

Im Gespräch

»This year the Pride represented a tipping point« – the 2025 Pride Parade in Budapest, the restrictions of LGBTIQ+ rights and gender and queer studies in Hungary*

*Judit Takács in Conversation with Mona Motakef**

One of the largest LGBTIQ+ demonstrations in Europe in recent years took place in Hungary. Over 200.000 people participated in the Pride Parade in Budapest at the end of June 2025. Initially banned by the Orbán government, the mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karácsony, declared the parade a city event to circumvent the government ban. While Christopher Street Day parades in some Western cities are nowadays questioned as overly commercialised parties, the political significance of the parade in Budapest was unmistakable. Many people marched to demand LGBTIQ+ rights and to express their resistance to the government's policies, as well as to defend Hungary's democratic future. What is the significance of the 2025 Budapest Pride Parade in the context of current anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ politics? What consequences does the march have considering the loss of public trust and growing political protests against the Orbán government?

We explore these questions and more with Prof. Dr. Judit Takács, a gender and family sociologist and renowned scholar at the ELTE Centre for Social Sciences – Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Centre of Excellence in Budapest. Her research focuses on the nexus of genders, sexualities, and family practices in Central and Eastern Europe. She has published widely on the social history of homosexuality, homophobia, gender-phobia, family practices, fatherhood, and childlessness. M. M.

Mona Motakef: Let's start with your research interests and your professional experience first: Your research and political involvement have been strongly influenced by political developments in Hungary. Could you give us insights what it means to you to work in the field of sociology, gender and queer studies in Hungary today?

* Corresponding Author: Mona Motakef, mona.motakef@tu-dortmund.de, TU Dortmund, Deutschland

Judit Takács: To work in sociology, and especially in gender and queer studies in Hungary today means constantly negotiating between intellectual commitment and political constraint. On the one hand, the field has grown significantly during the past two decades, with scholars producing critical research on family and care practices, inequalities, sexualities, and activism that is interwoven with global debates. On the other hand, the government's increasingly restrictive policies – such as the removal of gender studies programmes from accredited university curricula, the stigmatisation of »gender ideology«, and the banning of the Pride march in 2025 – create an environment where both research and teaching can be seen as politically charged acts. Working under persistent public delegitimization can lead to the feeling of marginalisation but this can also give the field particular salience. Many of us – I certainly do – understand our scholarship not only as academic inquiry but as a form of civic engagement, contributing to broader struggles for democracy, equality, and freedom. In that sense, doing gender and queer studies in Hungary today is precarious, but it is also meaningful as it forms part of the wider resistance to authoritarianism and the erosion of rights.

MM: What does it mean to fight for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people?

JT: To fight for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people today means insisting on the basic dignity of individuals in a context where those rights are increasingly weaponised and undermined. In Hungary, the struggle is not only about legal protections and policy change, but also about challenging the narratives that cast queer lives as threats to »the nation«, to »family values« and to an »authentic« Hungarian tradition. It involves visibility – marching, organising, publishing – but also resilience in everyday life: creating safe spaces where people can live freely and true to who they are despite hostility.

The resistance is both symbolic and material. On the one hand, it is about highlighting how the marginalisation of sexual and gender minorities often parallels restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and participatory citizenship as well as affirming that LGBTIQ+ lives matter, countering the silencing and stigmatisation that dominate state media. On the other hand, it is about ensuring access to healthcare, education, employment, and safety: areas where inequality and discrimination are still very real. From a sociological perspective, activism in this context operates both as a form of advocacy for tangible rights – for example, recognition of diverse family forms – and as a challenge to hegemonic narratives that position LGBTIQ+ themes as »abnormal« and/or threatening.

At times, one encounters the view within sociology that LGBTIQ+ topics are not among the most pressing issues in relation to inequalities in Hungary. While it is true that Hungarian society is marked by multiple and intersecting forms of inequality – including those related to class, ethnicity, regional disparities etc. – LGBTIQ+ issues are interwoven with these broader structures. Marginalisation based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics intersects with economic precarity, access to healthcare and education, and political representation. Ignoring LGBTIQ+ inequalities is to risk neglecting the ways in which normative frameworks of family, citizenship, and social belonging systematically exclude certain groups. Studying this field thus offers important insights into the mechanisms of power, stigma, and social control that shape inequalities more generally.

MM: How and where did you follow this year's Pride Parade in Budapest?

JT: I followed this year's Pride march from abroad as I was attending a conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia. However, our family was represented at the march by one of our sons. At the same time, a dear Slovenian friend of ours took part in the Budapest Pride, I believe for the first time. He commented on both the impressive scale of the parade and the physical demands of the long march on a hot summer afternoon.

MM: Under the pretext of »child protection,« the Orbán government has been severely restricting the rights of LGBTIQ+ people for years. – Could you sketch out these political and legal developments? What are its consequences for the Pride Parade?

JT: Since 2021, the Hungarian government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, has enacted a series of legislative measures under the guise of »child protection« that have significantly curtailed LGBTIQ+ people's rights. We have discussed these measures in detail in our article on »Resisting Genderphobia in Hungary« (published in *Politics and Governance*: <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i4.5528>). Genderphobia, understood both as an ideology rooted in the fear of gender diversity and as a deliberate strategy of fearmongering for political purposes, has become a defining element of an increasingly expansive far-right agenda. This agenda has been actively implemented since the establishment of the so-called »System of National Cooperation« by the Orbán government in 2010.

Since 2020, only married couples have been eligible to adopt children in Hungary. Single applicants, including lesbians and gays, may only adopt with

the explicit authorisation of the minister responsible for family affairs, effectively placing additional barriers on adoption for non-heterosexual applicants. This was followed by the 9th Amendment to the Hungarian Fundamental Law, adopted on December 15, 2020, introducing significant changes with strong implications for LGBTIQ+ rights, including the redefinition of family. A new clause – »The mother is a woman, the father is a man« – was added to explicitly reinforce a heteronormative definition of family, excluding same-sex couples from legal recognition as parents. While the amendment did not explicitly mention transgender and intersex people, the codification of sex as being fixed at birth contributes to the legal erasure of trans and non-binary identities and limits the possibility of gender recognition.

In 2021, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law, originally intended to crack down on pedophile offenders, banning access to content deemed to »promote homosexuality« among those under the age of 18. For example, books depicting or »promoting« homosexuality or gender transition must be wrapped in plastic foil to prevent browsing and cannot be displayed in shop windows or youth sections of bookstores. Violations can lead to business suspensions or permanent closures.

And of course, we also have to mention the 15th Amendment to the Fundamental Law, adopted on 14 April this year, explicitly stating that »a person is a man or a woman« and allowing the government to ban public LGBTIQ+ events, including Pride marches. This latest amendment affirms that the state would ensure the legal protection of the »natural order« and »prevent efforts that suggest the possibility of changing the sex assigned at birth«. Framing public LGBTIQ+ events, such as the Budapest Pride, as allegedly detrimental to children's development also opens the door to the potential prohibition of any other public demonstration deemed undesirable by the government, thereby posing a serious threat to the right to peaceful assembly.

MM: In what ways did this year's Budapest Pride Parade stand out compared to previous ones? What conflicts arose in the run-up to the Pride Parade?

JT: As I have already mentioned, just a few months before the Budapest Pride, the Hungarian Parliament passed legislation, effectively outlawing any Pride events. Additionally, the use of facial recognition technology was also authorised to identify attendees. Participants faced potential fines, and organisers could risk imprisonment. This is something that the organisers of the Pécs Pride will also have to face: Pécs is the fifth biggest city in Hungary, and the only one with a major annual Pride parade outside the capital – and the police have already banned the Pécs Pride march scheduled for October 4, 2025.

MM: Who participated in the Pride? Did new segments of society become involved? Why were there so many people? (Feminist und LGBTQ+-Movements, young LGBTQ+-people) in the media the participation of EU politicians was highlighted.

JT: The 2025 Budapest Pride saw a significant increase in participation, with many foreign attendees, including many Members of the European Parliament and national politicians. In comparison with previous years, the international political representation has definitively increased. The presence of EU politicians signalled the event's transformation from a local LGBTQ+ celebration to a broader political statement of solidarity, opposing authoritarianism and supporting democratic values. This shift was also reflected in the composition of attendees: for many participants, this was their first time attending. In previous years, non-LGBTQ+ attendees often outnumbered LGBTQ+ participants, but their numbers increased significantly this year, demonstrating the public expression of solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, in my view, this year the Pride also represented a tipping point. The government may have assumed that it could act with impunity against such marginalised minorities, yet many Hungarians appeared to recognise that anyone could become vulnerable under this regime. In my view, this awareness contributed to making the Pride a highly visible site of democratic mobilisation and resistance.

MM: In your opinion, what impact does this year's Pride Parade have on its participants, its organisers, the city and the country?

JT: For participants, the Budapest Pride served as an act of defiance against oppressive laws and a demonstration of solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, whose current situation many appeared to recognise as a possible reflection of their own future vulnerability. For the organisers, the success of the event, which probably exceeded all expectations, highlighted the resilience of civil society organisations and the local government of Budapest to support democratic values in the face of central government repression. Budapest's role as a host city for the Pride march reinforced its image as a centre of inclusive values and human rights advocacy within Hungary and potentially in the wider region. For Hungary, the success of the event signalled a powerful political statement: it demonstrated significant public opposition to the government's policies and challenged the narrative of uncontested support for its far-right agenda.

MM: As someone who has been researching the social history of homosexuality, homophobia and genderphobia for a long time, how do you assess the political developments in Hungary surrounding the Pride Parade? Do you see the strengthening of a long-lasting development? Does the Pride provide a new momentum? Does its international visibility give you hope for a democratic revival?

JT: The political developments in Hungary surrounding the Pride march are best understood as part of a long-term trajectory of authoritarian consolidation and normative redefinition promoted by the Orbán government. Genderphobic policies and legislative measures targeting public expressions of LGBTIQ+ content and identities are part of a broader strategy to centralise power, control civil society, and curtail dissent, with LGBTIQ+ rights serving as a highly visible site for the enforcement of normative conformity.

At the same time, the 2025 Budapest Pride demonstrates that such policies do not go uncontested. The record turnout and the creative organisational strategies employed to circumvent legal restrictions suggest a significant mobilisation of civil society. Consequently, the Pride march represents a politically and symbolically charged moment for opposition forces by signalling that grassroots activism, coalition-building across social movements, and international solidarity can generate visibility and pressure even in a repressive context.

However, whether this momentum can translate into real structural political change is less certain. International visibility brings the country's democratic decline to international attention, framing it as a matter of both moral and political concern. Such visibility may shape public opinion, reinforce cross-border solidarity, and exert pressure on Hungarian authorities. Yet, the government's legislative control, media dominance, and influence over the judiciary indicate that the immediate structural impact on democratic institutions is likely to remain limited.