

# Hungary's Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Post-American World<sup>1</sup>

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)

Vol. 16, No. 15

DOI: 10.2478/pce-2020-0006

**Abstract:** *This paper seeks to provide an overview of Hungary's foreign policy priorities since the change of the political system of 1989–90. It intends to critically analyse the rise of pragmatism, in particular, in the new policy chapters of the 'Turn towards the East' and the 'Opening to the South', while it also looks at the international system itself with its recent developments and how Hungary has behaved in relation to them. Focal attention will be given to certain regions of the world, together with some global issues such as China, Turkey, Russia and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the ongoing refugee crisis and climate change.*

**Keywords:** *Hungary, foreign policy, post-American world, China, Russia, Turkey, strongmen, Africa.*

## Introduction – Changing foreign policy priorities in the 'post-American world' scenario

The international system has been changing quite fundamentally as more actors carve out space for manoeuvring, articulate interests and views that were not (well-)heard before and in general, build up capacities that are necessary for them to prove that they can also attract the attention of others, as well as grow up as centres of gravity – at least in their own regions. While witnessing the

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1 EFOP-3.6.3-VEKOP-16-2017-00007- Young researchers from talented students – Fostering scientific careers in higher education.

2 Bolyai Research Fellow and his research is supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

‘rise of the rest’ (Huntington 1996; Zakaria 2012), we can follow a new type of play with an increasing number of middle powers wanting to demonstrate their geopolitically articulate aspirations. Geopolitics has not ‘returned’, as opposed to what Mead (2014) proposed, rather, it has always been with us and we have probably entered a new era of geopolitical considerations. With an expanding and rising China, a politically more active Russia and a more inward-looking U.S. along with a hesitant EU with all its internal tensions, a confident-looking North Korea with all its tricks played against the international community, together with a re-confirmation of the importance of national interest across many different regions of the world – in a number of cases, by the accentuated tones of populist governments – we see that there is now time to re-think global order. In fact, as Haass suggests, we need to deal with how to manage the deterioration of the old order along the lines of ongoing challenges, including the “problems of globalisation, especially climate change, trade and cyber-operations” (2019: 29). Although “the world is not yet on the edge of a systemic crisis,” cooperation has been more difficult to materialise as “protectionism, nationalism and populism gain” global attention (Ibid: 30) amidst visible power shifts. Zakaria describes a messy reality in which the U.S. “remains by far the most powerful country in a world with several other important great powers and with greater assertiveness and activity from all actors” (2012: 53). As Brzezinski already in 1997 clearly underlined, “global politics are bound to become increasingly uncongenial to the concentration of hegemonic power in the hands of a single state” as power – both in terms of knowledge and the economy – is “becoming more diffused, more shared, [...] more dispersed” (1997: 209–210). At the same time, identity politics seem to sweep across the international landscape, especially in Europe, as the ‘migration crisis’ is looming and fears are fuelled by several governments. “The region is not threatened by immigrants so much as by the political reaction that immigrants and cultural diversity create,” causing a confusion of national identity on the continent (Fukuyama 2018: 153). Although Slaughter is right about the “rising importance of non-state actors in corporate, civic and criminal sectors” (2004: 32), which certainly requires more thoroughly-planned global governance, with the rise of nationalism in the form of the “assertion of identity” (Zakaria 2012: 41), it is getting more unlikely to foster collaboration. Increasingly, “nation-states are becoming less willing to come together to solve common problems. As the number of players – governmental and non-governmental – increases and each other’s power and confidence grows, the prospects for agreements and common action diminish. This is the central challenge of the rise of the rest – to stop the forces of global growth from turning into the forces of global disorder and disintegration” (Ibid: 34).

Along different geopolitical cleavages – Wallerstein named at least three quite different major ones (2003: 273), i.e. (1) the struggle among the U.S., the EU and Japan; (2) the struggle between the core countries of the North and

countries of the South in other zones; (3) the struggle between the spirit of Davos and the spirit of Porto Alegre – national foreign policies and pragmatism, in fact, pragmatic foreign policies, have been formulated and put in place by many governments. Such policies consider the national interest as a guiding principle, taking into account primarily economic and security-related aspects. Any pragmatic foreign policy is capable of serving economic interests within the confines of geopolitical realities. Actors of an interdependent arena with more centres of gravity make attempts to influence others while strengthening or redefining their positions. All these can be seen in the form of increased international trade, or attracting investment, piercing into new markets and in general, improving global performance in the global economy and international politics.

Zakaria's 'post-American world' is not an "anti-American world" but rather an arena "defined and directed from many places and by many people" (2012: 4). More centres of attention obviously still do not mean that power is equally shared among states – such distribution is "relatively rare" (Nye 2011: 153). Several regions of the world present a number of complex scenarios involving continuous demography booms, rapid urbanisation and human security challenges. The "rise of the rest" is first of all to be understood in a political way as far as more aspirations and wants come along with it for a newly designed global governance structure. "There are more demands for seats at the table and that means that negotiating trade standards, aviation agreements, telecommunications regulations, environmental agreements and others becomes more complex to manage. [...] The problem of leadership in such a world is how to get everyone into the act and still get action" (Nye 2015: 99–100). The leading role of the U.S. in all these processes has been diminishing over time but remains crucial. As no. 1 challenger to the leading role of the U.S., China "has become more willing to assert its interests, particularly in the Asia region" (Fewsmith interview 2019: 44).

In such a changing international environment, rational decision-making remains a key feature of pragmatism for governments. Our intention is to take a look at Hungarian foreign policy via a number of key actors and regions of the world and discuss how Hungary relates itself to them in a pragmatic manner. First, bilateral relations with China are discussed.

## **Relations with the People's Republic of China<sup>3</sup>**

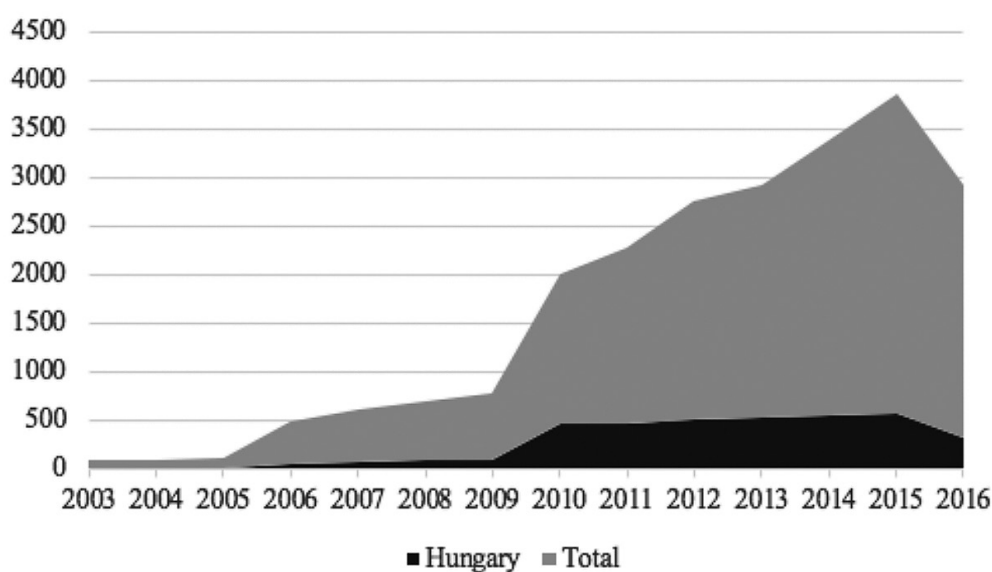
Hungary's pragmatic approach towards PR China is not unique – it was among the first countries in Europe to recognise the potential in trading and cooper-

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<sup>3</sup> We published a paper about the V4 countries' position on China in 2014. The chapter is based on that paper, with topical updates and new processes. See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

ating with Beijing, even at a cost of not addressing the issue of human rights violations. Hungary has been establishing itself as a regional partner of China for years now and the Orbán Government’s foreign policy openly declared its turn towards China – continuing and obviously extending bilateral relations previously enacted by the left-wing governments headed by Péter Medgyessy (2002–04), Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004–09) and Gordon Bajnai (2009–10) (Kačan 2012: 61). By analysing Hungarian-Chinese relations, we can realise that, within its own region in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Budapest is competitive. Hungary plays a prominent role in the region’s relations with China, especially if we focus on investments or trade relations – not to mention the country as the most popular regional destination for Chinese immigrants. As Szunomár notes, “although Hungary is not a priority target of the intensive Chinese FDI outflows of recent years, since the turn of the millennium, Chinese investments show a growing trend here. Chinese investment in Hungary started to increase significantly after the country joined the EU in 2004. According to Chinese statistics, it means a really rapid – more than a hundredfold – increase from 5.43 million USD in 2003 to 571.11 million USD in 2015” (Szunomár 2017: 4). She also quotes Chen, according to whom: “in 2010, Hungary itself took 89 percent of the whole Chinese capital flow to the region.” and adds, “although this share has been decreasing since then, as other countries of the CEE region also became popular destinations for Chinese FDI, the amount of Chinese investment in Hungary has continued to increase and it is by far the highest in the CEE region” (Ibid.).

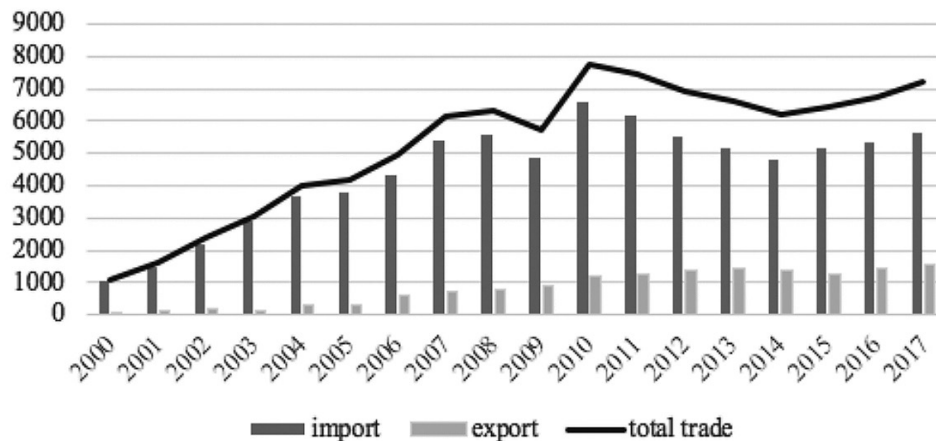
**Figure 1: Comparing OFDI in Hungary to Chinese OFDI in the 16 CEE countries (million USD)**



Source: Világgazdasági Intézet, MOFCOM (Szunomár 2018)

Trade is also steadily growing, although we have to add, Chinese-Hungarian trade is dominated by imports from China, while exports represent a significantly lower share. “Hungarian exports to China represent around 2 percent of Hungary’s total exports” (Ibid.), while around 6 percent of Hungary’s imports come from Beijing (Szunomár 2018).

**Figure 2: Chinese-Hungarian trade (million EUR)**



Source: Világ gazdasági Intézet, EUROSTAT (Szunomár 2018)

The “Eastern Opening”, introduced by the government in 2011, was a foreign policy tool designed to help trade (and investment) ties with countries of the East. The term “East” was never really clarified and Hungary had a wide range of diplomatic meetings from Kazakhstan to China and from Russia to Vietnam but Beijing was always among the top priorities. Looking back again at Figure 1. and Figure 2., however, shows that the policy failed to attract significantly more investments from China or to build up even closer trade ties with the Asian giant. Of course, needless to say, these policies can have long-term effects and Chinese exports to Hungary did start to grow again after 2014 but since Péter Szijjártó, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, declared in 2015 that the “Eastern Opening” was over, the real relevance of this episode is still not clear and we have still to wait for desired consequences – a few hopes at least, as we will see, are there.

In some cases, China also emerges as a sample country which Hungary should follow to gain GDP growth and stability<sup>4</sup> but we already noted in 2015

4 “The world today is about the phenomena that while Europe is arguing, the East is working. In Europe, out of 100, 65 people work; in the US its 75 out of 100, while in China its 85. Sometimes, one feels that the debates on our continent are more honourable than the work and if this is the case, then this continent will fall”. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary in 2015. Source: Website of the Government. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedekek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-amagyarorszag-baratai-alapitvany-masodik-vilagtalalkozojan> (1 August 2019).



that praising the ‘Chinese way of democracy’ over that of what the European Union fosters, is dangerous, together with the emphasis put on manufacturing based on the Chinese labour market producing illogical outcomes, especially when the education sector gets less and less attention and money in Hungary from year to year.

To sum up Hungarian relations with China, in a critical way, the sometimes high expectations were not always planned according to realities. The visit of Wen Jiabao in the summer of 2011 seemed to mean an advantage for Hungary compared to other countries in the region. The Chinese Prime Minister and Viktor Orbán signed twelve agreements, including a one-billion-euro extra credit of potential infrastructure investments but most of those agreements were abandoned, actually representing Chinese foreign policy, since this was also not unique behaviour.

Altogether, reflecting on this reality, Szunomár also notes that: “The China-Hungary relationship is a significant one, however, it shall not be interpreted as a strategic and influential alliance that could affect world politics or economy [..]. In its current stage, the China-Hungary cooperation is more like a new relationship full of potential” (Szunomár 2018). Coming from this perspective, Hungary’s possible leadership in the region is still very fragile and many countries are willing to offer the Asian country immediate and full partnerships – where the China+16 cooperation scheme (16+1) offers a great forum for that. Albeit the situation of Hungary within the region is fragile, Lukács and Völgyi noted that slowly, “one of the main goals specified in Hungary’s Eastern Opening policy, namely to increase FDI from China (Asia), seems to have been fulfilled by newcomers or growing investments of those Chinese companies operating for years in Hungary [..] In the field of trade, it is obvious that China has been paving the way for Chinese products to the EU market in a comprehensive manner but at the same time and in line with the other goal of Eastern Opening policy, the number of Hungarian companies exporting to China has significantly increased and agricultural/food/beverage exports of Hungarian companies can show up successful expansion in the Chinese market” (Lukács – Völgyi 2018: 19).

## **Russian dependency?**

Hungary always had an ambiguous relationship with Russia: on the one hand, it has been about avoiding or competing with their influence; on the other hand, it is for making the aforementioned goal a complex one: Hungary also depends on Moscow when its about the energy market. Already in 2014, we noted<sup>5</sup> that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia remained an important partner for Hungary, mainly because of energy trade – although Moscow has always played

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5 See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

a decisive role in Hungarian politics. The ‘shadow’ of the former socialist era and energy dependency, together with the attitude of the actual governments towards Russia, always generated arguments among political actors and thus influenced Hungarian political agenda on multiple occasions.

**Figure 3: Main origin of primary energy imports, EU–28, 2006–2016  
(% of extra EU–28 imports)**

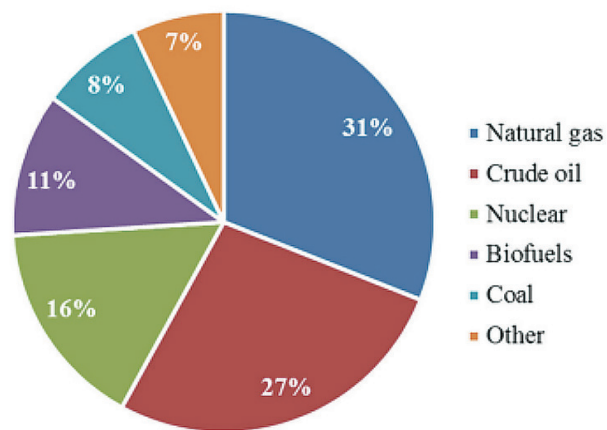
	Solid fuels											
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Russia	25.0	24.8	26.1	30.0	26.9	26.0	25.5	28.8	29.1	28.9	30.2	
Colombia	11.4	12.7	12.3	17.4	19.9	23.5	24.1	21.8	21.1	23.9	23.4	
Australia	12.0	13.0	11.7	7.5	10.5	8.7	7.3	7.5	6.3	9.8	14.6	
United States	7.8	9.1	14.0	13.5	16.8	17.9	22.9	22.4	20.5	16.1	14.1	
South Africa	23.1	20.1	16.5	15.8	9.6	7.8	6.3	6.7	9.8	7.7	5.1	
Indonesia	9.3	7.8	7.3	7.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.0	
Canada	2.8	3.0	2.6	1.4	2.0	2.2	1.6	1.8	2.5	1.6	2.0	
Mozambique	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.8	
Kazakhstan	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.8	
Others	8.5	9.4	9.2	7.3	8.6	8.6	7.4	7.5	6.4	7.4	6.0	
	Crude oil											
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Russia	33.8	33.7	31.8	33.6	34.7	34.8	33.7	33.7	30.4	29.1	31.9	
Norway	15.4	15.0	15.0	15.1	13.7	12.5	11.2	11.8	13.1	12.0	12.4	
Iraq	2.9	3.4	3.3	3.8	3.2	3.6	4.1	3.6	4.6	7.7	8.3	
Saudi Arabia	9.0	7.2	6.8	5.7	5.9	8.0	8.8	8.7	8.9	7.9	7.8	
Kazakhstan	4.6	4.6	4.8	5.3	5.5	5.7	5.1	5.7	6.4	6.6	6.8	
Nigeria	3.6	2.7	4.0	4.5	4.1	6.1	8.2	8.1	9.1	8.4	5.7	
Azerbaijan	2.2	3.0	3.2	4.0	4.4	4.9	3.9	4.8	4.4	5.2	4.5	
Iran	6.2	6.2	5.3	4.7	5.7	5.8	1.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	2.9	
Algeria	2.5	1.9	2.5	1.6	1.2	2.6	2.9	3.9	4.2	4.2	2.8	
Others	19.7	22.4	23.3	21.8	21.6	16.1	20.9	19.7	18.7	19.0	17.0	
	Natural gas											
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Russia	39.3	38.7	37.4	33.0	31.9	34.4	34.9	41.1	37.4	37.6	39.9	
Norway	25.9	28.1	28.5	29.7	27.9	27.6	31.8	30.4	32.1	32.0	24.8	
Algeria	16.3	15.3	14.7	14.1	13.9	13.1	13.3	12.6	12.0	10.8	12.4	
Qatar	1.8	2.2	2.3	5.9	9.7	11.6	8.3	6.5	6.8	7.7	5.6	
Nigeria	4.3	4.6	4.0	2.4	4.0	4.4	3.1	1.7	1.5	2.0	2.0	
Libya	2.5	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.7	0.7	1.9	1.7	2.1	2.1	1.3	
Peru	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.5	
Trinidad and Tobago	1.2	0.8	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.7	0.9	0.6	0.2	
Turkey	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	
Others	8.8	7.3	8.3	9.7	8.2	6.8	4.8	4.5	6.5	6.7	13.1	

Source: Eurostat

Energy security is one of the most crucial questions for Europe, with Russia dominating the solid fuel, crude oil and natural gas imports of the 28 EU members by 30.2, 31.9 and 39.9 per cent (see Figure 3.), with this dependency even more critical in the CEE region. If we are looking at the total energy supply of Hungary in 2016, it is dominantly fossil-fuel based, only 14.19 was coming from renewables (57% of these renewables were biomass and biogas)<sup>6</sup> but nuclear power also played an essential role, especially in the generation of electricity. According to Szóke, 31% of the total energy supply comes from natural gas, 27% from crude oil and 16% from nuclear power, which is also connected to Russia (Szóke 2018: 5).

6 A sor végén kullog Magyarország a megújuló áramtermelésben. Portfolio.hu, 21 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.portfolio.hu/vallalatok/a-sor-vegen-kullog-magyarorszag-a-megujulo-aramtermelesben.298620.html> (1 August 2019).

**Figure 4: Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) in Hungary**



Source: Szőke 2018.

Though oil trade is relatively competitive, as Ámon and Deák noted (2015: 86) and as a result, Hungary imports from other regions as well, still 50–75 percent of the country’s petroleum oil import comes from Russia (according to the 2018 first semester data of Eurostat)<sup>7</sup>. As Szőke underscored, although a lot has been done in the region to combat energy dependency, “according to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), Hungary imported approx. 8.6 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas in 2016, of which 95% came from Russia based on a long-term gas supply contract” (Szőke 2018: 6). If we add that Hungary had already signed a deal with Russian Rosatom and Russia in 2014, about expanding the nuclear power plant at Paks worth around 12.5bn EUR, we can see that dependency is a major question in present-day Hungary–Russia relations.

Besides the energy issue, the sanctions imposed against Russia also have economic relevance, hitting Hungarian agriculture the most. According to Minister Péter Szijjártó, “Hungarian enterprises incurred damages of 6.7 billion dollars in lost export opportunities between 2013 and 2016”<sup>8</sup>. Whether or not these sanctions can help change Russian foreign policy directions, Viktor Orbán was among the first ones to criticise them, saying: “because of these measures, we are losing opportunities. If there were no sanctions, we would be able to cooperate more and make greater advances”.<sup>9</sup> This results in the political ties between Hungary and Russia to blossom which therefore means they are getting closer and warmer than ever: Putin and Orbán regularly visit each

7 EU imports of energy products – recent developments. Eurostat. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/46126.pdf> (1 August 2019).

8 Hungary-Russia relations. Global Security. Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/hu-forrel-ru.htm> (1 August 2019).

9 Hungary’s Orban denounces EU sanctions on Moscow. France24, 15 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20180715-hungarys-orban-denounces-eu-sanctions-moscow> (1 August 2019).



other. Based solely on the front of energy dependency, it is clear how Moscow can influence Budapest, in addition to which some episodes of Hungarian foreign policy can be mentioned indicating even closer ties. The substantial change of the previously anti-Russian Fidesz is clearly visible and shows the obvious adjustment of the party's foreign strategy (Schmidt 2018: 79–81). As the Economist noted, “in opposition, the party was a stern critic of the ex-KGB regime in Moscow, berating it for neo-imperialism and shenanigans on energy security and complaining about Western weak-kneedness towards the threat from the east. Now the tone is rather different.”<sup>10</sup>

These episodes of its foreign policy cover a constant criticism of the sanctions, the strange financial deals behind the expansion of Paks (Hungary received the first loan package from Russia but instantly paid it back from market loans because of the better conditions they offered), the Hungarian reaction on the Ukrainian language act which convincingly is dictated by Russia, as well as the even more suspicious Gruevski case, where it seems Hungary helped the former Macedonian Prime Minister and Russian ally to avoid prison and arrive in Hungary where the authorities granted him political asylum<sup>11</sup> – further isolating the Hungarian position within NATO and the EU.

In a report compiled by Political Capital and commissioned by Globsec Policy Institute, authors analysed the vulnerability of Hungary to Russian propaganda based on the position of political parties, the media and civil society. Their results suggested that “the Hungarian political landscape and state countermeasures make the country especially vulnerable to Russian influence, with scores of 4.11 and 4.19, respectively, on a 5-point scale. Desktop research and experts both concluded that the government has a firmly pro-Kremlin view based mainly on ideological, power political and economic-financial (including energy policy and allegedly corruption-related) reasons” (Hunyadi – Molnár – Szicherle 2017: 4).

While Russian ties, especially deriving them from the energy situation, are important and diversifying foreign policy interests are a logical aspiration of the country, there were some alarming steps taken by the government which undermine the credibility of Hungary within Euro-Atlantic organisations and threaten that logical aim. Hungary should actively work on easing its energy dependency, turning towards renewables and looking for new markets, together with trying to look for a position where relations with Russia can be used for signalling the importance of Hungary within NATO as well as in the EU. Taking Hungary's geopolitical and geographical position into account, cutting all such ties is not (and should not be) a reality but more cautious behaviour is definitely needed.

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10 Orbán and the wind from the east. *The Economist*, 14 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/11/hungarys-politics> (1 August 2019).

11 See: Vörös 2018.

## A club of strongmen? – Relations with Turkey

Hungary's global opening with its 'Turn towards the East' chapter covered the countries of the Middle East as well, especially those with abundant financial resources to invest, as both potential short-term and long-term partners for Hungary. We already noted in 2014 that several diplomatic visits were made to the Middle East<sup>12</sup>: Viktor Orbán travelled to Saudi Arabia in 2011 to discuss political and economic cooperation between the two countries. Apart from the Prime Minister's delegation, since the beginning of the new Fidesz-led era, several other missions have paid visits to the Arab World, either on behalf of the government or the City of Budapest and tried to negotiate economic investment projects in Hungary. While no significant deals were made with these countries, the region must be mentioned because of Turkey and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, probably the most successful story of the Hungarian "Eastern Opening" in the region.

Already in 2011, a general foreign policy view of the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hungary<sup>13</sup> considered Turkey an important partner which has just recently become more positive, in accordance with Erdoğan's growing power. On a visit to Turkey in 2017, Viktor Orbán "emphasised that Hungary's loyal support for Turkey is not a one-off event but a consequence of Hungary's strategy, as a conservative country, of prioritising human values. Business and money are important but the most important thing is for one to have friends, he said, adding that this gives rise to obligations and Hungary stands by its friends – even if this is sometimes <uncomfortable>"<sup>14</sup> – reflecting on those countries which are opposing Turkey's EU membership. He said that Hungary is supporting their accession, mentioning: "Whatever anti-Turkish statements there are in important European Union countries, Hungary will never add its voice to them".<sup>15</sup> A year later, Erdoğan visited Budapest, praising relations between the two countries: "We are working hard mutually with Hungary, with which we have deep and rooted ties, to improve our cooperation [...] Our cooperation with Hungary within the scope of international organisations such as NATO, the Council of Europe and the European Union is exemplary"<sup>16</sup>

Bilateral trade is growing at an enormous pace and benefitting the Hungarian markets; Hungary exports twice the amount of imports from Turkey (See

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12 See: Tarrósy – Vörös 2014.

13 The policy view can be downloaded from the following link: [http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign\\_policy\\_20111219.pdf](http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign_policy_20111219.pdf) (1 August 2019).

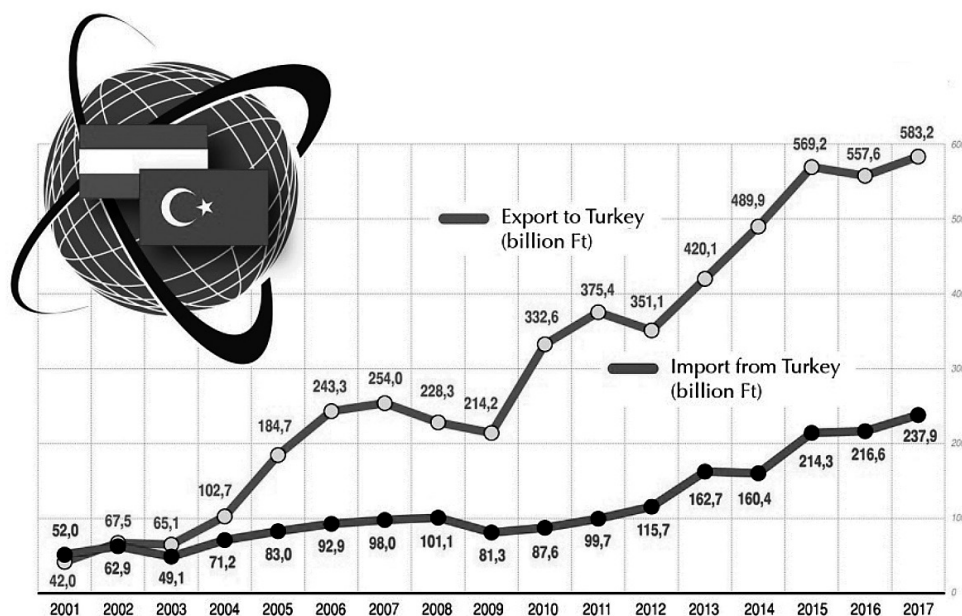
14 Hungary is on Turkey's side. *Miniszterelnok.hu*, 30 June 2017. Available at: <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/hungary-is-on-turkeys-side/> (1 August 2019).

15 *Ibid.*

16 President Erdoğan hails Turkey-Hungary cooperation. *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 October 2018. Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/president-erdogan-hails-turkey-hungary-cooperation-137724> (1 August 2019).

Figure 5) and Hungary hopes to receive Turkish investments as well in the upcoming years.

**Figure 5: Hungary-Turkey trade, 2001–2017 (billion Ft)**



Source: KSH, MTVA – edited by the authors

Besides successes in trade, Viktor Orbán was portrayed together with Erdoğan (and Putin and Duterte) in a TIME magazine article about strongmen in the world, joining a club of harshly criticised political leaders, somehow reflecting on Hungary’s foreign policy objectives as well (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: A version of the TIME magazine cover for the 14 May, 2018 edition – Later on, a different cover photo was used**



Source: Ian Bremmer Twitter post; <https://twitter.com/ianbremmer/status/991998281642278913>

## Relations with Africa – Focus on education<sup>17</sup>

Turkey may help Hungary successfully re-position itself in the African continent, too. One of the points of the brand new Africa Strategy of Hungary<sup>18</sup> directly mentions Turkey – among other external actors such as Portugal, Germany, Morocco, Egypt, Israel and the United States – with whom Hungary can possibly find ways of collaboration with regard to African engagements.

In a pragmatic perspective, it should not feel surprising that Hungary has also wished to formulate its ‘own’ Africa strategy – as one must have been assured reading the policy document of global opening from 2011.<sup>19</sup> Good reputation and a wide network of personal contacts in many countries of Africa can certainly contribute to successful implementation, if the approach goes further beyond official government rhetoric. Hundreds of young Africans arrived in Hungary during the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s with scholarships from the Hungarian state, who represent “an unbreakable link between our country and the continent,”<sup>20</sup> according to the introductory text of the first Budapest Africa Forum, held between 6 and 7 June, 2013, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), predecessor to the African Union (AU). These individuals – who, as Hungarian graduates with partial Hungarian identities, or at least with the feeling of attachment to their former alma maters and Hungarian culture, also bearing the knowledge of the local language – can function as ‘ambassadors’ to foster bilateral ties. “Much to be done”, however, as the academic and NGO circles have been advocating for many years so that such potential commitments are channeled into concrete achievements for the benefits of both sides.

Education, research and culture are extremely important dimensions of pragmatic foreign policy thinking. State scholarship programs can lay the foundations for long-term sustainable bilateral relationships by keeping students who have already obtained a degree in the system as ‘cultural ambassadors’ after graduation. In 2013, according to the authorisation of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education and Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, the Hungarian Government launched the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program which “aims to promote the study of foreign students in Hungarian higher education institutions via the implementation of intergovernmental education agreements and agreements with the ministry responsible for the

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17 This part is based on Tarrósy 2018.

18 Published in the Official Gazette (No. 56) of the Hungarian Government on 2 April, 2019: 1177/2019. (IV. 2.) Korm. Határozat [Government Decision].

19 “Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary (2011), at [http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign\\_policy\\_20111219.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign_policy_20111219.pdf). The chapter on Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel runs pp. 47–49.

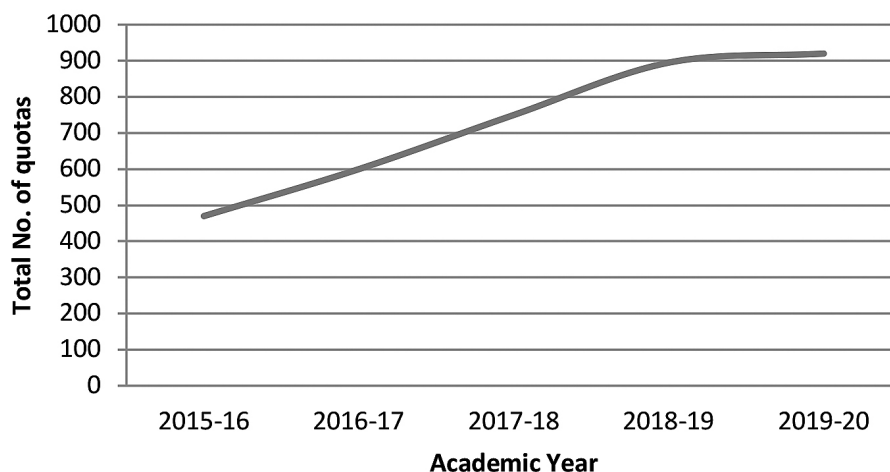
20 See: <http://budapestafricaforum.kormany.hu/hungary-and-africa> (1 August 2019).



education of foreign students in Hungary.”<sup>21</sup> István Íjgyártó, State Secretary for Culture and Science in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, stressed that the program “as a foreign policy instrument” was born because of the growing importance of migration for academic and scientific purposes in today’s globalising world. “[...] in the spirit of a kind of cultural dominance, brain drain has begun in the world, even among developed countries, and that countries can gain an advantage which cannot only attract students but also permanently acquire this qualified workforce for their own labour market; therefore, they can count on the knowledge and work of these people in the longer term.”<sup>22</sup> This programme is the revival of the previous ones during the Socialist years.

For the Academic Year 2015–16, Hungary signed bilateral agreements with 7 African countries including Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria and Tunisia, offering annual scholarship quotas to them. In this first year, only 38% of the total pool of 470 such scholarships was approved to applicants. By the Academic Year 2019–20, a 195% increase can be seen in the number of total quotas, this time with 920 places being offered to 15 African countries. In the meantime, Hungary signed agreements with 8 other governments, including South Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Cape Verde. (See Figure 7 and 8) To the latest in the row, the Hungarian Prime Minister paid an official visit at the end of March, 2019. His trip was the first highest-level state visit by a Prime Minister since former Socialist leader Pál Losonczy was travelling to several African countries in the 1970s.

**Figure 7: Total number of country scholarship quotas per academic year**



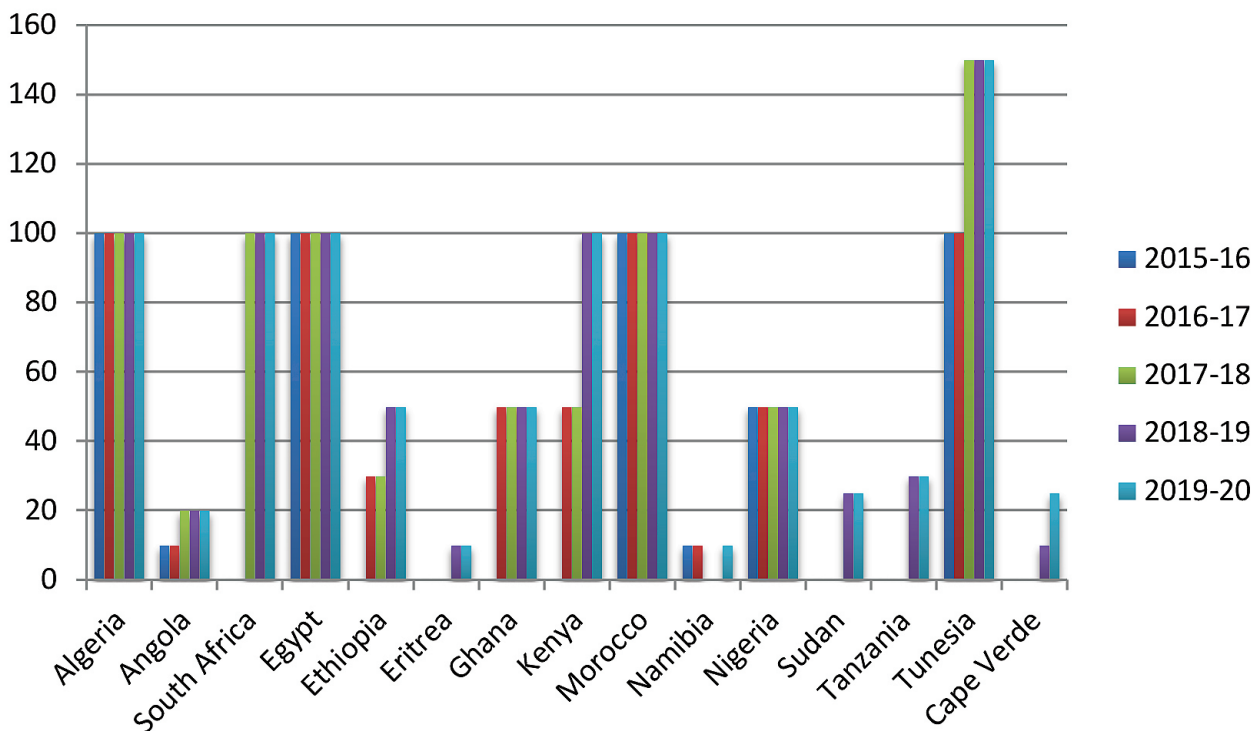
Source: authors. Own edition. Sources of data: Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tempus Public Foundation

21 See 285/2013. (VII. 26.) Korm. Rendelet [Government Decree]: [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300285.KOR](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300285.KOR) (1 August 2019).

22 Országgyűlés Külügyi Bizottsága, Jegyzőkönyv [Protocol of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Hungarian Parliament], 20 May, 2015, No.: KUB-40/72-2/2015., <http://www.parlament.hu/documents/static/biz40/bizjkw40/KUB/1505201.pdf> (1 August 2019).



**Figure 8: Change in annual scholarship quotas per academic year according to African partner countries**



Source: authors. Own edition. Sources of data: Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tempus Public Foundation

As of April, 2019, Hungary maintains 11 embassies in Africa: 5 in North Africa, i.e. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and 6 in Sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola and South Africa. In addition, the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade runs a wide network of honorary consuls and trade attachés. It was also experimenting with yet another soft tool in the form of the National Trading Houses but those turned out to be a failure in the African realm due to several planning-related and management factors and were thus closed down after a short period of time.

Point 12 of the Africa Strategy of Hungary talks about the intent to investigate the possibility to expand this network of representation across the continent, mentioning a new trade attaché position in the Côte d'Ivoire, in particular. Although the document is not a full-fledged strategy, rather a list of tasks and desired actions, it is inevitably the clearest communication for a long time by a Hungarian government to intensify engagements with Africa. The focal point of the arguments in this decision, however, remains the same: to successfully manage the migration of Sub-Saharan Africans by offering them job opportunities in their localities, therefore, contributing to the development of local economies in their vicinities.

## Hungary in its close region

After the change of the political system at the end of the 1980s, Hungary struggled for years with its neighbours, dealing with historical wounds, linguistic differences, nationalistic policies and the Hungarian minorities living outside of the country, all making it difficult to build up peaceful bilateral ties. However, such tensions decreased with the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic organisations: joining both NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004 offered a special role for Hungary: the country became an important bridge to the region of the Balkans. In particular, EU membership helped the countries solve their conflicts as the borders were not separating each other anymore; it also went towards helping ethnic debates get sorted out more easily.

Coming from its strategic position, Hungary has always been active about the integration of the Balkans – partially because of the Hungarians living in Serbia. Hungary hoped to sign the accession treaty with Croatia under their rotating EU council presidency, as well as supporting Serbia's membership to the EU. Beside these activities, the Visegrad Four cooperation is the natural environment for Hungary, a periodically changing (from more active to less relevant) cooperation with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, where recently Budapest has tried to be the engine of multilateral collaboration, emphasising the otherwise questionable EU-level relevance of the V4. In a European Council on Foreign Relations analysis, Janning pointed out that “Hungary is a regional networker with strong ties to neighbouring countries. However, the country has only weak influence beyond its neighbourhood” (Janning 2018). This limitation might be reflected in the country's sometimes questionable behaviour of using vetoes where it is applicable: in the 1990s, Hungary enjoyed its early-received position within the Council of Europe and vetoed the accession of its neighbours in the hope of putting pressure on them: it voted against both Slovakia's membership and Romania's observer status, while it voted against Slovakia's OSCE membership as well.

Just recently, Hungary decided to use the very same tool regarding Ukraine, blocking the NATO–Ukraine committee. The situation is alarming since, together with the aforementioned Gruevski-case, it seems that either Hungarian foreign policy is controlled by an external actor or Hungary is actively working against the Euro-Atlantic organisations and none of it is helping the image and credibility of Hungary, especially since it seems that the attack against a Hungarian Cultural Centre in Uzhhorod, which escalated relations between the two sides and made Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó accuse Ukraine<sup>23</sup>, was a manipulation – uncovered by Polish officials. “A trial of three Polish citizens

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23 Felgyújtották a Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség irodáját. Index.hu, 27 February 2018. Available at: [https://index.hu/kulfold/2018/02/27/ukrajna\\_karpatalja\\_ungvar\\_kmksz\\_tuz\\_iroda/](https://index.hu/kulfold/2018/02/27/ukrajna_karpatalja_ungvar_kmksz_tuz_iroda/) (1 August 2019).

accused of the arson attack on the Hungarian minority centre in the Ukrainian Zakarpattia has started in Cracow. This provocation was aimed at aggravating relations between Kiev and Budapest. Accused Michał P. testified that he was commissioned to organise the attack by a German journalist famous for his pro-Russian views”<sup>24</sup>.

## **The refugee crisis seen from Hungary**<sup>25</sup>

Hungary has a rather unique feature with reference to its migration scene, which basically derives from certain historic tendencies since the so-called Trianon Treaty of 1920, and therefore, the country’s historic heritage and its geographic location: “the overwhelming majority of immigrants are from neighboring countries and mostly have an ethnic Hungarian background” (Kováts – Sik 2007: 158). This is the reason why Hungarian society at large does not really have experience on a greater scale with people from faraway lands and cultures which the population considers different ‘enough’ from their majority society, since they have got used to receiving immigrants of European origin – mainly from the larger Hungarian cultural context. These immigrants speak no different language than the one the citizens of the motherland do, i.e. Hungarian. Up until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the proportion of the immigrant population – that is, “foreigners who stay in the country over a year” (Ibid: 159) – compared with the native population, shows a stable 1.5 to 2 percent, according to the statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), on an annual basis.<sup>26</sup> This is considered rather low in a country with a total population of 9.778 million, according to the 2018 HCSO data. Since 1981, the Hungarian population has been steadily decreasing (see Figure 9 for the last 15 years). “The fall in the population number due to natural decrease was somewhat moderated by positive net international migration in the last two and a half decades. However, in the last decade, immigration surplus could compensate for only less than half of the natural decrease” (Vukovich et al., 2012: 7).

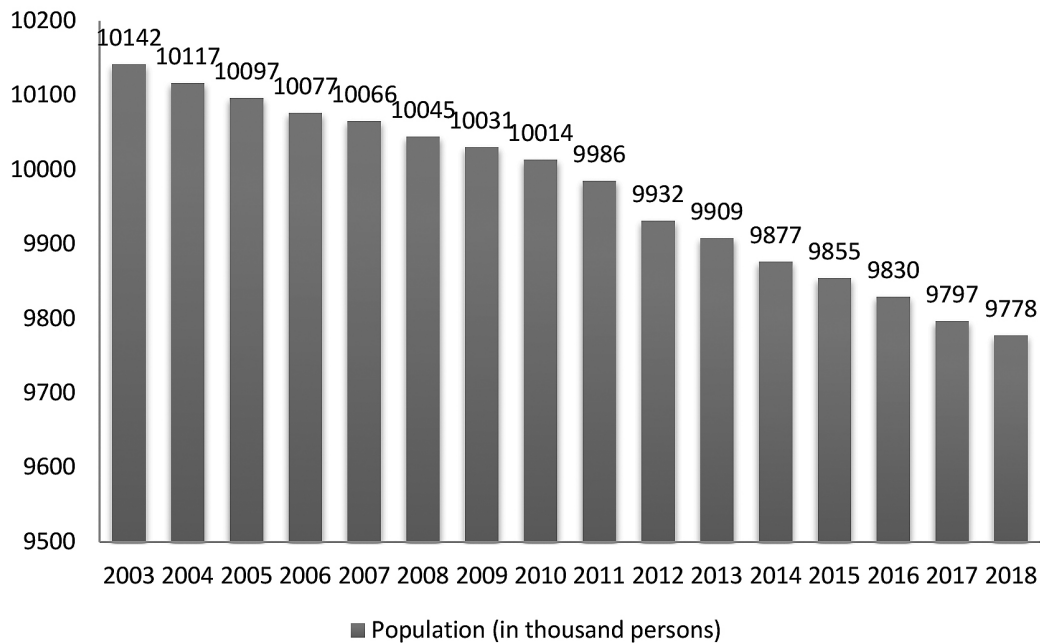
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24 Anti-Hungarian Provocation: Polish Process, German Clue. Warsaw Institute, 15 January 2019. Available at: <https://warsawinstitute.org/anti-hungarian-provocation-polish-process-german-clue/> (1 August 2019).

25 This part is largely based upon a piece under publication. See: Tarrósy 2019.

26 The *International Migration Outlook 2012* of the OECD also confirms this figure. See OECD 2012: 236.

**Figure 9: Change in Hungarian population numbers between 2003 and 2018**



Source: Tarrósy 2019. Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

Since the breakout of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, the Hungarian government favours a strictly anti-immigrant policy, with nation-wide campaigns including slogans such as “If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture!”, or “If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away the jobs of the Hungarians!”. As Drinóczi and Mohai underline: “The billboard campaign and the ‘national consultation’ were successful political tools used to make the Hungarian population fearful of migration, or at least develop increasingly negative attitudes thereto due to economic and security reasons” (2018: 99–100). After the latest landslide victory of his party at the national elections in April, 2018, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán clearly stated that: “We want that Hungary remains the land of Hungarians, the country of the ‘magyars’”.

The incoherent policies towards the refugee crisis are coming from the internal political dynamics of the country: threatening with mass migration<sup>27</sup> gives popularity to Fidesz; at least it was a good recipe to win support in the past few years. It seems that the government has no intention of giving away its trump card: through a very simple logic, they try to sustain the ‘alarming situation’ and prolong the state of emergency (which has been put in place since 2016 and will stay at least until September 2019).<sup>28</sup>

27 More on the European migration challenges see: Glied – Keserű 2016.

28 The situation affected the nonprofit sector as well. See: Kákai 2014 and Kákai 2016 and Pálné et al. 2016.

The logic is simple: when the fence and border control gets expensive, they complain about the EU not financing the border control.<sup>29</sup> When the EU offers help for border control, the Hungarian government criticises Brussels for taking away the country's rights to protect its borders.<sup>30</sup> When the EU tries to put together a solution with the African and Arab League countries to handle the refugee crisis on-site, Hungarian diplomacy blocks these discussions on purpose – being fully aware of the fact that those deals might decrease the number of refugees arriving in Europe. In May, 2018, Hungary (as the only EU country) rejected to sign an agreement in Morocco between African countries and EU members.<sup>31</sup> The Hungarian position derives from the fact that the government rejects all forms of migration and doubts that migration can have positive aspects; this is the reason why they left the UN's Migration Pact as well: “Hungary has zero tolerance for migration” – said Péter Szijjártó the day the Hungarian government vetoed an EU–Arab League agreement.<sup>32</sup>

## Hungary and climate change

While Hungary is aware of the dramatic consequences of climate change and through its president, János Áder, always emphasises the importance of changes at both policy level and within the mindsets of Hungarians, the country still needs to focus more on renewables. When fighting climate change, President Áder is the engine behind Hungary's climate policy, frequently mentioning the threat and addressing the politicians and citizens. At a conference in 2018, Áder János said, “climate change is the largest threat to mankind, threatening the future of human civilisation, [.]. In his opening address to the conference, Hungarian President Áder asked participants to put forward their information on climate change with <unrelenting straightforwardness> so that those facts <cannot be bypassed by economic leaders and political decision makers>. Scientists have an obligation to make people and political communities face the consequences of their actions as well as to continually warn them that <the more we postpone our decisions, the more radical changes will be necessary.> Áder insisted that bush fires in several countries, serious draught in Europe and floods affecting millions in Asia this summer have been a <dramatic reminder

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29 Nem fizet az EU a határkerítésért. Index.hu, 1 September, 2017. Available at: [https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2017/09/01/nem\\_fizet\\_az\\_eu\\_a\\_hatarzarert/](https://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2017/09/01/nem_fizet_az_eu_a_hatarzarert/) (1 August 2019).

30 Mi az igazság Orbán új háborújában? Index.hu, 18 September, 2018. Available at: [https://index.hu/belfold/2018/09/18/unios\\_hatarvedelem\\_frontex\\_europai\\_bizottsag\\_hatarorseg\\_kitoloncolas\\_orban\\_viktor/](https://index.hu/belfold/2018/09/18/unios_hatarvedelem_frontex_europai_bizottsag_hatarorseg_kitoloncolas_orban_viktor/) (1 August 2019).

31 Hungary to veto EU-Africa Summit Agreement. Daily News Hungary, 28 April, 2018. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-veto-eu-africa-summit-agreement/> (1 August 2019).

32 Hungarian government explains its veto on EU-Arab League migration accord. Xinhuanet, 5 February, 2019. Available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/05/c\\_137800974.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/05/c_137800974.htm) (1 August 2019).



of irresponsible management in the past decades>. He argued that even though mankind has been aware of the greenhouse effects on the climate for 200 years, greenhouse gas emissions are still on the increase. Climate change is <clearly visible and we have sufficient data and experience>”.<sup>33</sup>

There were also signs that Hungary is willing to act – in fact, it was among the first countries (together with Austria, France, Malta, Germany, Portugal and Slovakia) to ratify the Paris Climate Pact<sup>34</sup> and (because of the President) is also active within the UN Climate Framework (Szóke 2018: 10), but later in June 2019 Hungary was among those Eastern European countries, which decided to veto the EU’s 2050 carbon neutral target.<sup>35</sup>

However, as we have already mentioned, looking at the total energy supply of Hungary in 2016, it is predominantly fossil-fuel based, only 14.19% was coming from renewables and 47% of these renewables are biomass, while 10% are biogas and the Government is focusing more on Paks II than anything else. According to a new regulation, installing new wind turbines became impossible: these rules made in 2016 prohibit the installation of wind turbines within a 12 km radius around populated areas (roughly ruling out the whole country).<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding the hectic financial support opportunities in Hungary, the solar power industry is on the rise, proving the maturity of the solar market and the technology itself, achieving a 46 percent increase from 2016 to 2017.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

In our highly interdependent and interconnected world, populism and nationalism (of different types and peculiar character) are on the rise. From a fair and objective academic point of view, globalisation undoubtedly created new opportunities yet at the same time, resulted in some fundamental vulnerabilities. As Bremmer explains, “populists know something important about the people they’re talking to, [as] they understand that many people believe that globalism and globalisation have failed them. [...] They offer compelling visions of divi-

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33 Hungarian President Áder: Climate change threatening future of Civilisation. Daily News Hungary, 3 September, 2018. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungarian-president-ader-climate-change-threatening-future-of-civilisation/> (1 August 2019).

34 Hungary among first EU states to ratify Paris Climate Pact. Daily News Hungary, 7 October, 2016. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-among-first-eu-states-ratify-paris-climate-pact/> (1 August 2019).

35 Four states block EU 2050 carbon neutral target. EUObserver, 20 June 2019. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/environment/145227> (1 August 2019).

36 Wind power utilisation made impossible in Hungary. Daily News Hungary, 23 September 2016. Available at: <https://dailynewshungary.com/wind-power-utilisation-made-impossible-hungary/> (1 August 2019).

37 MANAP: 2017 után 2018-ban is rekordot dönthetnek a napelemes rendszerek Magyarországon. MNNSZ, 19 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.mnnsz.hu/manap-2017-utan-2018-ban-is-rekordot-donthetnek-a-napelemes-rendszerek-magyarorszagon/> (1 August 2019).

sions, of ‘us vs. them’ [...] ‘them’ meaning rich people or poor people, foreigners or religious, racial and ethnic minorities.” (2018: 2) We certainly live in an age of global insecurities and anxieties as we have been witnessing (and experiencing) the rise of transnational terrorism, another intensified flow of international migration, many new geopolitical hot spots, as well as tremendous changes in our weather – in fact, a global climate change – and we struggle with all of them, not being confident in our responses or actions. Different governments have been reacting in different ways to these challenges. “The weakest will fall away, leaving us with more failed states [...] Those still hoping to build open societies will adapt to survive [...] And many governments that have a stronger grip on power will build walls – both actual and virtual – that separate people from one another and governments from citizens” (Ibid: 12).

In this age of global insecurities and anxieties, Hungarian foreign policy can be described – up to a certain point – as pragmatic. Pragmatic since it has overwritten traditional Western orientation of Hungarian foreign policy pursued since the system change by understanding that there are also further opportunities outside of the EU–NATO–immediate neighbourhood policy triangle. This realisation has helped Hungary introduce its policies towards the emerging East and the potential South and while these were never coherent or one might even say successful and long-lasting, at least they proved: giving up all our interests in these countries was a bad decision at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s and Hungary would do well not to end up in the very same street again. That said, this new foreign policy is not always pragmatic, not even logical in some cases. The Orbán government subordinated its foreign policy to internal political goals, losing the credibility of its foreign policy steps. Rebuilding this credibility should be the ultimate goal of the government, therefore, the discourse should not be about offended reactions and confrontation but about trade, business and economic interests; not about political party goals but country priorities.

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