

## Governing populism – the Discursive Populism of Fidesz\*

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### *Introduction*

It has been unprecedented in post-Communist Hungary's history for a political party to obtain a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats in three consecutive terms; Hungary's right-wing *Fidesz* party managed to do so after 2010. There are different explanations for this phenomenon in the Hungarian and international literature, depending on which factors the particular interpretations emphasize (Matthes 2016: 323–334, Bogaards 2018: 1481–1499, Bugarcic / Kuhelj 2018: 21–33, Bangstad / Bertelsen / Henkel 2019: 98–113). Certain interpretations explain the reasons by applying the theory of hybridization. Consequently, they are centred on institutions and describe the changes from the aspect of liberal democracy as the focal point (Bozóki / Hegedűs 2018: 1173–1189). Another approach describes Viktor Orbán's policy as the institutionalization of plebiscitary leadership-based democracy (Körösenyi 2019) and/or analyzes the post-2010 Hungarian political system, including the prime minister, based on its political leader and leadership (Körösenyi / Patkós 2017: 611–632). Politico-economic approaches are applied as well. They typically identify the failure of post-Communist neoliberal economic policies as a key reason for the change of 2010 and the subsequent stability (Žuk 2018: 63–84, Wilkin 2018). On the other hand, while Heino Nyssönen does not deny the validity of the discourses focused on the abandonment of liberal democratic principles, he notes that certain other socio-historical reasons must also be considered to understand the processes: for example, the historical background of Central Europe as an independent entity as well as the analysis of discourses subverting the prestige of the West and/or the rise of the consequent non-Western-European counter-identities. In his opinion, the regional leaders in question (the politicians of the right-wing governing parties in Poland [Law and Justice] or Hungary [*Fidesz*]) reject the western discourses that smear their country's prestige, thus keeping

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the affected country in a certain “prestige crisis”. The above-mentioned leaders consider these, which are heavily criticized by the West, as the manifestation of their countries actually returning “to their own paths” (Nyysönen 2018: 258–269).

Describing the post-2010 regime, András Körösenyi (2015: 410) identifies the following key characteristics: regime establishment and conscious separation from the pre-2010 period; permanent use of extraordinary political and authoritarian governmental methods; efforts to create a “central field of force”<sup>1</sup>, attempts to rise above the left-right ideological division in terms of governmental policies; anti-pluralism and populism, statism and paternalism, charismatic legitimization; and difficulties in consolidation.<sup>2</sup> Of the above characteristics, this study mainly focuses on the linguistic procedures of the populism demonstrated by Hungary’s post-2010 right-wing governments.

As illustrated above, there are several (and not necessarily contradictory) explanations as to what may have led to the watershed change in Hungary’s democracy in 2010 and/or the stability of the governing right and its main party since. Its populism is characterized by two major factors: a) many of the literature’s interpretations of populism may apply to it and b) it is articulated from a governing position. The analysis of such diverse cases as those in Russia, the US, Poland or Hungary (which demonstrate several differences despite the many existing similarities) shows that populism is no longer restricted to the opposition: it is exercised in government as well (Pappas 2019). The latter gives rise to the eternal yet relevant question of how we view populism. It can be associated with such notions as ideology, political logic, discourse or even political strategy (Moffit /Tormey 2014: 383–386). Below I describe how *Fidesz* fills the “us” and “them” categories with content, based on populism as a political logic and discourse. As part of the above description, I investigate the procedures and interpretations of the enemy construction method applied by the government’s communicators as well as the enforcement of populism as a political logic. Finally, we arrive at the conclusion that *Fidesz*’ discourse, in terms of its political logic, moved from an initial inclusionary period towards exclusionary populism.

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1 The purpose of a “central field of force” is to achieve an institutional and political situation where neither the left-liberal opposition nor the radical right-wing challenger has a realistic chance of defeating *Fidesz*.

2 In this particular case it means that the Orbán government’s constant confrontation in foreign and domestic policy and/or its use of executive power result in a permanently conflict-oriented political approach both abroad and at home.

*Attempts to conceptualize populism*

The term “populism” is often interpreted as an idiosyncrasy of illiberal, authoritarian and other adjective-equipped non-liberal democracies, as is being done in the context of Hungary as well (Müller 2016). These interpretations tend to neglect the differences between democracy types and identify liberal democracy as *the* democratic standard whereas populism is interpreted as an anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, and anti-liberal concept. Conversely, this essay uses the pluralistic interpretation of democracy-populism relations for conducting a scientific study of new Eastern European populisms (Isaac 2016: 170–174, Walter 2017: 166–183, Stavrakakis 2017: 523–524, De Cleen / Glynos / Mondon 2018: 1–13, Moffit 2018: 1–16) which, for all intents and purposes, allows us to more accurately present the discursive populism of Hungary’s governing populist right-wing party. The Hungarian case demonstrates a lower level of explicability by an otherwise correct statement applicable to other examples (Kriesi 2014: 373); in other words, the dominance of a populist party can be explained by factors such as the constant changes of the electoral and political funding systems and therefore the competition of parties, the lack of the parties’ social embeddedness, as well as voter volatility or a lack of leaders.

In Hungary’s case, it is not only an intense polarization that needs to be considered (Enyedi 2016: 210–220) but the Hungarian party system’s high level of institutionalization as well (Enyedi / Bértoa 2011: 116–142). Moreover, the Hungarian case of a rising right-wing governing populism cannot be fully explained by factors such as, for example, the intensification of social or globalization-critical movements or the increasing voter demand for euroscepticism. In contrast, the rising western and eastern populisms can be more efficiently explained by a reaction to the EU integration processes of the past decades and the consequent focus on the lack of the EU’s legitimacy and its representation problems (Taggart 2006: 286).

All research projects or reflections on this issue need to address the conceptualization problems related to the notion of populism (Rooduijn 2018: 362–372). Populism as a thin-centred ideology can be interpreted as a homogeneous opposition of the people and the elite. According to the ideology-centred concept of populism, politics should reflect and represent the general will (*volonté générale*) of the people (Mudde 2004: 147–174). The interpretation of populism as a political logic is generally traced back to Ernesto Laclau (2007). According to this interpretation, if people are the object of politics, then populism is the political logic thereof – which makes all politics synonymous with populism. According to Laclau, the different social demands are organized in the spirit of populism. These

demands, previously disorganized and isolated from each other, are now recognized as demands and requirements, thus becoming equally validated. It is this recognition and validation that creates the demos. Based on Laclau, however, only the inclusive variant of populism (Mudde / Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 147–174) can construct the people's legitimate totality, for which diversity and equality must be articulated together (McKean 2016: 797–820). As the Hungarian case study shows below, *Fidesz*' populism demonstrates a reverse process: both its enemy construction and its constitution of "the people" clash with inclusionary populism. It carries the symbolic, material, and political attributes of exclusionary populism.

Another concept interprets populism as a discourse, a special communication strategy (Taggart 2000) which is manifested by a leader representing a crowd that is organized independently from the conventional and inflexible institutions (Moffit / Tormey 2014: 386). The concept of populism as a political style warrants a mention as well. Its components are defined by Moffit and Tormey as follows: appeals to the people along with the perception of crisis, turning point and collapse as a situational analysis as well as the application of modes of expression as a crude, threatening or politically incorrect speech (Ebd.: 391).

As shown above, the notion of populism tends to constantly generate conceptualization difficulties. The uncertainties arise from the practice of today's political journalism failing to distinguish between different forms of populisms and lumping them together with an almost complete disregard for the relevance different socio-historical or other explanations may possess for the rise of populism in a given country. The public discourse tends not to distinguish between eastern and western populism while the mainstream media typically treats it as a source of threat. The latter approach appears in scientific research as well: that is one of the reasons why we need critical reflections on the discourses that exclusively consider populism as nothing but a threat, pathology, aggression or repression which is contradictory to the normal, organized and professional functioning of politics (Taggart / Rovira Kaltwasser 2015: 347, Stavrakakis 2017: 523–534, De Cleen / Glynos / Mondon 2018: 9). The other uncertainty about the notion of populism is that these definitions engender such an inclusive category that it inevitably contains actors which are not necessarily supposed to be included in this group (Van Kessel 2014: 103, De Cleen / Glynos / Mondon 2018: 1–13). In order to avoid an overly expansive interpretation of populism, Stijn van Kessel recommends refraining from placing political players in the populist (in the adjective sense of the word) category whenever they merely use some components of populism that are

also applied by actual populist actors. These problems are no strangers to Hungary's scientific literature or publicists, either (Magyar 2016).

Based on the statements of Benjamin De Cleen and his co-authors, we certainly cannot apply the label of populism to a politician if he only talks in a populist manner, uses demagogic imagery or is outside the political establishment. Furthermore, populism is not a synonym of the radical right, nationalism, or authoritarianism, either (De Cleen / Glynos / Mondon 2018: 5).

In their comparative study, Taggart and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015: 354–360) identified six aspects for analysing Latin American and European populisms in government: (1) government structure (parliamentary or presidential system); (2) controlling potential by international actors; (3) acting potential and capability of other domestic actors; (4) timing of opposing or critical reactions; (5) potential backlash by the populist forces and finally (6) the content of the populist demands. These aspects need to be specifically addressed in this study because, as we will see below, *Fidesz*' initial inclusionary populism typically explored such cases of social experience and related problems (and then suggested [linguistic] solutions for them) as the failures of the (neoliberal) economic policies after Hungary's democratization or the corruption-related affairs of the left-liberal coalition between 2002 and 2010. These problems gave rise to civic demands whereby the logic of being different can be manifested in ousting the pre-2010 governing left, "finishing the democratization process", or a departure from the earlier principles of economic policy and social organization. The departure from this initially inclusive populism is also observed by Dániel Hegedűs in his writing about the manner in which the government's right-wing communication has constructed an enemy from the European Union, "liberal cosmopolitan elites", the "migrant-aiding left", George Soros, and liberal NGOs after the summer of 2015 – right at the moment when the refugee and migrant crisis peaked in Hungary (Hegedűs 2019).

#### *The populist right's practice of enemy and identity construction*

After this theoretical overview, we now turn our attention to the manner of constructing the political enemy, a highly typical feature of *Fidesz*' populism. To analyse *Fidesz*' post-2010 populist communication, I apply the categories introduced by political scientist Szilvia Horváth in her study of *Fidesz*' enemy construction practice in the 2002 national election campaign which the party also contested as the incumbent (Horváth 2006: 161–181).

The first element of enemy construction is the so-called “power of continuity”. This concept means that a certain continuity is constructed between the past and the present, typically by assuming or emphasizing some similarity. After getting into power in 2010, the political right has depicted the period between 1989/1990 (the collapse of Communism) and 2010 as a “transition period”, ascribing the term “post-Communism” to it. According to this interpretation, what happened in 1989/1990 was not a break with or separation from the past. Instead, there is a continuity between Communism and the post-Communist era that lasted until 2010. In the inaugural meeting of the Hungarian Diaspora Council on November 17, 2011, Viktor Orbán said: “Hungary has developed a public consensus that this era, this structurally identifiable era, this post-Communism must be closed. And the only way to close it is if we have an enormous, large majority in Parliament which could complete this job. By drafting a new constitution. And by making it clear that the monopoly or competitive edge of the parties rooted in Communism is over.”<sup>3</sup>

In *Fidesz*’ communication, the Communist and post-Communist era covers all political forces (other than themselves) which have a personal continuity with the pre-democratization times or include former and current members of the subsequent left-liberal governments or parties, respectively. According to this interpretation, they are all part of the past. Another aspect of continuity lies in the opponent’s characteristics. For example, when the left-liberal opposition turns to certain EU institutions or politicians for support in the protection of democracy and the rule of law in Hungary, the government’s communication often voices accusations that “just like so many times throughout history, the left-liberals are turning to the foreigners again”. The role that used to be played by Moscow has now been taken over by Brussels – according to the argumentation of the right-wing politicians. So the topos of the left’s internationalism as the ever-present “betrayal of the national interest” forms a bridge between the past and the present. This is how “Moscow’s former procurators” had become “George Soros’ agents” by 2018.

Beside such adjectives as “international”, the enemy is also constructed with Hungarian personal continuities. Such continuities include discrediting the general political left by equating it with the former governing

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3 We must close the post-Communist era! Speech at the inaugural meeting of the Hungarian Diaspora Council in Budapest (2011). Available at: <http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/le-kell-zarni-a-posztkommunista-korszakot>

Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and focusing on the party's former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány who left the party in 2011. The purpose of this "personalized construction" (Horváth 2006: 164) is to imply that as long as these actors represent the opposition, they will never stop short of a complete restoration of the past. Since the unilateral modification of the electoral system and the low support for the individual opposition parties makes the new, post-2010 actors conclude cooperation agreements before the elections, the governing party's communication extends the above interpretation to them as well – regardless of whether they are green or radical right-wing formations. New political parties formed after 2010 are therefore also labelled as actors trying to bring back the past. This is how the right-wing communication aims to de-legitimize the positions and election strategies of the above-mentioned entities.

The next known method of enemy construction is "to attach such negative attributes to the political challengers or opponents that are inherent to them, and which they themselves are unable to change and which determine their political behaviour" (Horváth 2006: 165). Whenever the communication is focused on the other's nature, we register the construction of an enemy rather than an opponent. According to Murray Edelman (1998: 91), enemies are entities characterized by inherent features that make them immoral and pathologically evil, therefore posing a constant threat. The opposing parties are construed as confronting moral positions. The left is described in right-wing rhetoric with terms such as "traitor of the nation", "traitor of the homeland", "anti-family", "liar" and many more in a similar vein. Since enemy construction is discursive by nature, the other side also reacts by using moral categories to describe *Fidesz*, describing the party as "anti-humane", "anti-democratic", "evil", and so forth which only serves to exacerbate polarization (Palonen 2009: 3–30).

According to Edelman, an efficient enemy construction requires the speaker to construct cognitive structures (Edelman 1998: 109), which suggest that the social problems are not caused by social structures or inequalities but by the decisions of "evil people". In the present case, *Fidesz*' communication almost exclusively blames "the decisions of Communists and leftists" or the corrupt practices of left-liberal governments for the changes that have transpired in recent decades rather than the international environment or the transformation of social structures. The cognitive structure includes the notion of an order which can only be created and maintained by a political right with "strong legitimacy", through removing the threats or preventing them from getting into power. This concept is manifested in *Fidesz*' daily communications through such repeated statements as: Hungary would once again be in debt, family tax



benefits and allowances would be lost, the economy would go in decline and “the homeland would become vulnerable to foreign interests” if the left-liberal opposition got into government. On the one hand, this rhetoric reflects a certain obsession while, on the other hand, it also presents a political narrative with a past, present and desirable future. According to Edelman, relevant acts represent a prescribed set while actors follow defined objectives (ibid.: 110).

In *Fidesz*’ communication, this has several meanings. The party for example maintains that Hungary’s democratization failed to create a morally unambiguous situation with the left-liberals lacking any interest in creating one. According to the Hungarian right, the left has a vested interest in maintaining the political continuity with the pre-democratic (Communist) system and does not identify with the nation’s interest. Consequently, the right-wing framing denotes the left as an entity that does not stand for and even aims to prevent a “strong and sovereign Hungary”. The above trends determine the terminology of the governing party’s discourse on sovereignty as well. The governing right’s argumentation communicates each public political measure in the context of “Hungary’s national interest”. The 2010–2018 term is significantly marked by the Orbán government’s freedom fighter narrative which first focused on the IMF, banks, multinational corporations, Brussels, foreign-owned energy suppliers, George Soros, and the European Commission. For example, the government’s political strategy framed the protection of utility fee cuts (Böcskei 2016: 70–89) or the rejection of the migrant allocation quota as the protection of the nation’s interests. This communication defines the protection of the “Hungarian society” as the new standard of success. Consequently, *Fidesz*’ interpretation claims that the function of any “attack” on the government’s positions by the former “post-Communist elite” is to protect the “Brussels lobby”, the profit-oriented corporations, the “migrant-aiding European elite” and “George Soros’ efforts to undermine the national state” as well as to restore the former political agenda that neglects “Hungary’s interests”. It is the government’s Soros discourse that best demonstrates how communicators need to constantly rearrange their set of convictions when their messages are under some attack (Edelman 1998: 110). For example, when even the government’s communicators are unable to prove that certain Hungarian and European Members of Parliament are George Soros’ lobbyists (“Soros agents”), they offer the explanation that the latter are too shrewd and clever to be caught.

Further enemy construction tools include a symbolic person and his representation in the pro-government communication, such as former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány. His person allows the discourse to be focused



on the character of the political opponent, specifically his being “a liar by nature”. Gyurcsány delivered his closing speech at the then governing Hungarian Socialist Party’s confidential meeting on May 26, 2006, two months after their national election victory. He argued for the necessity of reforms and, describing earlier budgetary policies, he used sentences such as: “We have obviously been lying throughout the past one-and-a-half or two years. It was completely clear that what we were saying was not true”. In a way not fully uncovered to this day, the speech was leaked on September 17, resulting in street demonstrations in the fall, usually organized by the radical right. Thereafter, the moral position assigned to the left-liberals by the right has been that of “liars”. To maintain this frame, *Fidesz* has been actively seeking to suggest and communicate Ferenc Gyurcsány’s political motivations behind any opposition activity ever since, thus morally de-legitimizing the latter’s positions.

It is therefore a general practice to “attempt to label the opponent with such characteristics that would present them as a group which you can never identify with, and/or whose statements, actions and interpretations are unacceptable” (Horváth 2006: 170). In an effort to avoid this situation, some of the opposition forces react by agreeing with the government’s position. One such striking example is the former leftist governing party’s (MSZP) position on the voting rights of ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary’s borders. Having opposed the proposal at a referendum in 2004 before categorically rejecting the idea afterwards<sup>4</sup>, they nonetheless took a 180-degree political turn and now endorse voting rights for ethnic Hungarians. This behaviour is mainly driven by the leftist MPs’ fear of being labelled and framed as “anti-Hungarian” in case they oppose the proposition, in other words, of being depicted as a group which no true patriot can identify with. There are numerous similar examples and voting patterns in post-2010 parliamentary practice when opposition MPs, who otherwise consider the Orbán government to be an authoritarian regime, still vote for particular governmental proposals.

That is where we arrive at the issue of incumbent populism. While in opposition before 2010, *Fidesz* already presented itself as the representative of “the people” and “Hungarians”. The party has reinforced its “we,

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4 IDEA Institute (2017), Voting rights for Hungarians living beyond the border: no rights without responsibilities. Available at: <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20171215-a-magyarok-tobbsege-szerint-ne-szavazzon-aki-nem-itt-adozik> Republikon Institute (2018), Idea of voting rights for Hungarians living beyond the border is unpopular. Available at: [https://index.hu/belfold/2018/01/11/nem\\_nepszeru\\_a\\_hataron\\_tuliak\\_szavazati\\_joga/](https://index.hu/belfold/2018/01/11/nem_nepszeru_a_hataron_tuliak_szavazati_joga/)

Hungarians” formula even while being in government in recent years. However, the circle of entities included in or excluded from this discourse has changed over the years, in line with *Fidesz*’ movement from its pre-2010 inclusionary populism towards the exclusionary variant. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012: 158–166) define the differences of the two variants in three dimensions. In terms of their material dimension, both focus on the distribution of wealth but while the inclusionary one would redistribute it to social groups that have been discriminated against or have not been provided with a sufficient share of the wealth, exclusionary populism pursues the opposite and excludes certain social groups from the circle of beneficiaries. The latter executes this by curtailing certain groups’ ability to participate in public debates. Conversely, inclusionary populism promotes intensifying the activities of previously under-represented social groups. Inclusionary populism aims to expand the notion of “we” whereas its exclusionary counterpart excludes certain social groups from the “people”. For example, the term “we, Hungarians” is used for emphasizing the concept of a homogeneous nation, thus rejecting multi-culturalism.

*Fidesz*’ movement from inclusionary to exclusionary populism can be observed both in the political and the symbolic sense. In recent years, the party has manifested this trend by acts such as the unilateral modification of the electoral system, party and campaign funding regulations as well as hindering the operation of human rights NGOs.<sup>5</sup> This process is not independent from the government’s critics or opposition figures being labelled as “migrant supporters”, “representatives of international interests”, “anti-Hungarian” and being excluded from the category of “we, Hungarians”. Consequently, this narrative considers the government and/or the political right as the sole champion of Hungarians against the Brussels elite.

Categories as the political right’s “we” and its application to supposed conflicts between Hungarians and the global and local (supposedly leftist and liberal) elite were already present before 2010 and then utilized in various public political cases. Even before the period studied herein, Emilia Palonen (2009: 318–334, 2013: 536–551) had already concluded that Hungary’s political life of the 2000s had no demands or dislocation efforts articulated outside the above-mentioned frame. In his speech on March 15, 2012, Viktor Orbán said: “The point of a freedom fight is not the fight itself but what comes after it. It’s not enough to vote against the bad, you need to defeat it; and it’s not enough to defeat it, you also need to

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5 Freedom House (2018), Nations in Transit 2018. Confronting Illiberalism. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>

create the good so that the bad could not return. We have done a lot for that in the past two years. We saved hundreds of thousands of families from the debt trap. We involved banks and multinational companies in sharing public burdens, we already have a constitution that will stand the test of time, and we dismantled the last obstacles blocking the cross-border unification of our nation. We renewed and reorganized the state; we contained the spread of unemployment. We have done many things, very many things, but still not enough.”<sup>6</sup> Seven years later, another of the prime minister’s speeches stated: “We wish for the peoples of Europe to get rid of their night blindness. We wish for them to realize that we will all lose our freedom in a liberal European empire. You can only be a free man if you’re a son of a free nation rather than a subject of an empire. European people cannot be happy unless they can decide on their own and their nations’ fate. (...) We Hungarians must also clarify what we want, what we can want. No nation can want anything other than what is the essence of its history.”<sup>7</sup> Seven years passed between the two quotes and my conclusion is similar to that of Palonen: Hungary’s political boundaries, myths and constructs, which form the basis for articulating and re-articulating conflicts and/or interpretation needs, had already been established decades ago.

*Fidesz’ populism as the inverse of Laclau’s populism concept*

*Fidesz* pre-2010 opposition period incorporated two clear premises of populism that Ernesto Laclau (2007: 67–77) refers to. First, there is the boundary separating “the people” from the power – in this instance the then governing left-liberals – and, secondly, the matching demands and needs which allow “the people” to materialize. The leader of the right connects these demands and needs based on the disappointment caused by post-Communism in general, but mostly related to the dissatisfaction with the governing left-liberals of 2002–2010 in particular (Illés / Körösenyi / Metz 2018: 1–19). In Orbán’s interpretation, the 2008 economic crisis is not simply a financial crisis but the failure of the political left’s typical

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6 Speech in Lajos Kossuth Square (2012). Available at: <http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-miniszterelnok-unnepi-beszede-a-kossuth-lajos-teren>

7 Speech on the 171<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the 1848/49 Hungarian revolution and freedom fight (2019). Available at: <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-az-1848-49-evi-forradalom-es-szabadsagharc-171-evfordulojan>

neoliberal economic policy and crisis management, the price of which will have to be paid by all members of society except the governing elite. In his view, the elite always “benefited” while the population became indebted. According to his narrative, Hungary’s next leader must fight for the country’s “sovereignty” as well as manage the moral crisis arising from Ferenc Gyurcsány’s leaked speech. To achieve these goals, Orbán identifies the need for a “constitutional reorganization” and a fight with the “people of the past” so that politics could make sure that “Hungary never becomes a colony”, as has been articulated in the Orbán government’s communication after 2010. Orbán’s interpretation evokes the image of a “war-time prime minister”, who “champions the Hungarian interest” and adopts legislation to do so (Illés 2016: 64).

It is relevant to briefly analyse the populism of Hungary’s right-wing incumbent government within Laclau’s framework, which of course does not imply that it follows such a framework. In fact, it is the inverse of that – as noted in the conclusions below. In this case, the right wing’s interpretations of “us” and “them” does not refer to social classes but existing or prospective social identities, institutions, structural positions which together form the positions of (right-wing) hegemony. Orbán’s incumbent populism is based on the premise that society itself is a discursive space. Consequently, the discourse delivered by the actor cannot simply be a question of linguistic or rhetorical interpretations; it is also a practice of articulation. This approach clearly reveals why the Hungarian right applies exclusionary practices and labels to its opponents (such as “Soros agent”, “anti-national left”, “Brussels elite”): to construct social relations. The language enables *Fidesz* to constitute relations, doing so, however, in an exclusionary manner. In *Fidesz*’ political thinking, this is the distinction between “us” and “them”, in other words “the people” and the “elite”, which articulates the extension of the political space, the enhancement of political topics and the expansion of the political territory. The efficiency of enemy construction is further increased by polarization, a characteristic feature of Hungary’s political life which, due to the aforementioned factors, has become a significant new political dichotomy in the post-2010 period (Palonen 2018: 308–321). According to this logic, political demands are articulated in such a manner where the left-liberal side always constitutes the “elite” while the right is the representative of “the people” or “people” in general. For the leader of the incumbent populist right, the foundation of politics is “(the) people”: he presents himself as the carrier of the truth which becomes the truth by being a priori equivalent to the representation of the social majority; in other words, the principle of “argumentum ad populum”.

### *Conclusion*

The latter statement is specifically used as a reference in the government's communication but it is not constituted in the framework of an inclusionary process. Since 2010, the Hungarian right-wing incumbent government has implemented significant institutional changes (Bozóki / Hegedűs 2017: 7–32) and moved towards a substantive and legal (sanctions) enemy construction and conflict generation that may substantiate a research direction that considers Hungary's incumbent populism as a risk.

Although, as mentioned above, one should refrain from interpretations that exclusively view populism as a pathological phenomenon, the concerns appear to be legitimate in Hungary's case due to the type of exclusionary populism present there. By now, *Fidesz*' populism is fixed in the idea of an allegedly homogeneous people and, consequently, subordinates the interpretation of the common good to that idea as well. The party's interpretation of the common good is not pluralistic, it does not represent a balance of competing intentions; it is exclusively a top-down declaration.

This situation has led to a unilateral transformation of otherwise pluralistically organized institutions as well as to increasing polarization. Consequently, future discussions may be focused on the authoritarian nature of the Hungarian political system rather than on populism's potential to radically expand democracy.

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