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Frontispiece:

A girl from the minority Yazidi sect, fleeing the violence of the ISIS in the Iraqi town of Sinjar, rests at the Iraqi-Syrian border in Fishkhabour, Dohuk province August 13, 2014. REUTERS/Youssef Boudlal/File Photo – stock.adobe.com

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Crisis on the edge of Europe. Migration and self-defense in Hungary

Rashed Daher

Abstract

In 2015, as the migration crisis unfolded in Central Europe, the Hungarian government took a firm stance on the issue by attempting to regulate the unprecedented inflow of people. Hungary quickly developed a policy of resistance against the migrants and closed its green borders from the south (by constructing a border fence) to divert the arrivals to the border checkpoints. Since then, the Hungarian government has denied any illegal (undocumented) entry into the country and refers to the sovereign right of the Hungarians to decide on the question of migration.

In my paper, I try to find the political roots of the strong Hungarian resentment against migration. It is evident that the presence of any migrants from the Middle East is rejected by both the government and the public, and the reception policy of Hungary mirrors this point of view. Focus on effective border management is considered a vital element for securing the nation-state against the illegal movement of people. I distinguish and analyze five critical components of Hungarian border control: deterrence of migrants entering the country (messaging), prevention of illegal border crossings (from outside Schengen area), interdiction at the border, apprehension of those who cross the border illegally (long-range border control), and expulsion.

Keywords: migration, refugee, Fidesz, border, Hungary Helps

1. Introduction

Migration has been a highly contested issue since 2015, as many European societies are directly affected by mass immigration on a daily basis. As this relatively new situation has triggered debates on possible responses, the whole issue with all its complexity has become a priority on the policymakers' agenda.

In 2015, the emergence of the Western Balkan route for mass immigration to Europe resulted in essential changes in the Hungarian political attitude towards migration. As the country saw an unprecedented mass movement of non-European

Union citizens through its borders, the notion and discourse of a migration crisis have become central to the political life of Hungary.

The issue of migration sparked international interest for two reasons: first, the country was among the most affected countries in 2015, with 411,515 recorded crossings, which was the largest per capita number in Europe.¹ Second, the country's leadership quickly developed an unambiguous policy against migration, which has remained consistent since then. The total rejection of immigration made the Hungarian case unique in the European Union at the beginning; however, many European countries later followed the same policy or pursued similar restrictive measures against mass migration.

Thus, the research problem can be defined around the migration crisis and the position of the Hungarian government, which is highly criticized by the central European discourse. This paper tries to understand and explain the reasons for, and evaluate the effectiveness of, the Hungarian government's stance on migration, and intends to spark a debate on the general understanding of migration. One of the objectives is to see how the discourse of migration both by the governing party and the opposition parties has evolved, and how it has created an audience and interacted with it during the last four years.

In the following, this paper examines this issue from a governmental level perspective ("high policy" response) instead of a "practical" response on the ground (analysis of the day-to-day interactions among people or public opinion). It means a macro-level focus in the study of the Hungarian migration policy and border management. The rising importance of executive power worldwide make an analysis from this perspective even more timely. I argue that the Hungarian stance must be understood from the viewpoint of sovereignty and national citizenship. As migration became a "border" question for Hungary in 2015, the issue is analyzed here through five layers connected to borders and security. Besides these analytical frameworks, this paper relies on the premise that political decisions manifest in an abstracted understanding of complex situations; therefore, the governmental level, by its nature, produces and must provide somewhat simplistic answers to difficult questions.

2. Positioning: fundamentals of the migration debate

The fundamental question of every discussion on migration from receiving countries is whether they should take a pro- or an anti-migration stance. As is

¹ IOM HUNGARY 2018.

the case for every dichotomic classification, over-simplifying papers that argue for only one of the approaches cannot be considered scientific.

The pro-migration viewpoint is based on the assumption that migration is a natural part of globalization; therefore, the mass migration of people is inevitable. This approach implies the historical responsibility of European nations for the poorer countries of the Third World, which is also interlinked with globalism. However, pro-migration advocates often forget the context of sending countries, and the effects that emigration might cause for those societies. They emphasize the positive opportunities embedded in migration (such as a better labour market, better opportunities for learning, both individually and socially) as their conceptions are linked to the neoliberal market theory (such as the free-market economy and the free flow of the labour force). Even though migration is a more complex issue, the pro-migration stance plays down the negative and sometimes uncontrollable social, economic, political, and cultural consequences of immigration for the receiving countries. Ultimately, in the pro-migration approach, the focus is more likely to be on the newcomers and their integration than on the host societies.

The anti-migration stance is based on the ideology of sovereignty (that has been a crucial element of international relations since the Peace Treaty of Westphalia) and maintains that state borders and the definition of citizenship are a state monopoly and should be kept as such. Advocates of this approach emphasize the challenges and the negative aspects of migration, sometimes even through xenophobic discourses of political mobilization. Supporters of an anti-migration stance concentrate on the problems of the receiving societies and lack a comprehensive (global) attitude towards migration.

Between these two extremes, there might be a third way, an in-between approach that considers the importance of sovereignty and is also open to migration on the global level. This approach also considers the local characteristics of each society. In democratic societies, we can rightfully assume that people can make decisions on their level of openness to migration; therefore, the governments of these communities are authorized to formulate policies on immigration to the extent the popular will empowers them.² A scientifically neutral approach must rely on past experiences and the existing situation, and not on how international migration regulation should be conducted. It is a more local-minded approach but not provincialism, and is based on the premise that currently, there is no realistic

² “There is no objective way to determine what number of irregular immigrants is above the acceptable limit for a country, as it is clearly a sovereign political decision dependent on many factors.” HOKOVSKÝ 2018, p 6.

prospect of operating a migration system on a global level; therefore, every state and the societies within it can choose their position on immigration. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that focus on and support for local communities cannot be restricted to the population of the receiving countries. Still, in a similar vein, the sustainability of communities must be considered in the sending states as well. Negative consequences of migration must be responded to by a multitude of actors in different levels of governance. Also, there must be some limits that regulate the freedom of movement of people internationally. “Global” freedom to migrate would result in an unpredictable and unsustainable situation that might cause unintended social turmoil in the receiving countries as well.

The Hungarian policy is based on the realist principle that sovereignty and territorial control still constitute the most important principles in international relations. Therefore, paradoxically or, normatively speaking, unfairly or tragically, some groups and nations are eligible for accessing Europe’s most developed countries, and some are not allowed to do so legally. As EU citizens, Hungarians have the opportunity to work or study in a Western European country if they wish, not only if they are forced out of their home country. Meanwhile, although those who are the subjects of mass migration and come from outside the European Union might have the same aspirations, they are not guaranteed the right of free movement within the European Union. This reality cannot be changed overnight; therefore, the importance of borders as lines that signify the limits of legal zones is higher than ever. In the era of uncontrolled movements of people, walls and barriers have gained prominence as means by which states can regain their power to control or at least profoundly influence migratory flows.

3. That fateful year: 2015

Hungary’s strategic location in the Schengen Area is beyond question. The country is the first entry point to the Schengen Area in the Northern Balkans and, except for Greece, the first continental entry point in South-eastern Europe. The year 2015 was when the immigration issue rose high on the Hungarian political agenda, and the country itself “enjoyed” extra attention from the world, and particularly from Europe. In the following section, the paper analyses the Hungarian government’s attitude towards the nascent migration crisis, and how its position on immigration has evolved over the years.

Hungary started preparation for the crisis in early 2015, as this small country in Central Europe had seen significant increases in the number of asylum claims

over the preceding years (from 2,157 in 2012 to 18,900 in 2013. This number doubled in 2014 reaching 42,777). In February 2015, Antal Rogán, head of the parliamentary group of the governing party Fidesz, announced that the Hungarian government intended to treat migrants and their asylum application strictly, and to seek public support for restricting illegal migration to the country.³ After this clear message of deterrence, the national consultation process began in April 2015, in which the government brought the issue of migration and terrorism to public attention.⁴ Following these events, a billboard campaign against migrants was launched in May 2015. On the one hand, it focused on the potential effects of immigration on the lives of Hungarian citizens (referring to such welfare problems as locals losing their jobs due to a growing number of immigrants and the cultural transformation of the country). On the other hand, the campaign also started to envision migrants as individuals who posed a security threat to the country, and may be responsible for disorder and criminal actions (“If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws!” as one billboard stated).

In constructing the discourse on the migration crisis, the focus was on the threat that the “newcomers” may constitute to the Hungarian society.⁵ The government managed to monopolize the discussion on the subject by sidelining the opposition parties and the scientific community.⁶ The main message of this new discourse for the Hungarians was that Hungary served as a gatekeeper country, the protector of Western Europe from the south (as a border fortress). Hungary would protect the European values and the principles of “Europeanness” (the Christian foundation of Europe); therefore, it was Hungary’s responsibility to defend the continent against the culturally different out-group as long as the “madness” (and tardiness) persisted in Europe, in the general policymaking level concerning migration. In this new discourse, Hungarians were identified by the government as Christians, and Christianity was presented as the essence of Hungarian culture (the Hungarian Fundamental Law established this notion in 2012). Migrants were allegedly against this culture and positioned outside the legitimate political community.

The choice of terminology contributes to the negative discourse around migration, which is done consciously by the Hungarian government. Since the early months of the crisis in 2015, Hungarian government officials have named the newcomers

³ HCH 2015.

⁴ DESSEWFFY-NAGY 2016.

⁵ Central European countries lack significant foreign-born populations (as they are largely monoethnic), therefore have no personal experiences on immigration from different cultures. It must also be noted that a significant anti-immigrant attitudes prevailed even before the crisis. – MAGYAR HELSINKI BIZOTTSÁG 2011.

⁶ CANTAT-RAJARAM 2019.

as migrants or rather “economic migrants” and not refugees. The aim has been to signal their intention not to take responsibility for those seeking asylum, and to indicate that the Hungarian government and public cannot accept them as refugees fleeing from war zones, but views them rather as “subsistence migrants” seeking only better conditions for themselves. Playing on the fears of the public, the Hungarian government considers migrants as threats and introduced the notion of “illegal” migrant (the word “migrant” always shows up with this denominator in the governmental discourse), and also “economic” migrant. (The term “irregular migration” appears in the publications of the International Organization for Migration referring to those who migrate after the expiry of their visa, lack legal status in a transit or host country, and try to enter these countries against the statutory regulations of these countries.⁷

Parallel with the creation of a new discursive field, the Hungarian government has developed legal reasoning both for the public and the international community. Viktor Orbán’s government positioned Hungary as a country committed to the existing migration agreements, and one which follows the rules and responsibilities of the Schengen area. The Hungarian government argued that migrants coming to Hungary from the south first passed through either Bulgaria or Greece, thus under the Dublin Treaty, these countries are responsible for their registration, asylum applications, and repatriation (even if the Hungarian authorities first registered some of the migrants in 2015 and 2016). Besides, during the migration crisis in July 2015, the Hungarian government amended the Asylum Act. It declared Serbia as a safe third country for immigrants, which enabled the Hungarian authorities to deny asylum for those who entered Hungary from Serbia automatically.⁸ (Only 146 of the 177,135 applicants were granted asylum in Hungary in 2015.)⁹ During the peak of the migration crisis in the summer of 2015, the Hungarian authorities decided to set up a 175 km long fence with concrete elements along the Hungarian-Serbian border, hindering the free movement of migrants across the green border. However, the construction was not finished by the end of August, and this delay resulted in the resignation of the Hungarian Defence Minister, Csaba Hende.¹⁰ The construction was completed on 17 September 2015, and by that time, a new law criminalized those who climbed over the fence, breached or damaged it. It must be noted – as the Hungarian government has emphasized several times – that

⁷ HOKOVSKÝ 2018, p 3.

⁸ ASYLUMINEUROPE 2015.

⁹ AL-JAZEERA 2016.

¹⁰ INDEX 2015a.

the “wall’s” primary intention is to stop illegal migration¹¹ and to direct migration flows to the official international border crossing points. The government also maintained that a valid passport or an entry permit makes everybody eligible to enter Hungary; therefore, the country does not restrict people’s free movement under international agreements.

Hungary’s favorable geographic position was also an important factor in the successful deterrence of migrants by the Hungarian government. As the Hungarian border fence on the Serbian border took shape in September, Croatia was geographically unable to block the flow of migrants who started to find alternative routes to the West through the country.¹² Moreover, those who wanted to trespass through Croatia and then Hungary had to face further barriers on the Hungarian-Croatian border as well: the Drava river is a natural borderline between the two countries, and helped keep the migrants out of Hungary, as the Hungarian authorities could control the borderline more easily.

It must be acknowledged that the Hungarian government encountered a policy dilemma right before the emergence of the crisis in the early months of 2015. Finding a solution that satisfied all interested parties seemed impossible. The Hungarian government faced two choices: either acting in line with the Hungarian public opinion and rejecting immigration, or working together with the European partners and creating an open border policy, as many of them advocated, in the name of the responsibility and solidarity of European nations for immigrants. As the Hungarian government chose the former set of actions, Hungary emerged as an important (alternative) stakeholder that shapes the migration debate in Europe.

This paper argues that Europe and Hungary particularly faced a real crisis in 2015 (even if the mass movement of people was confined only to main transportation roads and the capital city), not only a constructed threat. It was unprecedented in Europe’s modern history, and can happen again, as the root causes are still at work. Besides, during that period, border control required extra capacities in many countries and crisis management procedures to decrease the potential number of incoming people.

¹¹ Here, illegal migration is defined by national laws and regulations. This approach contrasts with the claim that laws on migration should be defined by supranational principles. In the international arena, states are still the most important legal constituents, they have the legal and sovereign power to regulate, police and act according to rules and norms of the international relations.

¹² ANGYAL 2015.

4. Keeping the crisis on after 2015

The Hungarian government utilized and securitized the migration crisis, thereby leading the debate and policy actions on the whole issue. To strengthen the executive branch for the migration crisis like the one in 2015, in March 2016, the Hungarian government declared a national state of emergency, giving extraordinary legal power to the government. In June 2016, Hungary adopted a counterterrorism legislative package that ostensibly served the monitoring of the border and maintaining public order. In July 2016, new legislation enabled Hungarian authorities to extend their area of operation in defense of the southern border, meaning that refugees and migrants caught within 8 km of the border were escorted back to the Serbian side. The number of migrants forced back to Serbia reached 19,219 between 5 July and 31 December 2016. During the process, according to Doctors without Borders, there were instances of physical abuse by Hungarian authorities,¹³ which the Hungarian government repeatedly denied. These measures were part of an effective messaging campaign that aimed to deter any migrants who planned to reach Western Europe through Hungary.

In the post-2015 period, the governmental discourse on migration partly followed the same lines that were established during the crisis, somewhat extended with new elements. After the September 2015 crisis, following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, Viktor Orbán made a direct link between migration and terrorism: “We should not look at economic migration as if it had any use, because it only brings trouble and threats to European people. Therefore, immigration must be stopped”.¹⁴ Later in 2016, these thoughts were reinforced continuously by government officials, and Orbán himself called migrants “poison”.¹⁵

The anti-migration campaign remained intensive even after the unsuccessful referendum on 2 October 2016. On that day, Hungarians overwhelmingly voted against the European Union’s plan to relocate asylum seekers in the Member States. The referendum was, however, constitutionally non-binding as the participation rate was lower (40.4%) than the minimum validity threshold (50%). Fidesz, the governing party, kept the issue of migration as a priority until the elections of April 2018 and has continued to do so ever since then. By this political move, the centrist party managed to stabilize its electoral base and undermine the ultra-nationalist Jobbik party’s support. The governing party’s campaign in 2018 was centered around the external threats that Hungary was allegedly facing (excessive

¹³ MSF 2016.

¹⁴ REUTERS 2015.

¹⁵ GUARDIAN 2016.

measurements by the EU, potential “invasion” of migrants, the influence of foreign actors via civil organizations), and tried to mobilise its support base by employing nationalist overtones.¹⁶ It was overall a successful campaign: Fidesz gained two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament.

On 20 June 2018, Fidesz and Jobbik voted to amend the Fundamental Law of Hungary for the seventh time. Other parties remained passive during the vote. The most important part of the legislation was the so-called “Stop Soros” law referring to the Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros and his alleged international network to help migrants get to Europe. According to the law, organizations and people who facilitate migration in Hungary are committing a crime, and may be imprisoned. Along with the identity questions, the new amendment prescribed that every state institution should defend Hungarian identity and Christian culture.¹⁷ At the end of 2018, Hungary voted against the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration created by the UN. From these legislative measures of the past five years, it can be seen that the Hungarian government has linked the question of migration to the question of identity since the beginning of the crisis.

There are examples of Hungarian migration governance that contradict the negative discourse towards migration and implement a positive attitude towards those who came from war-torn countries. As it turned out, at the beginning of 2018, 1,291 people were granted international protection, despite the government preferring to keep silent on the issue. Some of them also received Hungarian citizenship. Most prominent among the Syrian community in Hungary was Bassam al-Ghraoui, a Syrian businessman who established a chocolate factory in a Hungarian town, Hatvan, and an exclusive chocolate store in Budapest.¹⁸ It can be argued that Hungarian society and its identity are not 100% exclusionary: there are many instances of individuals who come to Hungary and positively contribute to the local culture, economy, and community, or have a well-grounded reason to live in Hungary, who can stay and are accepted as part of the nation.

All in all, in the period of direct exposure to the migration crisis (in 2015), the government launched a robust anti-immigration campaign to underline the policy actions (border protection) that it planned to take. However, after building the border fence and physically removing migrants from public spaces, the negative discourse on migration remained, and was sometimes even strengthened. In

¹⁶ DEUTSCHE WELLE 2018.

¹⁷ HVG 2018.

¹⁸ INDEX 2016.

this second period of “crisis” (after 2015), there is no real crisis in the sense that the country has taken such preventive steps that the existing capacities of the Hungarian state (including the strengthened border protection mechanisms, such as the border fence in September 2015 and the new border fence in April 2017) can maintain normal life in the country. As a consequence, there is almost no direct interaction between local Hungarians and (possible) newcomers. In this period, the government utilized the threat perception of “distant enemies” and maintained that the European Union’s pro-migration forces might transform Hungary into a pro-migration country by compelling the leadership to accept migrants under the framework of migration solidarity in the European Union. As this imagined threat creation could not work as effectively as the real experiences of locals and migrants in 2015 (manifested in several border clashes, mass movement of migrants traveling throughout the country, and the “settlements” at Keleti railway station), the government used a harsher tone in its discourse, to magnify and prioritize the perception of threat coming from the outside.

5. No real alternatives: the opposition parties and the migration issue

To add to the diversity of the migration debate in Hungary on the level of “high politics,” the paper also incorporates several approaches of the parliamentary opposition parties in Hungary, and examines how they tried to contest the mainstream discourse. Thus can we successfully highlight the division in the Hungarian political scene between the “defenders” (anti-migration camp, the government) and the “traitors to the nation” (pro-migration camp), as the government’s discourse defines the two camps.

Opposition parties such as Jobbik, MSZP–Dialogue, DK, and LMP developed their own policy on migration,¹⁹ while the Momentum Movement (founded in 2017 and not a parliamentary party) represents a new segment within the Hungarian youth, which contests the government’s focus on migration. Except for Jobbik (a far-right party), all the other parties were left-wing or centre-left parties. Therefore, within Hungarian opposition parties, a cleavage emerged between the pro-migration left block and anti-migration Jobbik. Jobbik is openly against migration and often speaks out against different minorities.²⁰ In the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election, Jobbik received 1,092,806 votes as the second party behind the Fidesz-KDNP

¹⁹ The political stance and characteristics of these parties will be later explained.

²⁰ DESSEWFY-NAGY 2016, p 7.

coalition, with a vote share of 19.06%. Jobbik held the issue of migration to be essential and has expressed its opposition to waves of migrants since 2015. As an opposition party, Jobbik's dilemma was to remain faithful to its anti-migration attitude without echoing the government's discourse and policy. This proved hard to achieve, as the government's campaign against migration was sophisticated, extensive, and compelling for a right- and even far-right-wing public. Thus, Jobbik focused on criticizing the government of Fidesz-KDNP for being inconsistent. For example, in 2018, Jobbik denounced the granting of asylum to 2,300 people in Hungary, despite the government's restrictive policy on migration and asylum. Yet even Jobbik accepts that protection should be given to war refugees.²¹ Jobbik agrees with the Hungarian government on "reinforcing European border protection and setting up a special Hungarian border guard service." Still, it wishes to cooperate with the EU in any migration policy²² and disagrees with the government's media campaign against migration.

The MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) is an overtly pro-migration party.²³ Since 2015, it has promoted a policy of assisting transit migration through Hungary towards Western Europe by empowering humanitarian and administrative services.²⁴ It also criticized the construction of the fence along the southern Hungarian border for being expensive and for presumably accelerating migration.²⁵ MSZP has also endorsed cooperation with the EU and made a commitment to the joint European border police.²⁶ After the construction of the fence and the effect it had on controlling migration waves, MSZP had little to say about migration and turned its political communication towards criticism of the government's migration policy, especially its media campaign against immigration, which the socialist party considered to be a hate campaign.²⁷ Another component of the MSZP's approach to migration was to admit the necessity of a long-term European solution to guarantee the safety of Hungarians, while accepting all measures taken by the EU on immigration.²⁸

Similarly to the MSZP, LMP (Politics Can Be Different), as an anti-establishment green party in the opposition, focused first on dealing with the issues of migration as a humanitarian obligation, calling for improved legislation and the processing

²¹ ALFAHÍR 2018.

²² JOBBIK n.d.

²³ MSZP 2013.

²⁴ MSZP 2015a.

²⁵ MSZP 2015b.

²⁶ MSZP 2015c.

²⁷ MSZP 2015d.

²⁸ MSZP 2015e.

of asylum applications.²⁹ With the closure of the Hungarian borders, LMP moved on to criticize the government's political communication. Yet, LMP differs from Western European green parties in that it does not embrace migration wholeheartedly. Instead, it argues in favor of "strengthening the protection of the EU's external borders, claiming that mass migration is a consequence of climate change and economic exploitation by large companies."³⁰ LMP saw the solution to migration in "exploring and responding to real causes, as opposed to what it perceives as the government's "ad hoc" and "symptomatic treatment" measures."³¹ In the meantime, LMP admitted that migration should be within national competence, including the right to choose whom to live together with.

DK (Democratic Coalition) is "a left-wing party split from MSZP in the opposition, following the second and third term in power by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). Its previous leader and prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, founded DK, or Democratic Coalition, citing MSZP's inability to reform itself. DK is a social-democratic party usually gaining around 5% to 6% of votes in elections".³² DK shares the tenets of its discourse on migration with MSZP and LMP. Thus, it considers that Hungary should assume immigration and refugee policy as the duties and moral obligations of a transit country.³³ In 2015, Ferenc Gyurcsány, formerly prime minister and currently the president of DK, even said that the fence built on the Hungarian-Serbian border should be demolished. Later, in 2019, he admitted the necessity of this "symbol."³⁴ DK also argues that the Hungarian government uses migration as a political tool. The party usually refers to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee in its approach to immigration and calls for the social integration of immigrants.³⁵ In its 2017 programme, DK strongly condemned "terrorism, religious hatred, Islamic radicalism, and support any measure that contributes to the effective integration of immigrants and combats discrimination against them."³⁶ However, DK's rhetoric on migration is overshadowed by personal attacks and an obsession with Viktor Orbán. In essence, DK is not different from MSZP and LMP in its political communication on immigration, and it constantly supports the EU's migration policies.

²⁹ LMP n.d.

³⁰ LMP 2019.

³¹ LMP 2019.

³² DESSEWFY-NAGY 2016, p 7.

³³ DK 2015.

³⁴ HÍRADÓ 2019.

³⁵ DK 2015.

³⁶ DK 2017.

The Momentum Movement is a centrist and liberal political party, which started as a movement contesting the organizing of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Budapest and transformed into a political party later in March 2017, addressing mainly young graduates.³⁷ Contrary to left-wing parties, the Momentum Movement believes that the “European Union has failed in tackling the migration crisis that erupted in 2015, and that to date has not found an effective and long-term common solution to this major challenge”.³⁸ According to its 2018 programme, Momentum’s migration policy is based on three pillars: “protecting Hungary and other European states, ensuring the fundamental human rights of asylum seekers, and thirdly implementing joint European action in as many areas as possible.”³⁹ The Momentum Movement recommends a “flexible reception of refugees according to the needs of the Member States.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, Momentum suggests reforming the quota system so that states can trade refugee quotas in financial contributions, much like the climate protection regulation of the Kyoto Convention. In its 2019 programme, Momentum reiterated its propositions, highlighting security as a priority in the migration issue and insisting on border protection.⁴¹

All in all, Hungarian opposition parties adopt three attitudes towards migration: the low profile anti-migration position of Jobbik, a cautious pro-migration view of the left parties of MSZP, DK and LMP and a centrist view of the Momentum Movement which prioritises a protective approach to European borders, together with granting asylum appropriately. It can be said that all parties, due to their centrist tendency, could be seen as incoherent (if looked at from Western Europe): leftist parties are cautious enough in Hungary to embrace border control as the Hungarian public is generally opposed to migration, while Jobbik avoids emphasising a critical approach towards migration and empowering the government. In contrast to the governing party where there is no place for criticism of the party’s overtly anti-migration policy, in certain parties of the left such as in MSZP, some members (for example, István Hiller, the former leader of the party), rejected the party’s pro-migration stance and referred to the Hungarian crisis management as a “necessity” as long as there is no common European Union policy accepted by all to solve the migration crisis.⁴²

³⁷ HÍRTV 2017.

³⁸ MOMENTUM 2018.

³⁹ MOMENTUM 2018.

⁴⁰ MOMENTUM 2018.

⁴¹ MOMENTUM 2019.

⁴² INDEX 2015b.

6. In search of “the Hungarian model”

National migration policy can be defined as a set of actions in the political realm aiming to deal with immigration to the nation-state from outside the EU. The main characteristic of this approach is that it tries to keep the decision-making at the nation-state level, i.e., the national governments. The current Hungarian government clearly and coherently pursues national migration policies as – based on previous experience of the bad management of the migration crisis on the EU level – it insists on tackling the migration issue on the level of nation-states and considers the EU institutions only as conciliation bodies. Similarly, the Hungarian government disregards the lowest levels of migration governance, the level of non-governmental organizations (including local responses to migration), and the level of migrants and refugees themselves (self-governing institutions of migrants and refugees). Therefore, the Hungarian response to immigration in Europe can be regarded as a one-level policy compared to the complex and multi-level migration challenge.⁴³

The central elements of the Hungarian reaction to immigration are creating and protecting an imagined as well as an actual border between the Hungarian citizens and the potential or real newcomers. As border-making is the central element of the Hungarian government’s political response, I summarise these policy steps of the last four years in connection with five concentric borderlines (both real and imagined). The aim of this system is the “bordering and ordering of a Hungarian national body”⁴⁴ by distinguishing between the groups of valuable and valueless.

These five components of Hungarian border control constitute the backbone of the so-called “Hungarian method” in migration issues.

1. deterrence of migrants entering the country (messaging)⁴⁵
2. prevention of illegal border crossings (from outside Schengen area)

⁴³ Migration governance policies might be developed by actors on four different levels. If decision making is shared and in harmony among these levels, the system can be considered as the multilevel governance of migration.

1. transnational level (by supranational institutions such as the EU)
2. national level (by national governments)
3. subnational, local level (by municipalities, local NGOs)
4. subject level (by the self-governing institutions of the migrants and refugees)

⁴⁴ CANTAT–RAJARAM 2018.

⁴⁵ Deterrence is the first step towards the prevention of the start of the migrant journey. The most important deterrent factor can be reality itself. “Many irregular migrants attempt to reach the EU under a false perception of an easier life. Once in the EU territory, they are disappointed with the reality.” HOKOVSKÝ 2018, p 17.

3. interdiction at the border
4. the apprehension of those who cross the border illegally (long-range border control)
5. expulsion or repatriation of illegal immigrants

As for the imagined borders, the government used different messages in its anti-migration campaign (economic migrants, migrants as terrorists, migrants do not respect the laws of Hungary), some of them contradicting each other.⁴⁶ It seems that in the first years of the discourse, the government aimed to address a unified audience disregarding the existing social and intellectual differences among various groups of Hungarian society. Lately, there has been an effort by the government to accumulate intellectual capacities in defense of the anti-migration discourse, thereby differentiating the audiences of higher and lower social and educated classes. Organizing scientific debates and inviting foreign experts that are in line with the mainstream discourse is not a paradigmatic change, but it is a crucial step out of the comfort zone and a step towards gaining more legitimacy both on the domestic and the international level. Therefore, unsurprisingly, verifying the government's arguments became prominent through the emergence of an anti-integration block within the EU, in which the Hungarian government claims to be a leading actor.

The “new” discursive campaign points beyond the defensive and reactive framework mentioned above, and cannot cover the full picture. Concerning the active measures taken by the Hungarian government, there is a strong commitment to the Eastern Christians in the Middle East. As such, Hungary positions itself as the defender of Christianity in Europe and among the oldest communities of Christianity in the Middle East. The government, therefore, seeks balance between different peoples of the Middle East, and helps to maintain religious diversity by addressing the root causes of migration in potential sending countries, and promoting Hungarian interests at the same time (supporting local initiatives in the sending countries under the framework of Hungary Helps program, such as post-conflict reconstruction among Christian communities in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt).⁴⁷ The observers who only started to comment on Hungary's foreign policy during or after the management of the migration crisis in 2015 do not justify the Hungarian foreign policy, forgetting about the fact that Hungary's policy of protecting its borders and restrictive migration policy was accompanied

⁴⁶ According to the billboard campaign, “migrants take the jobs of Hungarians”, however, migrants are also depicted as lazy people (or economic migrants) in governmental discourse.

⁴⁷ I want to express my gratitude to my colleague, Abdessamad Belhaj for his counsel on these issues.

from an early stage by a coherent strategy of helping societies of the Middle East and Africa to develop.

These initiatives are closely connected with the so-called Eastern Opening policy, which first took shape in the early years of the second Fidesz government (2010-2014). The action was formulated in 2011 but became particularly active in 2012 and 2013, extending later also to Southern countries (Africa and Latin America).⁴⁸ In light of the migration crisis of 2015, the aim of this foreign policy activism became twofold. First, it aimed to reduce the push factors towards migration among those who reside mainly in poor economic and social conditions in these Eastern and Southern countries. It also shows consistency between restrictive migration policies, channeling support and creating mutual economic benefits for the Middle East and Africa. Second, this new activism coincided with the increasing threat to Christian communities in these countries, and the Hungarian government has sought to mitigate the problems of these local communities by providing support for them. This activity is in line with the Christian character of Hungary, as manifested in the Fundamental Law (constitution) of 2012.

Hungary's model of assistance as part of Hungary Helps is highly selective as it targets communities that are connected to some form of Christianity or a Christian church. Therefore, the support to persecuted Christians and underdeveloped areas in the Middle East and Africa is unique. A deputy state secretariat for aiding persecuted Christians was created in 2016. It is based on the idea that everyone should stay in their homeland instead of migrating. Some countries have been inspired by the Hungarian model, such as the United States, Germany, and Denmark, while other countries have followed the Hungarian example, such as Slovakia, as the Slovak National Council also embraced the issue of persecuted Christians.⁴⁹ Since its inception in 2017, the Hungary Helps programme has enabled "some 35,000 people to choose to stay in their homeland rather than migrate".⁵⁰

The Hungary Helps programme has supported a dozen countries in Africa and Asia as well, and has built hospitals, schools etc. Syria is the primary beneficiary of assistance. In November 2018, Hungary Helps supported hospital care for Syrian war victims.⁵¹ In May 2019, "financial help was offered to build a center for children and families in Aleppo."⁵² Hungary Helps has supported Iraq several times

⁴⁸ FARKAS – PAP – REMÉNYI 2016, p 6.

⁴⁹ KORMÁNY 2018.

⁵⁰ VASÁRNAP.HU 2019.

⁵¹ KORMÁNY 2018.

⁵² ORIGO 2019.

as well. One of the most recent examples occurred in May 2019, when Hungary Helps assisted Assyrian Iraqi Christians in building the Erbil School of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the rehabilitation of the St. George's Church belonging to the Eastern Assyrian Church".⁵³ In addition to Syria and Iraq, Hungary Helps also gives donations to Egypt. This was the case in December 2018 when Hungary Helps supported "family members of the victims of the November El Minya terrorist attack."⁵⁴

The programme supports African countries as well. Thus, in June 2019, Hungary Helps gave 483 million forints to the Mai Ayni refugee camp in Ethiopia, which is maintained by church organizations, and donated another 161 million forints to the Ethiopian clinic Migbare-Senay.⁵⁵ In 2019, Hungary Helps "provided 486 million forints to Catholic and Protestant communities in Nigeria to mitigate the effects of armed violence against local Christians."⁵⁶

It must be noted that these forms of assistance are small-scale from the perspective of the whole migration crisis but essential for particular and well-selected local communities to help their preservation in times of economic, political, and social crises.

Besides the cultural proximity of those supported, economic partnerships promote a long-term solution to the migration problem, as they foster prosperity in the Middle East. Thus, more trade and more economic cooperation with the region's countries mitigate the tensions and moderate the push factors of migration.

One example of this approach can be illustrated by the Hungarian investments in Egypt in 2018, totaling "about 41.5 million dollars in 60 projects in the sectors of manufacturing, services, and tourism".⁵⁷ Suffering from significant water scarcity, Egypt is currently working with the Hungarian company Water and Soil to obtain assistance "in the field of water systems management, including training and exchange of expertise, technical information and localization of technology."⁵⁸

Stipendium Hungaricum is an educational programme that allows "thousands of students from all around the world to apply for higher academic studies in Hungary each year. In the 2018/2019 round of applications, more than 4,100

⁵³ HírTV 2019.

⁵⁴ KDNP 2018.

⁵⁵ VASÁRNAP.HU 2019.

⁵⁶ 24.HU 2020.

⁵⁷ ELWATANNEWS 2019.

⁵⁸ MASPERO 2019.

scholarships were awarded, and currently, over 5,000 students study in Hungary through the Stipendium Hungaricum.⁵⁹

Middle Eastern and African countries are the primary beneficiaries of Stipendium Hungaricum. Data from 2018 shows clearly the share of these countries in the programme. The following 17 countries received most of the scholarships:

Country	Number of students	Rate
Pakistan	5,529	19.5%
Syria	2,229	7.9%
Jordan	2,061	7.3%
Nigeria	1,498	5.3%
Ghana	1,412	5.0%
Kazakhstan	1,062	3.7%
Yemen	840	3.0%
India	821	2.9%
Mongolia	797	2.8%
Tunisia	684	2.4%
Algeria	674	2.4%
Tanzania	660	2.3%
Egypt	636	2.2%
Iraq	635	2.2%
Kenya	631	2.2%

Source : TKA 2017.

The Hungarian government also developed other initiatives to help countries in the Middle East and Africa, both academically and scientifically. For instance, “Hungary is also working on establishing a university in the Middle East, in collaboration with Budapest’s Pázmány Péter Catholic University.”⁶⁰

7. Conclusion

Hungary found itself at the forefront of the migration crisis in Europe. The government’s position in the discussion of the issue seemed relatively more substantial than the country’s size. Moreover, for many, the consistently “harsh” stance of the political leadership on the topic of migration contributed to the emergence of a unique Hungarian approach in the debate. During the analyzed

⁵⁹ STUDYINHUNGARY n.d.

⁶⁰ HUNGARYTODAY 2017.

period, one can see consistency in the Hungarian position against the contradictory interests and conflicting lines between member states and other stakeholders. This consistency aims to deliver a crystal-clear message: Hungary does not want to be part of a new global burden-sharing system in which participants aim to accept people from different cultures as part of the nation.

Viktor Orbán contends that Hungary represents the mean opinion of the EU citizens on the topic of migration. According to him, there is an emerging conservative axis in the world stretching from the USA, through British conservatives, Bavarian Christian Democrats, to Polish and Israeli rightists that consider Hungarian politics an ally.⁶¹ It is evident that Orbán's advances in European politics are based on the issue of migration and strong anti-establishment rhetoric, but in general, these are not the defining political factors in international relations, since political alliances that are built on existing economic and political structures have a more decisive role in the formation of governmental influence.

This paper argues that the legal basis for migration to or through the Hungarian territory is ineffective under the current legislative background as defined by the Dublin Regulation and the Schengen Treaty. However, the Hungarian government has to strike a delicate balance between identity issues and "practical" policies on the EU level, to avoid rifts between Hungary and other members of the European Union.

Finally, it must be noted that the Hungarian way of handling the migration crisis is very much dependent on the specificity of the Hungarian case, though this may be similar in some respects to the environment of and conditions prevailing in other member states (such as V4 countries). Still, it may face serious challenges to becoming a mainstream European policy direction.

⁶¹ MANDINER 2018.

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