European root “da” which means “to divide”. Division constitutes an immanent element of any genuine democratic system but the “division” could also mean “the division of powers”, which can happen only within the limits of the rule of law. As Kaczyński stated, a state based on the rule of law does not have to be democratic, but he “forgot” to say that a democratic state cannot survive without the rule of law.

VI. Exclusive ethnicity serves internal purposes

The sixth lesson underlines that an ethnic national identity is by definition more exclusive than other forms of identity, so wide-ranging exclusion is inevitable at some stage. Moreover, its assertive form builds an alleged unity through division. It needs not only an external Other but also an internal one to define itself. The

¹³⁶ The turnout in elections in Hungary, while being higher than in Poland, decreased from above 70% in 2002 to just around 60% in 2014.

antipathy towards the external Other is used to increase support internally. But the xenophobia directed towards the external Other is feeding the hatred towards internal enemies. Both enemies can be defined as intertwined threats. This worldview, blending external and internal threats, creates favourable conditions for the emergence and then a persistent popularity of conspiracy theories. In consequence, the rise of ethnic nationalism can constitute a serious threat not only in a multi-ethnic country but also in an ethnically homogenous one.

Xenophobia directed towards the external Other can feed the hatred towards internal enemies.

However, on the other side of the coin, efforts to build more homogenous nation by one political party mostly end up at a high level of politicization of national identity in its partisan character. Gradually, the latter becomes identified with only one political force (the so-called 'patriotic camp'). This party completely monopolizes other political traditions, thus putting the political scene in disorder. The best example is Kaczyński presenting himself as the only legitimized heir of Piłsudski. Kaczyński is a conservative right-wing politician who treats the ethnically defined nation as a key point of reference. He is courting far-right organizations and absolutely identifies Polishness with Roman Catholicism. Meanwhile, Piłsudski, originated from a socialist tradition. He placed unmistakably the civic and secular nation under the interest of the state and persecuted national extremists without mercy. The identification of the nation with only one party weakens the functioning of democracy by alienating a huge part of society which supports the opposition.

VII. Scapegoating

The seventh lesson, one particularly relevant for countries with large minority communities, is that ethnic nationalism assumes a priori that an individual who belongs to a different ethnic, religious or racial group, cannot be integrated as a fully-fledged member of the national community because of an allegedly fixed nature of his/her identity group. Currently, PiS and Fidesz use this prejudice towards European Muslims (scapegoating) and count in this respect with a huge social support. In fact, many Hungarian and Polish citizens who do not support PiS and Fidesz subscribe to this opinion. They perceive themselves as tolerant because it is "only" Muslims, Africans and Roma that they dislike. It means that they do not realize that a negative generalization used towards one group is the basic precondition for the introduction of the exclusion mechanism into the society (through the snowballing effect). The rise of xenophobia towards one ethnic or religious group is rebounding on other communities. If the discourse predominating in the public sphere presents the very existence of the nation as being at stake due to "the Islamic invasion", certain groups (for instance Jews, Romanians, Ukrainians, Roma, Africans) could also be perceived as a possible threat in such a moment of

moral panic. For national populists in power the channelled xenophobia targeting concrete groups is the best instrument to mobilize their hard-core electorate but also to push an opposition into the corner and impose their preferred narrative.

Many Poles and Hungarians perceive themselves as tolerant because it is “only” Muslims, Africans and Roma people that they dislike.

This strategy works because in the case of the targeted groups the level of antipathy towards them is usually high also among some supporters of the opposition. The latter is often passive or indirectly endorses certain elements of Islamophobic and anti-migrant discourse (i.e. the resolution of Polish parliament on refugees and the Middle East).

VIII. European project under threat?

The eighth lesson considers the existential threat to the basic foundations of EU posed by national populists. The Polish and Hungarian cases show that their rise results in the distancing of a huge part of society from the EU. It also confirms that national populists can closely cooperate against the EU mainstream, despite serious divergence of interests on other issues (Russia). National populists try to present themselves as the defenders of nations against supranational and federal European utopias. However, the main ongoing confrontation is between ethnic nationalism promoted by national populists and civic nationalism constrained by the rule of law, protecting the rights of minorities and individuals and which constitutes the key pillar of the EU. It means that the acceptance of the main proposals of national populists in regard to the definition of the nation will signify the beginning of the end of the EU. Erik Jones is particularly right when he warns us that:

The issue is not what they (populists) have to say about the euro or about immigration, it is who they isolate as the target for their political messages. By separating the electorate into ‘us’ and ‘them’, populists pose an existential threat to the European project – because the more they succeed in rallying people to their message, the less space remains for Europeans to identify with ‘Europe’.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Erik Jones, Op.cit.