



HUNGARY TURNS ITS BACK ON EUROPE 2.

DISMANTLING
CULTURE, EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND THE MEDIA
IN HUNGARY
2020–2021



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OKTATÓI HÁLÓZAT
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With this volume, we continue our "Hungary turns its back on Europe" report, which was finalised in autumn 2019 and published in January 2020, "prepared by independent Hungarian intellectuals who wish to inform the Hungarian and international public as well as European institutions about the severe harm that the Orbán regime governing Hungary since 2010 has caused in the fields of education, science, culture, and the media."¹

The reason for carrying on with our work is that, in the meantime, the situation in Hungary has exacerbated: the authoritarian features of the Orbán regime have been further strengthened, dismantling of the rule of law has continued, and the government's "cultural warfare" has moved up a gear and is increasingly destructive in the domain of culture. It is our common experience that Hungary, using European Union funds, has built an openly anti-European, 21st century autocracy, which has taken the state captive, dismantled the checks and balances essential to the rule of law, turned democratic institutions into an empty shell, invaded the media and made corruption systemic.

The Orbán regime, however, has recently shown signs of erosion. Fidesz has become isolated within the European Union and is being squeezed in a grip by domestic opposition that, by now, has come to its senses. The approaching 2022 parliamentary elections are predicted to be a close contest, pushing the government into increasingly unscrupulous and irresponsible actions. Perhaps the most important development of the past two years is that Fidesz has built a "parallel state" that allows it to control certain areas even in the event of electoral defeat. The key tools for the transfer of power are the new type of foundations – in fact, trusts equipped with public functions – into which the government is in the process of diverting an astonishing amount of public money and assets. It is also the fear of losing power that motivates the increasingly militaristic rhetoric of government propaganda, covert surveillance, slander and smearing of the opposition using fabricated corruption allegations.

In the second volume of our report, we will attempt to summarise what has happened over the past two years and to complement our previous work by presenting areas that have not been covered in our former analysis. In a separate Gender chapter, for example, we will take a look at the Orbán regime's policy on women and the dramatic deterioration of the situation of LGBTQI people. There will be a chapter on the re-convergence of church and state, and in a separate chapter we will dwell on the controversies of how the government is handling the Covid epidemic. In the Education section, we will analyse the changes in public and higher education over the last two years, and this time we will also review developments in vocational and adult education after 2010, while in the Science segment we will elaborate on the issue of innovation, as well. Obviously, we do not aim to be exhaustive this time either but try to summarise the developments and focus on the key issues.

This report, like the previous one, has been prepared by researchers, academics and professionals working in the areas concerned, many of whom are also involved in NGO activities.

The following civil organisations and NGOs participated in the compilation of the text: Hungarian Academy Staff Forum (Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma), Civil Platform for Public Education (Civil Közoktatási Platform), Eötvös Károly Policy Institute (Eötvös Károly Közpolitikai Intézet), FreeSZFE Society (Freeszfe Egyesület), Mertek Media Monitor (Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely), Association for Historic Building Conservation (Régi Épületek Kutatóinak Egyesülete), Stadium 28 Circle (Stádium 28 Kör), Society of Hungarian Authors (Szépirok Társasága).

The effort has been initiated and coordinated by the Hungarian Network of Academics (Oktatói Hálózat)².

We would also like to thank all those individuals who have donated to the publication of this book. Special thanks to the Marion Dönhoff Foundation for supporting the work of two of our authors with scholarships.

¹ Our previous report can be downloaded from our website: <http://oktatoihalozat.hu/>.

² The Hungarian Network of Academics is an autonomous organisation of teachers and researchers in Hungarian higher education.

SUMMARY

THE EXPANSION OF AUTOCRACY

Over the past 12 years, we have witnessed the emergence of a 21st century autocracy in Hungary, a member state of the European Union. Fidesz-KDNP, in government since 2010 with a two-thirds majority, has created the conditions for the personal – unrestrained and arbitrary – exercise of power by the Prime Minister, by systematically eliminating the checks and balances of the rule of law and by the unparalleled concentration and centralisation of power. Corruption has become a fundamental feature of state functioning, benefiting the holders of political power, oligarchs close to them and clients loyal to the regime.

After Fidesz's victory in the general elections in spring 2018, a contradictory situation emerged: on the one hand, the Prime Minister reached the peak of his power, but the system started on a path of erosion, internal decay and external isolation, on the other. In local elections in autumn 2019, the opposition parties won the mayor's seat and gained majority in the general assemblies in a number of major Hungarian cities, including the capital city. In the autumn of 2021, the opposition parties that maintained their alliance held successful primaries, and the 2022 parliamentary elections are forecast to offer a chance to topple the Orbán regime. The regime has lost a significant part of its external support in Europe, and the ruling party is now floating in a vacuum in the EU. Orbán is no longer the "strong man of Europe", but a local autocrat, who is trying to dismantle the EU from within, and whose double-talk has been recognised in the EU.

Over the past two years, the autocratic elements of the regime have become more visible, more palpable, more threatening, and even the external attributes of liberal democracy have begun to disintegrate. One sign of this process was the introduction of governance by decrees in the spring of 2020, under the pretext of the pandemic, with a series of laws and decrees restricting political freedoms and facilitating the expropriation of public funds and assets.

As the parliamentary elections are approaching, Fidesz's political strategy is focussing on ensuring the survival of the system in the event of an electoral defeat. The preservation of political and economic power is being carried out by new means compared to the methods the party used in the past. A number of state cultural institutions and the vast majority of Hungarian state universities have been placed under the management of "public interest asset management foundations performing public tasks" with boards of trustees loyal to FIDESZ. Institutions performing a public function and using central budgetary resources are thus placed under the control of a "parallel state", and their operation becomes uncontrollable.

NEW TYPES OF FOUNDATIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF POWER

Public interest asset management foundations performing public tasks (KEKVAs; i.e. AMFPPTs) were set up by legislators to outsource public assets with the aim to place entire sectors under the control of pro-government cadres for the long term. These new types of foundations have been set up mainly in the areas of higher education and culture: two thirds of the 33 KEKVAs created by the end of 2021 will manage institutes of higher education previously run by the state. The KEKVAs have received capital injections in the order of HUF 1,000 billion from public assets, including thousands of immovable assets and company shares. The boards of trustees of the KEKVAs are largely composed of officials loyal to the current political party in power; many of them are or were members of the government or are senior government officials. At the same time, the boards of trustees are authorised to exercise founding rights, thus future governments are deprived of the power of having a say in the composition of the boards. The state thus also waived its right to intervene in or control the operation of foundations established with public funds in the future. At the same time, it undertook a long-term commitment to finance the operation of the KEKVAs from the central budget. As the creators of this model consider the KEKVAs to be entities governed by private law, it is likely to be difficult to apply public control over their operations.

IDEOLOGICAL OFFENSIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF ECLECTICISM AND MILITARISATION

Prime Minister Orbán's system is characterised by total pragmatism in ideological terms: every symbol, myth, narrative is used in public communication, if its use promises potential benefits for the regime in some way. The symbolic facade of the NER (i.e. the "system of national co-operation") is thus very diverse: values that are often in conflict with each other can coexist peacefully: "Christian" and "ancient Hungarian", "national" and "one with Turkic consciousness", "popular" and "bourgeois", "conservative" and "radical", etc.

After Viktor Orbán's third victory by two-thirds majority in the 2018 general elections, he announced his "cultural era change" programme, which suggested that Fidesz wanted to transform culture as a whole in a voluntaristic way, to shape it to its own image. In the last 2-3 years, the pro-government press has been proclaiming a "Kulturkampf – culture war", calling for a more committed right-wing-nationalist role of the state, a more militant-partisan support policy, and the replacement of the old cultural elite, which is labelled "leftist liberal". However, the occupation of the cultural sphere continues to take the form of crude moves of power – budgetary, organisational and personnel decisions – and the reluctance and growing alienation of professional elites from the power.

We are witnessing the simplification and obfuscation of centralised messages and discourses in the area of the intertwined state and party propaganda. Fidesz, which is becoming increasingly isolated both externally and internally, addresses primarily its own supporters: it tries to keep its camp together by primitive fear-mongering and by reinforcing the psychosis concerning the image of Hungary as a "besieged fortress". This is achieved by direct and crude politicisation of all important social issues (e.g. the pandemic, the economic crisis or migration), by framing them as a life-and-death struggle between "us" and "them". Linked to this is the apparent militarisation of government communication. Alongside the idea of a sovereign "strong state", there is also a barely concealed irredentist agenda of increasing military self-defence and dominance over the Carpathian Basin. A new element is that in Orbán's speeches, the male figure of the dutiful, self-sacrificing soldier appears more and more often as a symbol of the patriarchal command-and-control system.

CHURCH AND STATE – REVERSING SECULARISATION

The Orbán government's attitude towards churches and Christianity has remained essentially unchanged compared to what it was during its terms in governance following 2010. The government's political communication focuses on the closely intertwined bonds of faith, family and nation. It uses the churches as a source of political legitimacy and Christianity as an identity narrative that signals above all a political attachment to conservative nationalism and the tradition of Christian nationalism.

Parallel with this practice, the political discourse and symbolic politicisation that define the Hungarian state as a "Christian-national" state are increasingly assertive, by questioning the modern principle of separation of church and state and is increasingly pointing towards "resacralization" of the political arena and everyday life.

The withdrawal of the state from the provision of public and welfare services is a process that is typical of the whole of Europe, but the involvement of the churches in this process is a specifically Hungarian phenomenon. Since 2011, the established churches have been incentivised by generous funding and regulatory instruments to maintain their institutions, and, as a result, the outsourcing of public and welfare services by the state is taking place in an increasing number of areas. In the meantime, the uncertain position of the non-established churches involved in providing public services has become even more uncertain. The transformation of the church-state relationship permeates the churches with politics and the task imposed on them to maintain a vast number of institutes is increasing their vulnerability and dependence on the state.

PRO-GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA AND HEGEMONY IN THE MEDIA

As we have already indicated in our previous report, after its victory in the general elections in 2010, Fidesz gradually occupied almost the entire Hungarian public sphere, and is now able to almost constantly push its political agenda. In the past few years, and especially during the scandalous pandemic management, it became clear that Fidesz sees governance as a communication activity. Government members and leading politicians are increasingly selected on the basis of public relations considerations as their primary task is to represent power to the public, a task which is supported by huge communications staffs. Fidesz is keen to use social platforms, which are particularly suitable for mobilisation, and is also consciously redirecting public information into these personalised virtual spaces.

Since 2019, the media hegemony of the governing party in Hungary has been further strengthened, the loss of space for independent and opposition media and the restriction of free access to information has continued. Free access to information has become increasingly difficult, while the huge funds spent on public media and the Fidesz media empire, the Central European Press and Media Foundation, are essentially used for government propaganda and to discredit the opposition and non-governmental organisations. The state is the largest advertiser in Hungary, and 85 % of its spending on advertisements has been allocated for pro-government media companies, making it financially impossible for independent media to operate.

With the 2020 government takeover of Index, formerly the most popular independent internet portal, the two largest of the three leading online media outlets are now under the influence and control of the government.

Since 2010, the radio market has shrunk significantly, with all of the major radio stations entertaining a larger audience now in the hands of pro-government owners. Since the last opposition regional radio station Klubrádió was deprived of its broadcasting rights by the authorities, it can only be accessed on the Internet. Meanwhile, the Media Council has done everything in its power to prevent the spread of digital radio broadcasting in Hungary.

In the market for television stations that also broadcast public content, there is also a complete predominance of pro-government broadcasters. The only politically independent television station is RTL Klub, owned by Bertelsmann, which is essentially entertainment-oriented and whose programmes on public affairs account for only a few percent of its airtime. The only TV channel with a public life focus (ATV) is owned by a fundamentalist church, which is also heavily dependent on government subsidies provided for churches.

Printed press, which is already in a steady decline, suffered the heaviest losses during the pandemic. Demand for the hundreds of press products that had already been merged into the Fidesz-affiliated media foundation has fallen spectacularly. The distribution of the two remaining independent dailies has been discontinued by the state-owned Magyar Posta Zrt., making it difficult for them to reach subscribers.

The central budget funded Hungarian news agency (MTI) and the so-called public service media, openly operating as sounding boards under total government control, are but mouthpieces for propaganda. The most important public event of the past period, the opposition primaries, practically received no coverage at all.

Restricting access to information during the pandemic had serious consequences: the government obstructed the provision of information to the population by withholding information, manipulating data, concealing the real situation and propagandising for success. This may also be a factor that caused Hungary to rank in a leading position among countries in the COVID 19 deaths per capita.

POLITICAL PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

Although the first and second waves of the coronavirus epidemic in Hungary were relatively mild, the third and fourth waves led to a severe health crisis, and Hungary to the top of the list of countries concerning COVID 19 deaths per million people.

How the epidemic was handled showed the weaknesses of the NER in a concentrated way: the management of the epidemic was subordinated to short-term foreign and domestic policy objectives and the always prevailing financial gain, while professional aspects and the opinions of professional organisations and independent experts were neglected. The government's handling of the epidemic was unprofessional, ill-considered, hasty and, at the same time voluntaristic: health data were concealed and manipulated; decision making centres were multiplied and the system made opaque; some issues were handled centrally, responsibilities blurred and obscured; popular measures were used for propaganda purposes, unpopular decisions were delayed or passed on to various other institutions (municipalities, schools, companies, etc).

Irresponsible and bad governance in the case of the pandemic is hard to be compared to the damage done in the cultural field. In this area the loss is measured in human lives. At the end of December 2021, when our report was finalised, nearly 39,000 Hungarian citizens had already died of coronavirus infection – 395 per 100,000 inhabitants.

CONSERVATIVE FAMILY IDEALS, SELECTIVE FAMILY SUPPORT, GENDER BIAS

Women policy conducted during the Orbán regime can be characterised by deceptive features: on the surface, it may appear to be implementing the aspirations of feminism, as it has incorporated some of the demands of women's movements into its rhetoric, for example, the ones on women's employment. However, in reality, it runs contrary to the emancipationist objectives, favouring only demographic considerations and reinforcing the subordination of women in a society that prefers male domination.

The NER's women policies are not primarily about women, but about the family – in which "the mother is a woman, the father is a man" – where the women's traditional role of carer and servant is taken for granted. The NER is trying to influence selective population growth through two-faced state regulation: on the one hand, it encourages the birth of more children, preferably middle-class, by providing a wide range of support for families in employment, and, it keeps vital universal benefits for the poorest families with children at extremely low levels, on the other.

The discourse and practice of gender equality, like the concept of gender, has become a subject of witch-hunt over the last 10 years and a leading issue in opposing related trends in the European Union. In 2018, courses to acquire Master's degree in Social Gender Studies were removed from the curricula of Hungarian universities, thus totally neglecting university autonomy. At the same time, the discourse and policy of "gender equality" was abolished.

Although public policy supports and even expects women to work – for example, by linking substantial family allowances to labour market participation – in the absence of gender equality policies, an increasing number of female employees are trapped in degradingly underpaid jobs and often in public employment. Women are doubly exploited: they have to carry out the unpaid household and care tasks that fall on them, and they also have to participate in paid work, without being supported in the labour market by either structural conditions or gender equality values. Women's earnings in Hungary are still 16 % lower than those of men's, with the result that the difference between men's and women's pensions is 10 % in favour of men.

The NER's growing maternalistic, natalist, exclusionary, anti-gender and anti-diversity policies over 3 terms led to the point that the pro-government MPs in majority in the Hungarian Parliament voted against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2020.

The Fidesz leadership is often criticised for operating as a closed male party. In the past 12 years of the party in power, during some periods there were no female members of the government at all, and the number of female ministers has never exceeded three. In 2020, Hungary had the lowest proportion of female MPs in parliament in the EU: 12.6 %. Recently, the NER has been trying to make its rigid public image more attractive by promoting a few highly qualified young female politicians to high political positions.

ATTACK AGAINST SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES

Fidesz started restricting the fundamental rights of LGBTQI people as soon as it came to power in 2010. The Basic Law contained provisions that banned marriage between same-sex couples (2011), and two years later it was also enshrined in the Basic Law that marriage constituted the foundation for the family. This also excluded same-sex couples in civil partnership from the concept of family.

Linked to the government's practice of labelling more and more social groups as Hungary's enemies, the LGBTQI minority was again targeted following a relatively calm period after the migration wave in 2015, and the government launched a propaganda campaign against them in 2019. In May 2020, a law banned transgender people from getting their names and gender legally recognised. In autumn 2020, a storybook entitled "Fairyland for All", which included LGBTQI characters, was shredded at a press conference by a politician representing an extremist right-wing dwarf party named "Our Country". The action of a female member of this party was met with loud approval by the Prime Minister and pro-government press. On 15 June 2021, the National Assembly, by adopting a law on the fight against paedophilia, restricted the activities of NGOs in educational institutions to raise awareness of the LGBTQI phenomenon, and restricted the availability of LGBTQI content in media and films to people under 18. The pro-government media portrayed experts and human rights activists who opposed the law as supporters of paedophilia.

CULTURAL WARFARE

The cultural policy of Fidesz is above all about power politics. The framework of power politics in the area of culture is defined by its narrow concept. It is an intellectual policy in so far as it selects and supports among competing intellectual groups "nationally committed" ones and makes them clients of the government. It is institution-centred, in that it sees cultural institutions run by elites as centres of power and ideology. Fidesz assumes that the institutions it controls can get their ideological messages across to the whole society, and it finds a means to do so primarily in popular culture.

The discourse on power during the past two years has been dominated by the expression and rhetoric of "Kulturkampf" or "culture war". The main reason for this was that the Fidesz's power apparatus realised that while it had succeeded to a large extent in imposing its will on structures and actors in economic areas, the judiciary system and the media, the same could not be said of a significant number of some important actors in the cultural sector. Nor did the party succeed in transforming the world of Hungarian culture in any meaningful way by forcibly occupying institutions, excluding independent artists, rewarding politically loyal intellectuals disproportionately in relation to their performance, demanding a "change of canon", etc. Thus, even today, in the 12th year of Fidesz's political rule by two-thirds majority, this sector still has a small, but not entirely negligible potential for resistance in terms of its social impact.

In the past two years, centralisation has continued in the area of literary politics, with the appointment of leaders fiercely loyal to the Prime Minister to leading positions of state institutions, and the reduction of resources and making the operating conditions of organisations and forums that are considered oppositional difficult. The management of literary organisations and support systems was taken over by Szilárd Demeter, writer and editor, notorious for his provocative statements, and his appointment in 2019 signalled an intensification of the culture war and the expiry of power of moderate actors on the governing party's side, who are now being replaced by radicals. Demeter, as the government's "strong man", is gradually extending his power to an even larger area of culture. The institutional structure built around him is more and, in some respects less like a ministry of culture, since it covers nearly the whole cultural area but the cultural empire under his leadership that functions in a legal status as a public benefit asset management foundation, therefore it is outside the control of parliament.

In theatre arts, certain trends identified in the previous report have continued, such as the manual management and centralisation of the area, with generous state support for certain programmes, while other trends have intensified, such as the support of institutions openly loyal to the government from a support scheme that replaces the abolished Tao subsidy (system of corporate income tax support considered by the Commission to be investigated as for its market-distorting impact and whether prohibited state support is involved), and the appointment of people loyal to the government to senior positions. However, there is a suspicious silence on some issues – such as the funding of independent theatres, a "thorn under the nail" on the government's side for decades, the status of which is planned to be rethought from scratch, "of course" without consulting those affected.

At the same time, the cynical dismantling of the autonomy of the University of Theatre and Film Arts finally reached far beyond the tolerance level of the public: the performative actions of those who protested against this measure provided feed for thought for the whole of Hungary.

As the government has not supported freelance artists in any way during the COVID period, nor the non-profit institutions that provide them with venues of inspiration, poverty and existential tension among artists is increasing. The community of artists critical of the government is becoming even more isolated, as it finds neither resources nor sustainable operating models in the current cultural political climate. Discriminatory regulations affecting LGBTQI people also affect some areas of arts, creating the possibility of direct censorship, while structural censorship inherent in state institutions is also gaining ground.

In 2020, a year after the death of former government commissioner for cinematography, Andy Vajna, the system of state funding for Hungarian cinematography was radically remodelled. Under the supervision of a new government commissioner, state funding for film production was placed in the hands of a single organisation. Preliminary declarations and the subsidies allocated so far indicate that support for cinematography is also being provided as determined by "Kulturkampf", serving the cultural aims set by the government.

The majority of Hungarian museums were severely affected by Act XXXII of May 2020, under which the status of civil servants in museums, archives, libraries and cultural institutions was abolished on 1 November 2020, and replaced by public employment status. There were also shifts of emphasis in the very structure of museums. In 2021, a third player joined the two existing priority museum centres, the Museum of Fine Arts, which is also in charge of the Liget Budapest project, and the Petőfi Literary Museum, which was created by extending the competences of the "new literary powerhouse" linked to Szilárd Demeter. In April, László L. Simon, former Undersecretary and Fidesz MP, was appointed Ministerial Commissioner for Museum Integration. His tasks included the renewal of the Hungarian National Museum, the centralisation of the archaeological and artefact conservation activities of Hungarian museums and the renewal of the entire museum sector. He was also partly assigned with the issues of museum investment projects and museum relocation in Budapest, which may entail serious issues not only for the present, but also for the future. A few months later László L. Simon was also appointed Director General of the National Museum, and his candidature, as well as his previous directorship reflect a desire to ensure that museum exhibitions are in line with the government's current memory policy.

In December 2018, the Fidesz government decided to move the Hungarian Museum of Natural History from Budapest to a provincial town named Debrecen because the National University of Public Service claims to use its buildings. This decision was confirmed in January 2020, despite public protests. To implement its plan, the government appointed a new director to head the museum. Under this dictatorial leader, who has no academic degree, the museum began to erode. The museum staff gradually disintegrated, with dozens of professionals leaving the institution, including the heads of some collections.

With the abolition of the central state institution of heritage protection in Hungary in 2012, the organisation and professionalism of heritage protection has been completely dismantled, and professional decisions that go against the political will of the government cannot be made. In this context, the ideological and economic interests of the government are increasingly determining the management of World Heritage sites, especially in Budapest and Lake Fertő, and this has led to the withdrawal of the bid of the Limes of Rome in Trans-Danubia from the application process for the status of a World Heritage site.

EDUCATION – REGRESSION, MICRO-MANAGEMENT, SEGREGATION

The main trends in education policy illustrate how Orbán's regime seeks to shape society according to its own established ideas. The function of education to promote social mobility has virtually disappeared: from primary to higher education, it is becoming increasingly difficult for disadvantaged groups to access quality education and thus to progress. In recent years, ethnic segregation has increased, the already small room for manoeuvre for teachers and institutions has been restricted, and the elimination of autonomy has become almost complete. There is increasing ideological interference in the content of education, and the imposition of "national and Christian" content in line with the dominant conception of nation.

Although the protests of teachers in 2016 resulted in a more modern National Core Curriculum (NAT), from 2018 the new core curriculum was revised in an offensive to increase the intellectual influence of the authorities, leaving out the professional organisations that had expressed their wish to participate in the process.

After the ideologically motivated revision of the NAT, aimed at strengthening national identity, a new basic curriculum was rapidly adopted, followed by new textbooks. These contained a number of very outdated values and they lacked expert support. In literary education, more space than before is devoted to authors associated with extreme right-wing ideologies between the two world wars, who were included in the NAT during the second Orbán government. At the same time, the amount of knowledge to be taught in many subjects has been increased, making it impossible to achieve modern pedagogical goals of active learning, competence development and literacy.

Over the past decade, Hungarian public education has undergone a process of privatisation due to the expansion of a network of schools operated by various churches. This reorganisation was not triggered by an increase in demand for church education but was in fact the result of deliberate and targeted government interventions serving political ends. Between 2010 and 2018, the share of church-owned private schools in primary education roughly doubled, and in secondary education it increased by two and a half times. The expansion of church-owned education has led to increased educational inequalities (social selection and segregation of Roma pupils), a deterioration in the efficiency of the school network and, in a large number of municipalities, a violation of parents' rights to provide their children with types of education that are in line with their religious, philosophical or pedagogical beliefs.

After 2020, following suit with the previous FIDESZ governments' measures to reduce quality in education, the conditions for pedagogical development work in nursery schools deteriorated, and the duration of teacher training was reduced from six to five years.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, education managers were reluctant to involve some education stakeholders in the development of protective measures. In the absence of effective government action, children from disadvantaged families, especially Roma families, often faced insurmountable difficulties in accessing digital education. The epidemic also highlighted the difficulties many teachers face in using digital tools.

No progress has been made since 2010 to modernise the Hungarian school system, including vocational education. Contrary to international trends, the duration of general education has not changed and, in fact, in vocational schools with 20 % of all the students, both the total duration of education and the time devoted to general competence development have been significantly reduced. VET, like education as a whole, is outdated and not adapted to generational characteristics. The specialisation of students at the age of 14 into school types with significantly different life chances leaves room for selection by social background. The preference for vocational education and training from the age of 14, without any meaningful opportunity for change, narrows life paths. Unprepared and often back-and-forth "reforms" without professional consultation, increased the burdens of teachers due to shortages of teaching staff and central requirements, and the lack of appreciation of their work has exhausted them. Although the 2020 reform of vocational education and training in principle offers the possibility of some modern solutions, the implementation of such reforms is highly improbable.

Hungary is lagging far behind in participation in adult learning, especially concerning employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, and in the area of participation of people with low educational attainment and those living in disadvantaged areas, as well as in the digital skills of the population. Although many training courses have been delivered with EU support, their effectiveness is undermined by protectionism in the selection of trainers and the lack of information and services to help individuals and companies make their own training choices; even previous training opportunities are declining.

The government's management of adult learning does not reflect the strategic role of this area. Adult learning is an area of specialisation with no dedicated apparatus within the Undersecretary's Office for Economic Strategy. Fragmentation and a lack of coordination, monitoring and results-based quality assurance hamper the effectiveness of actions and improvements. Adult learning is essentially funded in line with central budgetary policies without empowering individuals and enterprises.

Two major changes happened in the domain of higher education. The first was a further serious decrease in the number of applicants to higher educational institutions as a result of government measures, and the second, which transformed the structure of Hungarian higher education in the long term, was the reorganisation of four-fifths of Hungarian state-operated higher educational institutions – two-thirds of state-run higher educational institutions in terms of student numbers – into foundations. This means that the vast majority of universities are now outside the control of the government of the day and – as the legislators intended – can be governed by the vassals of the government in power at all times, both ideologically and economically. This transformation was carried out without a publicly debated programme and without any democratic debate, taking full advantage of the situation created by the pandemic, which made it easier to adopt laws and difficult to organise protests. However, unanimous opposition from teachers and students at the University of Theatre and Film Art nevertheless resulted in a large-scale protest, which did not prevent the government from reshaping the institution to its liking. After that, most of the previous faculty and students left and the university's former intellectual assets were transferred into a freshly registered association. In the meantime, the government embarked on a joint project with the Shanghai Fudan University to establish a branch of Fudan in Budapest, on terms that are strikingly unfavourable to Hungary.

SCIENCE UNDER ENHANCED GOVERNMENT CONTROL

In recent years, there have been a number of major transformations in the university and research sectors. In addition to the traditional basic research sites (universities, former Hungarian Academy of Sciences – MTA research network), several other institutes have received significant public research funding. The largest basic research network in Hungary (that of MTA) has been placed under the supervision of a new funding body, and the status of researchers as civil servants has been abolished: a period of uncertainty and constant change has started.

The proportion of open, independent, peer-reviewed proposals has declined, and government funding of domestic scientific research is often based on opaque and subjective decisions, leading to institutional and personal dependency, censorship and self-censorship. In the evaluation of the remaining basic research proposals, the supervising minister has also applied non-scientific criteria. Generally speaking, in science funding, political, business and ideological considerations weigh heavily alongside scientific excellence.

The government is willing to influence the structure of basic research in several ways: the transformation of universities into "endowments", through the lack of an alternative term; the creation of national laboratories, or the "nationalisation" of the MTA's research network, where research topics have to be pre-approved, are all steps in this direction.

Hungary devoted significantly fewer resources to R&D funding between 2010 and 2020 than, for example, Poland and the Czech Republic, which have a very similar historical-political legacy. More than half of Hungary's Gross Expenditures on Research and Development (GERD) came from the business sector and about one sixth from foreign sources. The share of enterprises engaged in innovation activity is also low compared to other Central European countries and is steadily declining. The government has failed to base its science, technology and innovation policy on scientific analyses and consensus in professional debates but subordinates it to the day-to-day political interests of non-scientists. Opinions and possible criticisms by groups of professionals are branded as political attacks and are ignored.

Over the past two years, new elements have been added to the historiography and memory policy that serve the purposes of the power of the government. In the re-evaluation of certain events in Hungarian history, the consensus in historiography is being disregarded. In the evaluation of history, war propaganda is practised: victories are exaggerated, defeats are

excused, and are almost considered as victories. Statements falsifying historical facts have also been incorporated into school textbooks. Xenophobia is further fuelled by the re-interpretation of historical events. Alongside existing research institutes, ones with the same research orientation but promoting Fidesz's historical narrative have been set up.

The endeavours for the total occupation and ideological exploitation of culture is equally prevalent in the protection of monuments, the dismantling of the professional autonomy of theatres, museums and public collections, in the transformation of the architectural and sculptural symbolism of public spaces, as it is in disintegrating the research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the total disenfranchisement of university senates.

NEW FEATURES OF THE ORBÁN REGIME 2020–2021

THE EXPANSION OF AUTOCRACY

The period between autumn 2019 and the present day has brought about controversial developments in the history of the Orbán regime, which reached its full status with the victory of Fidesz in the spring 2018 elections, the Prime Minister achieving the height of his power. Yet, at the same time, the regime has embarked on a path of internal decay, erosion and external isolation. The political polarisation fomented by the regime proved unstoppable, and governance was reduced to a technique of holding on to power at all costs. The autocratic elements of the regime became more visible, more palpable, more threatening, and, not least, the trappings of liberal democracy began to disintegrate. A true sign of this process is that ruling by decree, for which the pandemic situation has only served as a pretext, has become common practice. With the 2022 spring elections approaching, Fidesz's political strategy has been to ensure the survival of the system in the event of electoral defeat. The Prime Minister will seek to retain or pass on power regardless of the election results. In doing so, he is using tools unknown to the past.

In our previous report, we showed that the Orbán regime's feudal-style clientele-building created a culture of self-censorship, fear, vulnerability and submission. Elite corruption and state corruption are no deviance but integral parts of the regime. The long-term public mandate of cadres with dubious professional qualities but proven loyalties, ones who are kept in a state of personal dependency, serves to entrench the power structure. The concentration, centralisation and personalisation of power, the extensive patron-client relations, the duality of the criminal state and a re-feudalised society have created a dichotomy. A world of masters and servants, thought to have disappeared, was rebuilt. Permanent organisational and jurisdictional changes not only shattered faith in the state's ability to function, but also blurred the boundaries in practice between the dominant party, the state, and the circle of political entrepreneurs that hold the state captive. The main cause of this chaos is the absolute power of the leader at the top of the hierarchy, which is mostly untrammelled and is limited only by certain rare and exceptional cases of mobilisation in society.

The first years of the Orbán regime saw a re-nationalisation of many areas, which strengthened the state's controlling role and ideological influence. In the last half-decade, however, we have witnessed the blatant expropriation of state assets on a scale previously unimaginable. Privatised institutions have lost a significant part of their former social functions, while these measures will strengthen the roles these institutions play in legitimating the regime. The pseudo-private institutions thus created are being played into the hands of the regime's clientele, directly and severely limiting the institutional autonomies of culture and education, as well as adversely affecting the status of workers.³

The Orbán regime has lost a significant part of its external support in Europe, and in the EU, the ruling party is in a vacuum. Orbán is no longer the "strong man of Europe" offering a new, unconventional model; he becomes seen to be a local autocrat whose tricks have been exposed, disrupting the EU from within. The European Union has long played an ambivalent role: has sustained and legitimised Orbán's regime, but at the same has limited its room for manoeuvre. Orbán's decline in influence in the EU has seen Fidesz ousted from the European People's Party (EPP). The political turnaround in the US at the end of 2020 has further narrowed the Orbán regime's matrix of external relations, but it is still not to be underestimated, partly because of their cooperation with the successor states of the former Yugoslavia and partly due to cooperation with a number of eastern autocratic regimes. Merkel's departure, and the formation of a new German government without the CDU, will mean a further loss of position. Thus, while relations with EU and NATO allies are steadily deteriorating, links with dictatorial regimes and far-right politicians remain friendly, and there is a trend of regular and so far unsuccessful initiatives to bring together the European far-right, as well.

OPPOSITION VICTORY IN THE CITIES

An important change, however, is that a more robust pattern of domestic resistance emerged in 2019. A great number of voters have learned in recent years that protests, petitions and ad hoc citizen reactions are not sufficient to force democratic change. Conscious community-building, united opposition forces and determined and large-scale participation in elections

³ See the next section and the chapter on the so-called "KEKVA model" in our report.

are essential. In the autumn 2019 municipal elections, the opposition won in most of the country's major cities, including Budapest. It turned out that Fidesz's monolithic rule can be broken at the municipal level. Not only opposition bubbles but also significant democratic counterweights were created within the single-party state framework. Although the central power has continuously tried to limit the scope of opposition-led municipalities by withdrawing local tax revenues and withholding budgetary resources, they continue to function as islands of freedom in an undemocratic environment. One of the key issues of the current period has been the development of the urban-rural fault lines.

The revival of opposition activity in 2019 eventually led the fragmented opposition parties, recognising voters' expectations, to adopt a joint declaration of values in December 2020.⁴ They declared in it that their goal was to dismiss the Orbán regime, and to this end, they joined forces to put forward a single common candidate for Prime Minister and a single common list of candidates to oppose Fidesz.

THE PANDEMIC AND THE EXCEPTIONAL LAW

The recovery in the domestic political arena in 2019 was frozen by the Covid pandemic in spring 2020. In a way unprecedented in world history, the possibility for direct interaction and collective action in almost all spheres of life was eliminated or made very difficult. The Orbán regime, which from the outset has systematically dismantled the concept of separating powers, centralised the state to the extreme and built it upon the one-man rule of the head of government, has unexpectedly found itself in an extraordinary situation. However, the regime did not use the opportune moment to enter into a brand new dialogue with society and return to democratic functioning, but on the contrary, with reference to the pandemic response and by introducing exceptional law and order, it also broke down the formal obstacles limiting the will of the executive power (practically that of Viktor Orbán).

While the existing powers in the legal system would have been sufficient to mitigate the consequences of COVID and prevent its spread, the government has stabilised a particular form of authoritarianism by granting full public authority the executive power.⁵ The specificity of emergency authorisations in the rule of law is that they can be given for well-defined purposes, with specific justifications and time limits, and subject to ultimate parliamentary control. In such periods, political restraint and culture play a greater role, but public law constraints do not disappear completely. As the public law limits on exercising power in Hungary had previously been eroded and the culture of the rule of law had not even developed, the Orbán regime easily took advantage of the epidemic situation.

In March 2020, the government declared a state of emergency, but did not provide detailed justification for the substantial restrictions on rights, nor did it justify why the measures in the Health Act are not sufficient. At the same time, freedom of expression has also been curtailed, hampering the flow of information necessary for protection, especially in a situation where the government has either delayed or failed to meet its data provision obligations. Under the Enabling Act, even the declaration of the end of an emergency is a matter for the government to decide upon. There was nothing to suggest that the epidemic was an obstacle for Parliament to function, since it was during this particular period, under severe restrictions on freedom of expression, that a series of laws were passed that had nothing to do with the fight against the epidemic. Full and unfettered governmental authority and a parliamentary law factory operated in parallel. The so-called Transition Act later gave legal force to the provisions enacted under the government's extraordinary powers. But even beyond these, the government's actions during the pandemic had serious long-term consequences.⁶

At the time of the outbreak, the case of the expelled Iranian students was used as part of a political campaign against refugees. With the involvement of the courts, the students, who were studying in Hungary and who, according to government media reports, had "brought the virus into the country", were expelled without proper justification for violating the epidemiological rules. The process of vacating hospital beds, ordered by the Minister of Human Resources, Miklós Kásler in a totally unlawful order, was a massive violation of human dignity. The amendment to the law according to

⁴ The Declaration of Values can be found here: <https://elovalasztas2021.hu/erteknyilatkozat/>. In this document, the opposition parties declared that "Hungary has entered a new era. For the first time in the last decade, the Hungarian people have a real chance to shake off the corrupt and dishonest rule of Fidesz-KDNP. Despite the attempts of the prime minister, who fears his imminent downfall, to make cooperation between the opposition parties impossible, the opposition parties committed to a change of government are ready to give the right response to the undemocratic amendments to the electoral law. Conscious of our historic responsibility to the country, we will put forward a joint list in the forthcoming parliamentary elections and unite with each other and with all citizens who want change to dismiss Fidesz, which is building a one-party supremacy." Last seen 30.12.2021.

⁵ https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/Transitional_Act_AIHU-EKINT-HCLU-HHC_30072020.pdf, last seen 30.12.2021.

⁶ [http://ekint.org/lib/documents/1595421967-EKINT_Concentration_of_Power_Salvaged_-_Coronavirus_Stocktaking_\(analysis\).pdf](http://ekint.org/lib/documents/1595421967-EKINT_Concentration_of_Power_Salvaged_-_Coronavirus_Stocktaking_(analysis).pdf), last seen 30.12.2021.

which the registration of gender on birth certificates cannot be changed retrospectively has no connection whatsoever with the epidemic. In addition to the amendment to the law, an integral part of the ideological campaign against gender, the National Assembly also adopted a political declaration rejecting the Istanbul Convention, with reference to the threat of migration.⁷

The amendment of the Criminal Code rules on scaremongering has had grave consequences. The vague incriminations, which allow for flexible interpretation, have increased self-censorship and fear. Numerous prosecutions have been launched for internet postings critical of the government. Freedom of expression has not been protected by the Constitutional Court, and criminal proceedings have been launched by the judiciary system. So the threat has not remained theoretical only. The political use of legal restrictions became evident during the official proceedings against the participants of the so called "honking protest" initiated by independent MP Ákos Hadházy, in which a series of disproportionate fines were imposed for (quasi-)violations. In the meantime, a racist and aggressive demonstration took place in the centre of Budapest under police protection.⁸

Freedom of information was further restricted by the extension of the deadline for the obligation to provide information, and this also had nothing to do with the defence against the pandemic. As a result, the fate of the funds and other public money diverted from local governments could remain unknown. The political aim of the economic action plan is to make the municipalities, which became opposition-led after the last municipal elections, impossible to govern. The unhidden message of political selectivity is that municipalities loyal to government policy can continue to receive funds. Allocating finances and the distribution of substantial development funds is done on the basis of politically biased lobbying. The introduction of free parking, the removal of half of the local business tax and the whole of the motor vehicle tax, and the withdrawal of previously granted subsidies cannot be explained by the economic constraints caused by the epidemic, because at the same time Fidesz-led municipalities and Fidesz-affiliated businesses have received substantial subsidies. An important example of this is that, while many small businesses were made unviable during the epidemic due to insufficient economic stimulus funding, developments of hotels nationwide and ports around Lake Balaton, all within the ownership interests of those close to the Prime Minister, received outstanding funding.⁹

During the epidemic, the status of cultural workers as civil servants and the resulting increased protection of their employment rights were abolished in a situation of limited interest enforcement. At the same time, the municipal theatres were placed under the guardianship of supervisory boards, mostly appointed by the minister.

KEKVA (AMFPPT) – PUBLIC TRUSTS WITH A PUBLIC-SERVICE MISSION

Spring of 2021 saw the proliferation of public-service trusts operating as parallel centres of power and control, under the direction of actors loyal to Orbán, with the aim of cementing the system.¹⁰ The Orbán regime turned to the foundation model after the transformation of the Fundamental Law and other two-thirds majority laws, as well as of public institutions to consolidate power and serve party goals. In so doing, it created new positions of power for itself and ensured that it would retain them in the event of a transfer of government, following democratic elections.

The first foundations of this kind were established in higher education. The autonomy of universities has been steadily declining since 2011, as our previous report pointed out. Since then, the Hungarian higher education system has changed fundamentally, with the state formally withdrawing from the job of maintaining universities for the vast majority of the higher education domain.¹¹ Between 2019 and 2021, the majority of state universities have been outsourced to the above-mentioned private foundations, run by boards of trustees composed of politically selected individuals. This model consists

⁷ See chapters on Gender policy and LGBTQI minorities.

⁸ Honking while making a complete circle in a traffic roundabout was organised to protest against the sudden and wontan decision to send home more than 10 thousand patients from hospital (see the Chapter on Political management of the pandemic). Other means for protesting was impossible because of the lockdown. The protesters got huge fines for breaching the lockdown, having put EU flags in their car windows or for unnecessary use of horns. <https://444.hu/2020/05/16/ott-volt-a-dudalos-tuntetes-en-kitarott-egy-unios-zaszlot-a-kocsibol-150-ezerre-buntettek>, last seen 30. 12. 2021. The racist demonstration was secured by the police instead of dissolving it This followed a murder case in Deák Square in August 2020. <https://magyar-narancs.hu/belpol/onbiraskodasra-buzditottak-a-deak-teri-gyilkossag-miatt-szervezett-rasszista-demonstracion-130239> last seen 30. 12. 2021. <https://hungarytoday.hu/budapest-stabbing-memorial-gathering-fans-assembly-act/> last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹ <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2021/02/26/turisztika-tamogatasok-ugynokseg-mtu-guller-zoltan/>; <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/05/26/szallodafejlesztes-mtu-magyar-turisztikai-ugynokseg-balaton-meszaros-garanci/> last seen 30. 12. 2021. <https://atlatszo.hu/kozpenz/2020/10/21/folytatodik-a-balaton-kiarusitasa-berbeadjak-a-vitorlaskikoteket-vizparti-telkeket-privatizalnak/> last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁰ Public trusts with a public purpose are described in more detail in the next chapter of this report.

¹¹ See the chapter on higher education in the report.

of removing large amounts of public assets from state control, making their fate untraceable and ensuring a long-term political control of higher education. It is not only the new foundations of traditional higher education institutions that have acquired unusually large assets, but also other organisations with mostly vague objectives ("talent management", etc.), such as the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, the Lajos Batthyány Foundation, the Foundation for Central European Education or the Foundation for Hungarian Talents without Borders. The restructuring has made it possible to select the heads of institutions on the basis of ideological and personal credibility, while with the abolishment of public service status, the vulnerability of employees and the possibility of imposing loyalty upon them have increased.¹² It is only at the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE), an entity enjoying a special situation, where a protest involving the entire set of professors and students was launched against the go-foundation process, which eliminated university autonomy.¹³

The rise of authoritarian rule and the declaration of a "state of emergency" made the exercise of freedoms even more difficult. In the summer of 2021, the European Commission published its second report on the state of the rule of law covering all Member States, which found that in Hungary, the handling of corruption, media pluralism and the independence of the legislature and judiciary in general were in a seriously deplorable state.¹⁴

In the long term, the regime seeks to secure its power through institutional frameworks that may appear to be stable; however, they are fragile from within. One-man leadership based on distrust and a centralised decision-making structure do not allow complex problems to be tackled and create instability. In the event of electoral defeat, the loss of a charismatic leader could lead to a complete collapse of the regime. On the other hand, the militarised political discourse and the institutional and legal preparations for a possible deployment of the armed forces, as well as surveillance of opponents by intelligence services, indicate that the possibility of losing government is a source of fear for those in and close to political power, if only because, following such a turnaround they can expect legal proceedings on corruption charges against them. In such a situation, some members of the administrative community may desert the establishment, and the risk of unpredictable and socially costly, panic-like executive behaviour may increase. It is now clear that the Orbán regime is as much about constantly expanding the arsenal of power-enforcement organisations – as evidenced recently by the new development funds allocated to the Counter-Terrorism Centre (TEK),¹⁵ the amendment of the Defence Act¹⁶ and large-scale arms purchases – as it is about threatening the opposition in case, they dare to touch the public foundations of the system if they win. It is becoming increasingly clear that in its relation to the opposition and to independent institutions, the Orbán regime is following the Russian pattern, pioneered by Putin, where, instead of outright violence, rather means of surveillance, interception, intimidation and blackmail prevail.

OPPOSITION PRIMARIES

As the regime gradually became militarised, the opposition joined forces and proved its viability by organising a highly successful primary election in the autumn of 2021. The primaries gave the candidates of the democratic opposition parties a chance to test themselves outside their own bubbles, and at the same time gave voters a chance to get to know the opposition candidates in time. The primaries brought back democracy for a historic moment and showed what a democratic Hungary could be like. It was an opportunity for voters and their prospective electors to meet, talk and debate directly. Although the primary elections were fully ignored and not covered by the public media, the event made the balance of power within the opposition visible and gave an idea of the scale of the task facing the opposition. The primaries provided a new opportunity for the kind of politicking that the Orbán regime had been trying to wean voters off over the past decade with persistent state propaganda.

In present day Hungary, there is both a state and legal system tending towards authoritarianism, as well as a society that wants to break free from it.

¹² <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/09/27/1630-milliardot-kapnak-az-egyetem-ialapitvanyok-a-kovetkezo-ot-evben>; <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/mcc-milliard-kozpenz/31020384.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹³ The case of SZFE is discussed in detail in the higher education chapter of the report. On the reasons for the resistance of the SZFE, see: <http://www.ekint.org/alkotmanyossag/2020-12-19/a-kitarto-ellenallas-titka-mit-uzen-az-szfe-polgarainak-kuzdelme>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/IP_21_3761, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁵ https://nepszava.hu/3069659_5-5-milliardot-kapott-a-tek-megszerzik-a-hos-utcai-ingatlanokat-is, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁶ <http://www.ekint.org/alkotmanyossag/2021-01-07/voros-imre-kulonleges-jogrend-katonakkal-mindorokke>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

It was not the establishment of the KEKVA model, i.e. the model based on "public interest asset management foundation performing public duty"(AMFPPT)¹⁷ which launched the outsourcing of public wealth from state supervision. The prototype of KEKVAs was created by the Magyar Nemzeti Bank (MNB, Central Bank of Hungary) in 2014, when the Pallas Athene Foundations were established. György Matolcsy, governor of MNB, in most cases appointed people as trustees of these foundations who were employed as leaders in MNB, and thus were subordinated to him. MNB transferred HUF 267 billion to these foundations from its own wealth.¹⁸ After this initial step, the government tried to codify that the wealth transferred to the foundations of MNB, has "ceased to be public money" and also tried to make the general public accept this.¹⁹ However, the Constitutional Court of Hungary declared that the foundations of the Central Bank manage public money, and they have a public function. However, the Constitutional Court of Hungary declared that the foundations of the Central Bank manage public money, and they have a public function,²⁰ Similar conclusions were reached by the Curia of Hungary,²¹ the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information (NAIH),²² and also the Public Procurement Authority of Hungary²³ in their decisions concerning the MNB foundations. Consequently, at that time the government's attempts to transfer public wealth to the private sphere directly did not succeed. However, the other element of the model is still thriving: to strengthen and maintain the background for Fidesz and the Central Bank relying on public money and public wealth, with the elimination of the state-run institutional system. A manifestation of this latter function is the limited economic activity of the foundations (e.g. real estate management, management of securities), which can ensure the functioning of the foundations to a certain extent, without further wealth injections (in a similar manner to the endowment model known in the Anglo-Saxon world).

By 2019, the government refined and extended the model. The first KEKVA was established to maintain Corvinus University Budapest, and the state transferred 10-10 % of MOL and Richter shares to the foundation. The next foundation was the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), which is a separate organisation, despite the similar names. This KEKVA, which was dreamt up as the educator of the future rightist elite party cadres, also received 10-10 % of MOL and Richter shares free of charge. As a result, the two KEKVAs took over almost HUF 600 billion of the state wealth. In the autumn of 2021 (see Table 1 at the end of the present chapter), the number of established or introduced KEKVAs was over 30, and the wealth outsourced from the state wealth is increasing accordingly. Two thirds of these foundations are connected to universities, while the rest of the KEKVAs have some cultural or educational purposes.

The majority of the trustees are connected to the present ruling administration: often they are the members of the government, leaders of local governments managed by the Fidesz, or are other Fidesz officials. Concerning the boards of trustees maintaining the universities, besides the political cadres, a significantly smaller number of university leaders were appointed (e.g. Béla Merkely, Rector of Semmelweis Medical University, or Yvette Bozsik, university professor of dance art) together with the representatives of major market actors (e.g. Richter, Bosch, Audi).

17 KEKVA is an abbreviation for "közfeladatot ellátó közérdekű vagyonkezelő alapítvány". As this novel type of organisation is unique, no tried and trusted English equivalent is available for its name. Paragraph 6, Article 38 of the English version of the Fundamental Law of Hungary uses the equivalent "public interest asset management foundation performing public duty". Other translations also appear elsewhere: public trust foundation with a public function, public benefit trust, public trust, or even state trust. Therefore, wherever possible, the KEKVA abbreviation will be used to denote this special foundation type. [The Translator.] https://hunconcourt.hu/uploads/sites/3/2021/01/thefundamentallawofhungary_20201223_fin.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

18 Transparency International Hungary, Javaslatok a korrupció visszaszorítására Magyarországon [Proposals to reduce corruption in Hungary]. Transparency International Hungary, January 2018. <https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Javaslatok-a-korrupci%C3%B3-visszaszor%C3%ADT%C3%A1s%C3%A1ra-Magyarorsz%C3%A1gon.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

The same report is summarised in English here: Transparency International Hungary, Proposals to reduce corruption in Hungary. Summary in English. Transparency International Hungary, January, 2018.

https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/transparency_int_jogallam_korrupcio_tanulmany_kivonat_angol_nyelven_2.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

19 Fábrián, Tamás: Kósa Lajos elmagyarázza, hogyan tűnik el a közpénz [Lajos Kósa explains how public money disappears]. Index.hu, 1 March 2016. https://index.hu/video/2016/03/01/kosa_a_kozpenzrol/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

20 Resolution of the Constitutional Court of Hungary 6/2016 (III. 11.). <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A16H0006.AB&txreferefer=00000001.txt>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

21 EF: Döntött a Kúria, ki kell adni az MNB-alapítványok költéseit [Curia resolution: spendings of MNB foundations must be published]. Index.hu, 30 March 2016. https://index.hu/gazdasag/2016/03/30/mnb_alapitvanyok_kuria_itelet_kozerdeku_adatigenyles/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

22 Resolution of the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, NAIH/2016/2937/2. <https://naih.hu/dontesek-infoszab-allasfoglalások?download=287:allasfoglalás-a-magyar-nemzeti-bank-pallas-athene-alapitvanyai-által-kotott-tamogatasi-szerzodesekrol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

23 Ábrahám, Ambrus: Előre menekülnek az MNB alapítványok [MNB foundations escape forward]. Népszabadság, 14 May 2016. <http://nol.hu/gazdasag/elore-menekulnek-az-mnb-alapitvanyok-1615583>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Most of the foundations received the real estates of the institution managed by the given KEKVA, and they were also donated a further HUF 600 million wealth. The real estate portfolio transferred to the KEKVAs contains more than 2000 entries.²⁴ However, several foundations received a significant amount of public wealth in addition to the real estates used by them. For example, not only did the foundation that maintains MCC receive the building complex on Gellért Hill, Budapest worth several billion HUF, but they were also given the former National Casino in Pécs, a youth camp and a yacht port in Révfülöp, a shopping centre in Szekszárd, as well as further real estates in Szombathely and Zalaegerszeg. The book value of shares, real estates and other remunerations transferred to the cadre education institute of Fidesz approximates HUF 500 billion (ca. 1.4 billion EUR).²⁵ Thus, the richest KEKVA is probably the MCC Foundation. From this amazing wealth, on the one hand, the MCC can finance the education of cadres of the present administration for decades; on the other hand, it can also promote the pro-government think-tanks by giving them regular tasks, e.g. financing politically useful analyses and polls. Immediately, MCC bought shares from one of the most significant actors in the publishing and book trade sector, the Libri–Bookline Group.²⁶ The conduct of MCC is a prime example for the political intentions behind the KEKVA model: the government did not support the system of special colleges having a long-lasting tradition, but only one institution that has very close connections to the government.

For this major initiative, the government created a new organisational structure. A separate act was passed for the establishment of the KEKVAs,²⁷ which is also backed by the Fundamental Law of Hungary. The most important characteristics of the KEKVA model are summarised below.

MIXTURE OF PUBLIC FUNCTIONS AND BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

The KEKVAs (AMFPPTs) are exempt from the prohibition of the Civil Code of Hungary²⁸ and the Civil Act²⁹ according to which no NGO can be established with the primary aim of economic and business activity.³⁰ A construction unusual in Hungarian legislation was created for the KEKVAs, which is regarded as “peculiar” even by the relevant act. KEKVAs are obliged to finance their public tasks from the public wealth transferred to them, and to use this wealth to fulfil their public aims. However, KEKVAs are allowed to “conduct business in line with the principles of private investors”. The Hungarian state carries out public tasks primarily through budgetary institutions, according to the relevant legislation on the state budget. All other solutions, such as the inclusion of organisations outside the state administration, are only possible for assistance.³¹ The conflict arising here is easy to detect at those universities maintained by KEKVAs which also operate clinics. It would be too risky to sell the institutions that play a crucial role in the health-care system – so the act limited the freedom of asset management for health-care institutions: they can only sell real estates with the consent of the state.

The new concept introduced in Hungarian legislation in connection with the KEKVAs is a prerequisite for the establishment of the endowment model mentioned above. However, it may also open up the way for the outsourcing of other state functions and roles in the long run. It is important to see that the original aim of this foundation model is to include private wealth in the service of the educational and cultural sector. However, the solution conceptualised and introduced in Hungary is just the opposite of this: the KEKVA model irrevocably withdraws public wealth from state control. Although there are members of the business sector in the boards of trustees, the majority of leaders are people close to the government, which suggests that those in power at the moment wish to conserve their influence through these representatives in the long run.

²⁴ Functionally, though, the number of real estates is lower than that, as the larger real estates have more than one topographical lot number. The majority of real estates are plots of land.

²⁵ Ligeti, Miklós: Vajon jogállamot játszanak? Nem titkolja szerződéseit a Mathias Corvinus Alapítvány [Are they playing a rule-of-law state? The MCC Foundation does not hide its contracts]. HVG Blog, 5 May 2021. <https://korruptio.hvgblog.hu/2021/05/05/vajon-jogallamot-jatszanak-nem-titkolja-a-szerzodeseit-a-mathias-corvinus-collegium-alapitvany/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁶ Csabai, Károly: Újabb értékes vagyonelemmel gazdagodott a százmilliárdok felett diszponáló állami alapítvány [Further precious asset gained by state foundation managing hundreds of millions]. mfor.hu, 8 April 2021. <https://mfor.hu/cikkek/vallalatok/ujabb-ertekes-vagyonelemmel-gazdagodott-a-szazmilliardok-felett-diszponalo-allami-alapitvany.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁷ 2021. évi IX. törvény a közfeladatot ellátó közérdekű vagyonekezelő alapítványokról [Act IX of 2021 on the public trust foundation with a public function (KEKVA Act)] <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2100009.tv>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸ Act V of 2013 promulgating the Civil Code. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=96512&p_country=HUN&p_count=937&p_classification=01.03&p_classcount=4, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹ Act CLXXV of 2011 on the Freedom of Association, Non-profit Status and the Operation and Support of Civil Organisations (Civil Act). http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=99862, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁰ Paragraph 5, Article 3 of the KEKVA Act.

³¹ Paragraph 2, Article 3/A of Act CXCV of 2011 on Public Finances. Further restrictions are given in Paragraph 2, Article 7 c and Paragraphs 1–2, Article 41. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100195.tv>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

THE STATE FINANCES PUBLIC TASKS CARRIED OUT BY FOUNDATIONS³²

The real aim of the KEKVA model can be identified if the long-term financing scheme and sustainability are analysed. The state created these foundations in a way that the state is obliged to finance the institutions now taking the form of foundations from public money, while losing the control over the operation and financial decisions of the KEKVAs. The control is taken over by the boards of trustees, the members of which were appointed by the present government. It is hardly possible to regard this change as a true model change (this is the official term for the maintainer changes); rather, the outsourcing of a considerable part of higher education and an important part of the health-care system was carried out. This is also supported by the fact that no real discussions preceded the so-called model change at the institutions affected, and the final concept kept changing according to the political interests of the government. Only Corvinus University has considerably more leeway in the economic field, although the profit from the MOL and Richter shares will probably not be sufficient to cover the expenses: therefore, the need for financial support from the state remains even for this university. It must be noted that the government wished to spend more than HUF 1000 billion (ca. 2.8 billion EUR) on financing higher education from the European Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which would have meant sources far exceeding the state budget for higher education. However, this plan foundered because the European Committee did not approve of it.³³

THE FOUNDER, I. E. THE HUNGARIAN STATE, LOSES CONTROL OVER THE OPERATION OF KEKVAS AFTER THEIR ESTABLISHMENT.³⁴

As foundations serve as independent legal entities, this organisational form makes it possible to withdraw public wealth from state control irrevocably. This is true for all foundations. In the present case, it means that the wealth transferred to KEKVAs can never be given back to the state according to present legislation that requires a qualified majority. The deed of foundation of each KEKVA should be modified to exercise a change in their asset management; however, the modification of the deed of foundation is a right of the founder, which is irrevocably transferred to the board of trustees.³⁵ Moreover, the founder may prohibit the modification of certain points of the deed of foundation. This prohibition may only be lifted if the modification is required in order to meet the requirements of legislation. However, the oversized scope of boards of trustees' rights are prohibited to be modified. It must also be taken into consideration that the act does not allow the founder to retreat, i.e. no foundation, including all KEKVAs, can be closed down. Consequently, the state cannot drive the thousands of billions transferred to KEKVAs back into the state budget by closing these foundations either.

This unprecedented construction does not only play a prominent role in carrying out outsourced public tasks, but it also has a crucial role in the control of companies important for the national economy whose shares are owned by the KEKVAs now. Thus, the state will have even fewer possibilities to exercise control over the operation of the MOL Group, the Ózd Steelworks or the Gedeon Richter Plc.

THE STATE CANNOT RECALL TRUSTEES AND CANNOT NAME NEW ONES EITHER

In order to ensure that the management of the wealth transferred to the KEKVAs should stay in the interest sphere of those currently in power, the government appointed members faithful to the current administration into the boards of trustees, who had to be rendered unrecallable. This was solved technically by giving both the rights of founders and the rights of asset managers to the KEKVA boards of trustees, i.e. to the managing bodies.³⁶ The boards of trustees are entitled to pass decisions on the future of the given KEKVA independently, and on the fate of the wealth presented to them. As mentioned above, the KEKVA can manage the wealth entrusted to it freely, as private investors in the market, and disposes of the assets freely with minor restrictions.

The first generation of trustees for each KEKVA is named by the government, more precisely, by the minister in charge of the given sector. Later, however, the trustees can decide about the election of a new member if a position becomes vacant. Consequently, it is highly probable that in the case of vacancies, trustees will try to invite leaders with a similar mindset. It is, however, prohibited for the board of trustees to waive their founder's right and asset manager's right, and they must not renounce these rights in someone else's favour either.

³² Article 7 of the KEKVA Act.

³³ Kolozsi, Ádám: Inkább nem kérte a magyar kormány az egyetemeknek ígért 1200 milliárd forintot Brüsszelből [Hungarian government finally backed out of Brussels deal on HUF 1200 billion promised to universities]. telex.hu, 12 May 2021. <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/05/12/inkabb-nem-kerte-a-magyar-kormany-az-egyetemi-fejlesztesekre-akart-1200-milliard-forintot-brusszelbol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁴ Article 7 of the KEKVA Act.

³⁵ Paragraph 6, Article 10 of the KEKVA Act.

³⁶ Paragraph 5, Article 7 of the KEKVA Act.

This system is not only closed upwards, i.e. towards future governments, but also downward; which, especially in the case of universities, refutes the government's claims that the foundation structure guarantees the independence of institutions. In reality, the KEKVAs do not strengthen the autonomy of institutions, as the lecturers, students and advocacy groups have no say in the composition or the operation of the boards of trustees.

DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF OPERATION IS RENDERED IMPOSSIBLE

A KEKVA is an institution in which a single legal person exercises the founder's rights, manages assets and is the sole beneficiary at the same time. According to the KEKVA Act, a single legal person (i.e. the foundation) disposes of the foundation (i.e. itself), i.e. the legislator authorised a single legal entity to have three different qualities and fulfil three different functions.

It was not an important aim during the construction of this organisational form to build in control mechanisms over operation. There is no trace of rules concerning conflicts of interest for trustees in the KEKVA Act, although such rules are generally set up concerning public authorities, as several conflicts of interest may arise owing to the various public positions held by the trustees. It remains to be seen that in the case of such a conflict what is to ensure that the KEKVA should prioritise the interest of the institution managed by it instead of, for instance, the political objectives or business perspectives of a secretary of state or a CEO in the board of trustees. Furthermore, situations may arise in which trustees or their relatives might have direct material gain due to the KEKVA's economic decisions, transactions with real estates or purchases.

Probably, the most challenging task for the present government will be to dismantle public administration controls up to now exercised at least formally over the public tasks and wealth transferred to the KEKVAs. The wealth management of KEKVAs can be checked by the State Audit Office of Hungary, as they received public wealth free of charge. The reasons which ensured the accessibility to data of public interest or the obligation to enter public procurement procedures for foundations of the MNB are also present in the case of KEKVAs. However, there is some uncertainty in the latter issue, as the Act on Public Procurement³⁷ does not explicitly name KEKVAs among the entities that are subject to the obligation to conduct procurement procedures, although public foundations are mentioned overtly. As a result, KEKVAs are only obliged to conduct a procurement procedure if the majority of their budget is financed by a public authority (such as the Parliament or the government). Therefore, based on this act, universities and the corresponding KEKVAs will still have to conduct procurement procedures, due to the long-term financial commitment of the state.³⁸ However, the position of those KEKVAs that mainly finance their operation from the profit of the wealth presented to them by the state may fundamentally be different.

It raises concerns that the definition of "public funds", which was included in the Fundamental Law of Hungary together with the concept of KEKVAs, was narrowed down.³⁹ This might lead to the lifting of the existing minimal social control over the operation of KEKVAs in the medium term, maybe through further modifications in legislation.

Various explanations have been created concerning the real objective of the KEKVA construction. These include ensuring the long-term cultural hegemony of the right wing; the outsourcing of higher education; securing political control over higher education; the establishment of a construction to finance the think-tanks in the Fidesz hinterland continuously; the creation of the replacement basis for the rightist political elite; a guarantee for the control of strategically important companies to remain near the present ruling parties even if the government is changed; the construction of a parallel "shadow" state alongside the public administration.

Probably, all of the above perspectives played a role in the creation of the KEKVA model. It is sure, however, that the national wealth transferred to KEKVAs is well over HUF 1,000 billion, and this wealth cannot be taken back easily. Naturally, the KEKVA Act can be modified with a two-thirds majority. There is a chance that with a series of decisions requiring a two-thirds majority, the state can regain its founder's rights, which would entitle the state to modify the operation of KEKVAs: it might restrict the oversized scope of board of trustees rights, or might modify the composition of boards of trustees by appointing new members.

³⁷ Paragraph 1, Article 5, Act CXLIII of 2015 on Public Procurement. <https://www.kozbeszerzes.hu/torveny/act-cxl-iii-of-2015-on-public-procurement/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸ Public Procurement Authority of Hungary: Súlyos tévedés a jogállamiságról szóló jelentésben [Serious mistake in Rule of Law Report]. Public Procurement Authority of Hungary, 22 July 2021. <https://www.kozbeszerzes.hu/hirek/sulyos-tevedes-jogallamisagrol-szolo-jelentesben/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹ Paragraph 3, Article 39 of the Fundamental Law of Hungary, 25 April 2011. "Public funds shall be the revenues, expenditures and claims of the State." https://hunconcourt.hu/uploads/sites/3/2021/01/thefundamentallawofhungary_20201223_fin.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

If the Fundamental Law of Hungary is modified, the next Parliament might abolish the whole KEKVA structure. Even if all this happens, previous decisions of the KEKVAs concerning assets will still be in force. Consequently, if they give their wealth to someone else, the assets lost cannot be restored in any way.

LIST OF KEKVAS AS OF 12 NOVEMBER 2021

- Batthyány Lajos Alapítvány
Batthyány Lajos Foundation
- Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Budapest Business School
- Dunaújvárosi Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Dunaújváros
- Gróf Tisza István Debreceni Egyetemért Alapítvány
Count István Tisza Foundation for the University of Debrecen
- Hauszmann Alapítvány
Hauszmann Foundation
- Jövő Nemzedék Földje Alapítvány
Future Generation's Land Foundation
- Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány
Public Foundation for Research on Central and Eastern European History and Society
- Közép-európai Épített Örökség Megőrző Alapítvány
Foundation for Preserving Built Heritage in Central Europe
- Közép-európai Oktatási Alapítvány
Central European Education Foundation
- Maecenas Universitatis Corvini Alapítvány
Maecenas Universitatis Corvini Foundation
- Magyar Agrár- és Élettudományi Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- Magyar Kultúráért Alapítvány
Foundation for Hungarian Culture
- Magyar Táncművészeti Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Hungarian Dance Academy
- Makovecz Campus Alapítvány
Makovecz Campus Foundation
- Marek József Alapítvány
Marek József Foundation
- Mathias Corvinus Collegium Alapítvány
Mathias Corvinus Collegium Foundation
- Millenáris Tudományos Kulturális Alapítvány
Millenary Foundation
- Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design

- MOL – Új Európa Alapítvány
MOL New Europe Foundation
- Nemzeti Egészségügyi és Orvosképzésért Alapítvány
Foundation for National Health Care and Medical Education
- Neumann János Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for John von Neumann University
- Nyíregyházi Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Nyíregyháza
- Pannon Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Pannonia
- Polgári Művelődésért Oktatási, Kulturális és Tudományos Alapítvány
Foundation for Educational, Cultural and Scientific Education
- Rudolf Kalman Óbudai Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Rudolf Kalman University of Óbuda
- Soproni Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Sopron
- Széchenyi István Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Széchenyi István University
- Szegedi Tudományegyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Szeged
- Színház- és Filmművészetért Alapítvány
Foundation for Theatre and Film Arts
- Testnevelési Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the University of Physical Education
- Tokaj-Hegyalja Egyetemért Alapítvány
Foundation for the Tokaj-Hegyalja University
- Universitas Miskolcensis Alapítvány
Universitas Miskolcensis Foundation
- Universitas Quinqueecclesiensis Alapítvány
Universitas Quinqueecclesiensis Foundation

IDEOLOGICAL OFFENSIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF ECLECTICISM AND MILITARISATION

It is safe to say that from the very outset, the Orbán regime has been "ideology-applying, not one that is ideology-driven",⁴⁰ i.e. the activities of the ruling political elite are not guided by a coherent system of commonly held ideals, values and norms, much rather are they by pragmatic power-technical considerations: the system adapts the use of "right-wing" ideological panels, "Christian/National" or even ancient Hungarian symbolism to the daily political needs of the day. Since our last report,⁴¹ there has been no substantial change in this respect, but there are certain developments worth noting.

⁴⁰ Kozák, Márton; Magyar, Bálint: Ha nem tetszik a rendszer... A rendszerkritikai alapállás stratégiája [If you don't like the system ... Strategy of the system critical stance], Élet és Irodalom, 2020 augusztus 7. <https://www.es.hu/cikk/2020-08-07/kozak-marton-magyar-balint/ha-nem-tetszik-a-rendszer.html> last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁴¹ Hungary Turns its Back on Europe, <http://oktatoihalozat.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/angol.pdf>

THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A "CULTURAL ERA"

As we described in our previous report, in 2018 – equipped with the third two-thirds mandate – Viktor Orbán felt that the time had come to announce a "cultural turning point": to launch profound changes that, in addition to stabilising the political system, would also lead to the emergence of "a spiritual order, a kind of prevailing mood, perhaps even taste – a form of attitude" in Orbán's Hungary.⁴²

The need for longer-term "strategic thinking" may have arisen after an earlier "Kulturkampf" project, which had pinpointed some members of the intellectual elite, had fizzled out. Árpád Szakács's series of articles entitled *Whose Cultural Dictatorship?*⁴³ demanded a distinctive cultural policy line, called for the extreme right-wing principles to be implemented, and accused not only the mainstream of the Hungarian cultural elite, but also a number of right-wing artists and productions that otherwise served Fidesz and the NER, of immorality, cosmopolitanism and gay propaganda, etc. A series of articles in the pro-government media concluded that "over the last eight years, the right-wing cultural policy has been financing and promoting the cultural policy of the very left-liberals".⁴⁴

Attacks on the government's cultural policy from the right have been stopped, but at the same time work has begun on elaborating a "cultural strategy", the essence of which was formulated by Márton Békés, the research director of the House of Terror Museum, in his pamphlet entitled *Cultural Warfare. The Theory and Practice of Cultural Power*.⁴⁵ The set of military metaphors that dominate the pamphlet to an abnormal extent – "cultural warfare", "strategic-operational plan", "military" and "tactical means of combat", etc. – suggest that the author sees culture as a temporarily hostile territory to be conquered. In a complete reversal of Gramsci's theory, it is from a position of power, or even of absolute power that he would launch an attack on the "status quo", by which he means the "hegemony" of a liberal cultural elite deprived of all means of political expression.

While this pamphlet focuses on domestic conditions, in his recently published "theses",⁴⁶ Békés extends his "strategic" approach to the global space, and now envisions a universal „Kulturkampf” waged by an invisible elite centre using cultural means to destabilise nation states, undermine their sovereignty and create "an invisible world empire". "The formation of a cosmopolitan-individualist alliance between left-liberal-green parties, global plutocracy and progressive cultural elites, a complex that includes both the cybernetic power of digital corporations and the international network of non-state actors (such as Soros' NGOs), is not only a domestic but a global phenomenon."⁴⁷

The "hybrid war" to undermine the uniqueness, unity and resilience of national cultures also involves "foreign-funded media, tech companies that violate state sovereignty", "the interests of transnational capital and its local intermediaries, or global and federal intergovernmental organisations."⁴⁸ The global network imagined as a giant not only aspires to but is also capable of completely transforming societies, "inducing demographic winters, untying intergenerational ties, fluidising gender identity, destabilising national identity and changing the composition of the population", as well as "changing the natural form of the family".

All this is taking place "in the strategic areas of producing culture, knowledge and consciousness, as well as symbol creation", "where less visible and more hard-to-stop, but therefore more dangerous, activities are being carried out to undermine the foundations of the state, that is to say, to destabilise them."⁴⁹

A national programme to defend "cultural sovereignty" by state means should be declared because "...the awareness of sharing a common culture and the recognition of cultural belonging are the cornerstones of social cohesion, and therefore safeguarding them is tantamount to guaranteeing the security of the state order." So "cultural sovereignty must be protected by state means".⁵⁰

42 See Orbán's July 2018 speech quoted here: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp>; last seen 30. 12. 2021

43 <https://www.magyaridok.hu/szakacs-arpad-kinek-a-kulturalis-diktaturaja/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021. See also "Árpád Szakács on the left-liberal cultural dictatorship" here: <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2018/05/09/arpad-szakacs-on-the-left-liberal-cultural-dictatorship/>; last seen 30. 12. 2021.

44 <https://www.magyaridok.hu/velemenyevegstadiumban-a-magyar-kultura-3765248/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

45 Békés, Márton: *Kulturális hadviselés. A kulturális hatalom elmélete és gyakorlata* [Cultural warfare. Theory and practice of cultural power], Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány, Budapest, 2020, To better understand Békés's activities, see: <https://hungarianspectrum.org/tag/marton-bekes/> and https://www.academia.edu/51400835/The_Conditions_for_a_European_Renaissance; last seen 30. 12. 2021.

46 Békés, Márton: „Tézisek a kulturális szuverenitásról” [Theses about cultural sovereignty], *Látószög*-blog, 2021. december 2. <https://latoszogblog.hu/aktualis/tezisek-kulturalis-szuverenitasrol/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

However, the pamphlet, which calls for state security in culture, shows that the Orbán regime, after almost twelve years of two-thirds governing, has not been able to effectively integrate the cultural elite into NER. So far, despite the substantial additional resources provided to MMA, PIM⁵¹ and other paying departments, there is no sign that the Prime Minister's daydream of "a spiritual order, a kind of prevailing mood, perhaps even taste – a form of attitude" is taking root. NER's takeover of the cultural sphere continues to take the shape of the most harsh and rigid set of power moves – budgetary decisions, expropriation of institutions, staffing decisions – and the process is not at all smooth operation. The ruling regime often experiments with transparent corruption attempts, but even so it is still evident that professional elites are reluctant and increasingly alienated from the way professional affairs are politically managed, which, by the way, has become routine and normal.⁵²

NEW EMPHASES AND FEATURES IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND PROPAGANDA

The partial success of the opposition in the 2019 local elections, the weakening of Fidesz's international position and the country's foreign policy attractiveness, as well as the Covid crisis, which highlighted the serious dysfunctions of the Hungarian state structure, have suddenly created a completely new communication environment for the government. The result is often extreme simplification, primitivisation and even coarsening of messages and that of discourse, which is striking even if compared with NER's public communication so far.

The propaganda machine of Fidesz contrasted the alleged patriotism of the "countryside" versus the opposition's victory in Budapest and larger cities in 2019, marking the countryside as the true depositary and carrier of Hungarian mentality and habitus, the sense of mission of being Hungarian. This was an open reference to the slogan that became widespread after the fall of the short communist rule in 1919, which branded Budapest as a "sinful city". To retain its rural voter base, Fidesz also revived another slogan from the Hungarian political discourse between the two world wars. Even back then, the Independent Smallholders' Party wanted to appeal to rural Hungary with the slogan "God, Homeland, Family". These three simple words are now being used again as a political agenda by Viktor Orbán. The essence of this is: the privileged position of the key churches, which are called historical, and the granting of financial benefits for their political loyalty; the proclamation of the Hungarian nation's thousand-year mission, the defence of the homeland against foreigners; and, finally, the proclamation of the retrograde family model, according to which the primary task of women is to bear children and serve men, i.e. the heads of the family. The patriarchal view of the family is accompanied by homophobic propaganda.⁵³

The growing internal and external isolation of Orbán and Fidesz has led to a war-logic observed in government communication, both in the domestic and international political arena: it constructs an antagonistic opposition between "us" and "them", i.e. the "Hungarians" and their "illiberal friends" on the one hand, and the increasingly united forces of the (supposedly) hostile world (globalised capital, the liberal democracies of the West and George Soros proclaimed as "arch-villain", the supporters of an increasing EU integration, the human rights movements, NGO's, i.e. the "migrant-pampering" and "anti-Christian" forces, etc.), on the other. Fidesz and its voter base is identified with the "national side" in propaganda, while anyone critical of Orbán and his illiberal state (from the Democratic US President and the European People's Party to the Christian Social Bavarian Prime Minister) is automatically classified as part of the universalist-globalist "left", i.e. as lackeys of anti-Hungarian cosmopolitan (post)communists.

Those who disagree with the government are now openly considered a "national security risk", thus legitimising the unconstitutional and illegal use of secret services for domestic political purposes. It was only recently that the speech by House Speaker László Kövér to the heads of the Hungarian civilian national security services in February 2020, came to light. In it, he elaborates on "...the existence of two, practically mutually exclusive visions of state and that of nation, within Hungarian politics. (...) "A part of the Hungarian political class thinks, believes and works for a self-determining state and a self-conscious nation. The other part of the political class acts in the political tradition of a self-abandoning state and a self-tormenting nation (...) I consider this political situation to be the most dangerous national security risk facing Hungary today."⁵⁴

All of Fidesz's messages serve to increase the sense of danger in its own camp, to maintain the psychosis of a "besieged fortress" and thus to keep the country constantly on the alert, while the belief in the exceptional abilities of the Prime

⁵¹ MMA: Magyar Művészeti Akadémia, Hungarian Academy of Arts, PIM: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Petőfi Literary Museum.

⁵² See the chapter on Cultural policy.

⁵³ See the LGBTQI section of the report.

⁵⁴ <https://telex.hu/direkt36/2021/11/27/kover-laszlo-arrol-beszelt-titkosszolgalati-vezetoknek-hogy-az-ellenzek-jelenti-a-legnagyobb-nemzetbiztonsagi-veszelyt>, [László Kövér told intelligence leaders that the opposition is the biggest threat to national security], last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Minister, the image of him as a global political factor and the modern "personality cult" that is building around him are becoming increasingly consolidated.

The new trend in political communications is also reflected in the alarming decline of even previously not very high standard of parliamentary skirmishes, the disappearance of substantive debates, and the prevalence of a personal and disparaging tone, which the Prime Minister himself – when he sometimes happens to fancy a parliamentary session in person – spectacularly practises and provokes. Government representatives feel less and less obliged to present the reasonableness and justification of a decision in a meaningful way – it has become common practice to dismiss policy objections with belching out verbal trump cards, empty puns or tired platitudes, if they are even acknowledged at all.

THE MILITARISATION OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE

A new element, but one that is well explained by the altered situation, is the apparent militarisation of government communication. Orbán's rhetoric has been characterised, for at least two decades, by militant rhetoric to mobilise the faithful, and he has always been fond of military imagery, in support, inter alia, of his vision of a "strong state". During the Covid outbreak in spring 2020, it was no coincidence that the professional body that led the defence was named "Operational Staff", headed by the Minister of the Interior, featuring the National Public Health Service Chief and two uniformed police officers as communication faces. Hospitals were placed under military command, curfews were imposed with unnecessary rigour, and armed troops were on the streets to guard them.

Behind the introduction of a new military way of speaking, more far-reaching ideological goals are also emerging. In this respect, the Prime Minister made a speech of programmatic value at the 20 August 2020 ceremony on Kossuth Square, the key phrase of which was "Truth without strength is worth little! We only possess what we can defend!"⁵⁵ At the same event, Orbán addressed the newly inaugurated officers with these words: "Today, few people know what an important role awaits you in shaping the future of Hungary, which is regaining its self-respect, breaking out of the captivity of a hundred years of Trianon, finding the taste and path of old greatness, and shedding the miserable mockery of small-mindedness and humiliation... you will have an important role to play, not only because of the growing strength of your weapons, although that role will not be underestimated. Even more so because you are now the custodians of an old Hungarian wisdom quote: life is duty." (...) "From today you embody for us the idol of a man, a Hungarian military officer who fulfils his duty with arms and, if necessary, at the cost of his life".⁵⁶ It is not only the military-fascist spirit of this instruction that is striking, but also its patriarchal old-fashionedness, especially if we add the openly sexist tone of Orbán's speech in Sátoraljaújhely on 6 June 2020, in which he designated the place of "women" in ensuring the supply of Hungarians ("soldiers defending the country and masters building the country").⁵⁷ Orbán was not even seeking to fudge the issue: "... in the midst of the clamour of the unscrupulous, the dishonest ones who choose the easy way out, you only have to think that you have a duty to perform here."⁵⁸ Whichever angle you look at it, this is, indeed, a barely concealed fascist agenda to enslave and subdue diverse individual and communal autonomies, a diversified and unruly civilian world into a militarily structured, patriarchal, command-and-control system, on the long term.

The most impressive and concise symbolic summary of the new narrative is the video clip, which is a visually concentrated excerpt of Orbán's "Trianon" speech delivered in Sátoraljaújhely on 6 June 2020.⁵⁹ It suggests that, for 1100 years it has been our "historical mission" to save the Carpathian Basin from all kinds of superpowers, and in this effort, we have always been on our own. This is not different today. Of course, we are now making the region great "together with our neighbours", but the 1100-year national past is primarily an obligation for our "great culture-building and state-organising nation".⁶⁰ It is our responsibility to be at the forefront of the reconstruction, because "we have the horizon of our history at a thousand years' height", and therefore we can rise above "the limits of here and now".⁶¹ Our leadership in the region is natural, not only because "we are once again the most populous country in the Carpathian Basin", but also because "we have not been this

⁵⁵ <https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/belfold/20200820-orban-viktor-augusztus-20>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's commemoration speech here: <https://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-commemoration-speech/>; last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁵⁸ <https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/belfold/20200820-orban-viktor-augusztus-20>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁵⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjzM6V9I9OY&t=1s&ab_channel=Alapjogok%C3%A9rt%C3%B6zpont, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

strong for a hundred years", "our political, intellectual, economic and cultural gravitational pull is growing day by day."⁶² What is this but a cleverly packaged, old nationalist idea of Hungarian cultural supremacy cast in a "Visegrád Group of 4" (V4) shape? The aim of the struggle fought "together with the peoples living with us" is clear: "to make all the jewels of St Stephen's crown shine again" – the text refers openly to the so-called "holy crown doctrine", according to which the surrounding countries have had to be considered, for centuries, as part of the Hungarian state.

CHURCH AND STATE – REVERSING SECULARISATION

The government's previous political narrative, with illiberal democracy as its key concept, was replaced by a different political self-understanding after the 2018 elections. In his radio interview on 4 May 2018, Viktor Orbán stated that "we are working on building an old-fashioned Christian democracy rooted in European traditions"⁶³. However, the Orbán government's attitude towards churches and Christianity has not changed in essence compared to the post-2010 cycles.⁶⁴ The government's political communication has focused on the closely intertwined bonds of faith, family and nation, and as a consequence, churches, "working" couples ready to have children, and Hungarians living outside the country's (beyond) borders have continued to receive special financial support. The government uses churches as a source of political legitimacy and Christianity as an identity narrative that indicates, above all, a political attachment to conservative nationalism and the traditions of the Christian national ethos, rather than religious or faith identification.⁶⁵ This is precisely why Christian and "primordial Hungarian", pagan symbolism can easily coexist in political communication and performances, the most recent example of which was the celebrations on 20 August 2021, when a giant statue of the Hungarian mythological bird of prey was paraded along an avenue in Budapest, followed by a large installation depicting the first Hungarian Christian monarch, St. Stephen. At the same time, the government's "practical", populist approach to Christianity has led to a number of disagreements with the otherwise mostly loyal Catholic bishops (e.g. on the issue of abortion or artificial insemination, or earlier on the introduction of compulsory religious education in schools). The efforts to erode the separation of church and state are also reflected in the statements of state leaders and in various symbolic events. A good example of the former is the statement by Miklós Soltész, Minister of State for Church and Nationality Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, that "it is the task and responsibility of all of us to pass on Christianity."⁶⁶ This also includes the vehement statements by the government party which followed a journalist's comment that the head of a government organisation responsible for epidemiological matters regularly displays a clearly visible cross around her neck during daily official briefings on the coronavirus.⁶⁷ Significantly, in September 2021, "the Ministry of Agriculture, in partnership with the Prime Minister's Office, erected a large cross on each state forest estate to support the objectives of the World Eucharistic Congress in Budapest."⁶⁸ A kind of questioning of the separation of church and state is emblematically expressed in the fact that the Prime Minister's Office, which was transferred into the newly renovated former Carmelite monastery building of the Buda Castle at the beginning of 2019, is blessed by a Christian priest every year on 6 January, the day of the Epiphany, in the rite of (the) house consecration.⁶⁹ While these ceremonies are regularly reported by the "public" media, it was only after a Facebook post by a church leader that it became known that in November 2019, at the inauguration of the new Puskás Arena, a soccer stadium that can

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-a-kossuth-radio-180-perc-cimu-musoraban-26/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁶⁴ See the sub-chapter on Churches and culture in the 2020 edition of Hungary Turns its Back to Europe. 30-31.

⁶⁵ Ádám, Zoltán; Bozóki, András: (2016) State and Faith: Right-wing Populism and Nationalized Religion in Hungary. *Intersections*, 2(1): 98-122.

⁶⁶ The crossroads and kindergarten on Swabian Hill were blessed, *Hegyvidéki Önkormányzat*, 20 Jun 2020. <https://www.hegyvidek.hu/aktualis/hirek/megaldottak-svabhegyi>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁶⁷ For example, Máté Kocsis, the leader of the Fidesz parliamentary group, called the person criticising the chief medical officer a provocateur in a Facebook post: Elképesztő, de igaz: a balliberális újságíró felszólító a Müller Cecíliát, hogy ne hordjon keresztet a nyakában [Amazing but true: the left-wing liberal journalist called on Cecília Müller not to wear a cross around her neck], *Pesti Srácok*, 30 Oct 2020. The fundamental right of public officials to express their religious convictions by wearing symbols is restricted in several European countries and provinces, citing the interests of preserving the neutrality of the state. Balázs Schanda: Fejkendőviselés az iskolában [Head scarf in schools], *Fundamentum*, 2004/2 pp. 115-121; Katalin Szajbély: Vallási jelképek viselése a munkahelyeken az Emberi Jogok Európai Bírósága és az Európai Unió Bírósága gyakorlatában [Wearing of religious symbols in the workplace in the practice of the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union], *Közjogi Szemle*, 2020/2, pp. 1-8.

⁶⁸ A Eucharistic memorial cross was unveiled near the Szinva spring, http://www.eszakerdo.hu/magyar/aktual/2021/eucharisztikus_emlekkereszt_2021-08-24_cikk.htm, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁶⁹ The Karmelita Monastery in Budapest, which houses the office of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, was blessed again this year. <https://24.hu/belfold/2022/01/06/felszentes-orban-viktor-karmelita-vizkereszt/>, last seen 07. 01. 2022.

accommodate 60,000 spectators, "representatives of five churches blessed the facility and finally the Roman Catholic representative consecrated it. The event was also attended by State Secretary Miklós Soltész."⁷⁰

The 2011 Constitution recognised "the role of Christianity in the preservation of the nation". The 2018 amendment to the Fundamental Law went even further, with Article R stating that "the protection of Hungary's constitutional identity and Christian culture is the duty of all state bodies".⁷¹ In doing so, the legislator has closely linked Hungary's constitutional identity and the protection of the country's Christian culture. The recent amendments to the Basic Law also raise the fight against "gender ideology" to the level of a law.⁷² Article L of the amendment, ratified in December 2020, states that "Hungary protects the institution of marriage as a life community between a man and a woman, based on voluntary consent, and the family as the basis for the survival of the nation. The family relationship is based on marriage and the parent-child relationship. The mother is a woman, the father a man."⁷³ Furthermore, Article XVI (1), also as amended, states that "Every child has the right to such protection and care as is necessary for his or her proper physical, mental and moral development. Hungary shall protect the right of children to an identity appropriate to their sex at birth and shall ensure education in accordance with values based on the constitutional identity of our country and its Christian culture."⁷⁴ The explanatory memorandum to the Ninth Amendment refers to the order of creation, and it will therefore be the task of the courts in the future to interpret this in relation to cases that arise.

The Fundamental Law, which entered into force on 1 January 2012, and Act CCVI of 2011 on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Associations and Religious Communities are the cornerstones of the relationship between churches and the state. The Constitution enshrined the separation of churches and the state, but also emphasised the cooperation between churches and the state for community purposes (education, social, cultural, etc.) and differentiated hierarchically between religious communities according to the level of cooperation. Such outsourcing of state services is presented by policy-makers as an "alliance" or "strategic partnership" between church and state. The law distinguishes between religious associations, registered churches, recognised churches and established churches. Under the 2019 amendment to the law, cooperation is an obligation for established churches,⁷⁵ with whom the state enters into a comprehensive performance agreement, while with others it may enter into individual fixed-term agreements of up to five years' duration.

While the Catholic Church is governed by the international agreement with the Apostolic Holy See, the state has concluded comprehensive agreements with several established churches since 2017, ensuring stable funding for outsourced services: the Hungarian Reformed Church in 2017, the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation in 2019, the Hungarian Evangelical Church and the Congregation of Faith in 2020, and most recently the Hungarian Baptist Church in 2021. Since 2011, the established churches have been incentivised by a set of generous funding and regulatory instruments to maintain their institutions, and as a result, outsourcing of public and welfare services is taking place in a growing number of areas. The penetration of churches was fastest in the public education system, with the proportion of church primary schools rising from 9.4% to 16.4% between 2010 and 2018, while the proportion of church secondary schools increased from 10.4% to 24.5%.⁷⁶ Established churches have become major players in the past decade in operating Safe Start programmes, schools and Roma colleges. Symbolic recognition of the churches is shown by the fact that the National Opening Ceremony of the Year of Public Education has been held four times in church schools since 2010. The government launched the Carpathian Basin Kindergarten Development Programme in 2016, partly with church partners. Between 2017 and 2021, 130 Catholic, 66 Reformed and approximately 10 Lutheran kindergartens were built or renovated in Hungary with state support. A national programme to help 300 of the poorest settlements in the country to catch up was launched in 2019, coordinated by

⁷⁰ The Puskás Arena was unexpectedly blessed by Sándor Németh, Magyar Hang, 7. 11. 2019. <https://hang.hu/belfold/varatlanul-megaldottak-nemeth-sandorek-a-puskas-arenat-108122>

⁷¹ <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1800628.ATV>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁷² See the chapter on Gender policy for more details.

⁷³ <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2001222.ATV>

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Any religious community with at least 10 members can become a religious association and thus a legal entity, if it can prove its social support based on 1% of the tax contributions (average of 1,000 contributions over 3 years) and has been operating as a religious association for at least 5 years. Religious communities with an average of at least 4,000 pledges of at least 1% of the church's income tax over 5 years and which have been legally established for a long period of time may apply for registration as a registered church. To apply for the status of registered church, a church must have at least 20 years of operation as a religious association in Hungary, 15 years of operation as a recognised church or at least 100 years of organised international operation. Finally, an established church is a registered church with which the state enters into a comprehensive agreement, not an individual, fixed-term agreement, which is promulgated by law. The granting of established church status is therefore a matter for the National Assembly.

⁷⁶ See for more detail the chapter on Government-boosted advance of church-run schools.

the Maltese Relief Service, with mostly church and some civil partners. The expansion of the churches affects health care and higher education: for example, one of the most important institutions for teacher training in Hungary, the Eszterházy Károly University, has been operated by the Archdiocese of Eger since August 2021. By the end of the decade, the entire network of foster parents was brought under the aegis of the churches, and the real estate of previously nationalised children's homes gradually came under church ownership. The most recent development is the process of ecclesiastical outsourcing of specialised child protection services.

In the meantime, the situation of the non-established churches involved in the provision of public services has become even more precarious. In 2012, the EMMI concluded a 5-year individual public education contract with the Hungarian Evangelical Churches to compensate for the loss of budget support. However, after 2017, the contract was prolonged for one year only, and in 2019 the number of children supported was capped, and the amount of support reduced. The Roma Buddhist community of Jai Bhim is in a similarly vulnerable situation. The Dr. Ambedkar School was also covered by an individual public education agreement, which was terminated by the State Secretary for Education in 2020. Finally, the school agreed to start a vocational and baccalaureate technical school and signed an agreement with the Ministry of Innovation and Technology in 2021 to fund it, but the funding of the phased-out high school classes remains unresolved.

Each year, churches selected by the government receive billions of Euros in individual grants for cultural support (church community programmes and investment projects, preservation of the built heritage of churches). Through the level of support, the government also expresses the level of trust it has in a church. According to EUROSTAT 2019 data, while Hungary spent below the EU average on social services (27.9% of total expenditure compared to 41.4% for the EU27)⁷⁷ and around the EU average on education (10.3% of total expenditure compared to 10% for the EU27), it spent much more than the EU average on religious, recreational and cultural services (6.6% compared to 2.5% for the EU27).⁷⁷ The use of public funds through multiple funding channels is opaque and uncontrollable, and the outsourcing of public services undermines the right of access to services for non-religious clients and raises the problem of democratic control.

In recent decades, the withdrawal of the state from the provision of public and welfare services has been a process that is typical of the whole of Europe, but the involvement of the churches in this process is a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon. In an increasing number of regions and areas, the churches are becoming (the) sole service providers, with no secular alternatives. In these cases, it is up to the church service provider to decide on the distribution and organisation of services and the prioritisation of clients. The transformation of the relationship between church and state is re-politicising churches, creating a competitive political field of power both between and within churches, and the need to maintain bloated institutional systems is increasing their vulnerability and dependence on the state. Moreover, international experience shows that privatised institutional systems outsourced by the state become permanent, enduring structures in the long run, which cannot be dismantled or renationalised even in the event of a change of course in public policy.

PRO-GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA AND HEGEMONY IN THE MEDIA

As we presented in our previous report, after their victory in 2010, Fidesz has gradually captured almost the entire public sphere and, as a result, they now control the political agenda and set the tone for public discourse. The importance of communication is demonstrated by the creation of a cabinet office under the leadership of Antal Rogán, which centrally manages the government's vast propaganda apparatus.

It was already a feature previously, but in the last few years and during the scandalous epidemic management it has become particularly striking that Fidesz interprets governance as chiefly a communication activity. The most important government decisions "... such as the reduction of utility costs, the building of the border barrier, the LGBTQ law – serve primarily election related thematic purposes; in these, the majority of government members are only assigned an executive and/or mediating role."⁷⁸

Increasingly, government members and leading politicians are selected on the basis of public relations criteria, as their role is primarily to represent power to the general public. "The primary role of ministers and government politicians is not to

⁷⁷ It is a regrettable fact, however, that the huge sums spent on education and culture often advanced by government officials are not really spent on education and culture (as described in our report at several places) but on the government's propagandistic aims: building of a university for government friendly cadres, outsourcing other universities, building stadiums, delocating museums and other cultural institutions the location of which are vindicated by government friendly oligarchs, building huge cultural empires based on foundations presented to their friends, rich support of course art and propagandistic entertainment of the public, etc.

⁷⁸ Rényi, Pál Dániel: Orbán Viktor's influencer-government, <https://444.hu/tldr/2021/12/22/orban-viktor-influenszer-kormanya>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

make decisions on their own, but to implement them and to effectively communicate centrally-conceived messages to the widest possible audience."⁷⁹ They are assisted in this effort by huge communications staffs.

Fidesz is keen to use social platforms, which are particularly suitable for mobilisation, and is also consciously redirecting public information into these personalised, non-official – state and government operated – virtual spaces. Viktor Orbán is in the habit of announcing the most important measures on his Facebook page, never in the public media.⁸⁰

In the summer of 2020, the Megaphone Centre was set up "to gather and train influencers who think that being conservative is sexy, cool and rock & roll, to halt the liberal terror of opinion that is destroying the internet." Fidesz has been spending exuberant sums of money since the start of the election campaign to distribute the Facebook posts of pro-government influencers.

Here's a look at what has happened in the media since our previous report went to press. Since 2019, the pro-government media monopoly in Hungary has been further strengthened, along with the loss of space for independent and opposition media, the narrowing of free access to information, and the continued loosening of privacy barriers. Both freedom of access to information and freedom of information have been increasingly restricted.

Public advertising spending remains the most important tool for government manipulation of the media market. In 2020, the Hungarian state increased its advertising spending by 13.8 % compared to 2019, and 85 % of this revenue went to pro-government media companies.⁸¹ This situation allows for control over both pro-government and some independent media, which, 92 % of journalists and editors say, threatens or makes editorial independence impossible.⁸² Further distortions in the media market are caused by the fact that neither the multinational enterprises present, nor the large private companies dare to advertise in independent outlets, for fear of reprisals from the state.

The two biggest losses in the opposition media space in the past two years have been the government's takeover of Index, the most popular independent internet portal, and the official withdrawal of the broadcasting rights of the last opposition regional radio station, Klubrádió.

Index has been owned by Fidesz-affiliated entrepreneurs since 2005,⁸³ but for a long time they were unable or unwilling to bring the news portal under direct political control. In 2019, the owners initiated organisational changes that would have led to the elimination of the portal's political independence in the longer term. In order to preserve his independence, the editor-in-chief made the restructuring claim public, so the owners dismissed him with immediate effect.⁸⁴ Subsequently, the editorial staff – unusually so in Hungary – resigned collectively, handed in their resignation, and within a few months an independent news portal called Telex was set up and launched. Although Telex has gained a lot of popularity in a short time, its readership is nowhere near that of Index, which has been in operation for more than 20 years. Index has not turned into an overtly pro-government propaganda media; instead, it tries to balance along the fine line between pro-government and a semblance of independence and still maintains its leading position in the market. Although no apparently government-critical articles are featured on the portal, the news published is less one-sided and biased than those in the organs that directly belong to the pro-government media holding, but at the same time there is a constant tendency to depreciate and devalue the site.

As a result of the annexation of Index, the two largest of the three leading online media outlets – Origo and Index – are now under the influence of the governing party.

Since 2010, the radio market has become much narrower and broadcast contents have become more lopsided every year. While there were 250 independent broadcasters in the country in 2010, the number has now fallen to less than 100, with all of the major stations in the country held by pro-government owners.⁸⁵ The most serious blow to free radio was the withdrawal of Klubrádió's frequency licence.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See <https://mertek.eu/2021/07/20/az-europai-bizottsag-jogallamisagi-jelentes-a-media-helyzeterol/>; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1634551652872&uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0700>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸² Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania and Turkey in the years 2018-2019; Country report: Hungary. URL: https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67805/hungary_results_mpm_2020_cmpf.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸³ See: <https://adatbazis.k-monitor.hu/adatbazis/cimkek/index>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸⁴ <https://444.hu/2020/07/22/kirugtak-az-index-foszerkesztojet-dull-szabolcsot>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200722_Menezstettek_az_Index_foszerkesztojet, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸⁵ [https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/igy-hajtotta-uralma-ala-a-kormany-a-radiokat-fidesz-vajna-meszaros/30919114.html](https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/igy-hajtott-a-uralma-ala-a-kormany-a-radiokat-fidesz-vajna-meszaros/30919114.html), last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸⁶ https://hvg.hu/kkv/20200911_nmhh_mediatanacs_klubradio_frekvenciaengedely, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Klubrádió, the last independent public radio station, has been fighting for freedom against the authorities since Fidesz came to power. Or conversely, the Fidesz government has systematically, step by step, over the past 10 years, made it impossible for Klubrádió to operate, by depriving them of frequencies, restricting their coverage and imposing penalties. A last measure was taken in September 2019, when the Media Council, consisting exclusively of members delegated by the governing party, deprived the channel of its last Budapest frequency on the basis of bogus, formal grounds, so that its broadcasts are now only available on the internet. With this decision, the Media Council silenced the most popular independent radio station in the capital, which had a huge audience of 150-200,000 people who listened to its programmes every day – 15 % of the capital's population – on regular radio sets, and at least 10,000 on the Internet. Today, the station's broadcasts are only available on the Internet, a situation that has hit the station particularly hard because its audience is mainly composed of listeners over 50 years of age, the generation least familiar with online media. Klubrádió is now almost entirely community-funded, and its revenues from advertising are negligible, as potential advertisers are afraid to buy airtime in the station's programmes for fear of reprisals from the government.

It is not only that efforts are made to undermine the diversity of today's media market, but the Media Authority also aims to cripple the future of press freedom. While most European countries now require by law that manufacturers only install radio equipment that is suitable for digital reception (DAB+) in motor vehicles, and an increasing number of countries is preparing to terminate analogue radio broadcasting, the Media Council has done everything in its power in recent years to prevent the spread of digital radio in Hungary. Had DAB+ been successful, the Council would have less and less say in what entities could operate radio media services in Hungary, since digital technology would have abolished frequency scarcity, the government's primary market, and virtually anyone could start and operate a radio station.

As for the market for television networks which also broadcast public affairs content, there is now a complete predominance of pro-government broadcasters. RTL Klub, owned by Bertelsmann, is the only completely politically independent television station providing its audience with unbiased information on political and public events in its news programmes and some public affairs programmes. RTL Klub broadcast this news very late in the day, but only a few percent of its broadcasting time is devoted to this, because of the channel's essentially entertainment character. It has been demonstrative in its defence of the rights of sexual minorities during the government's homophobic and anti-LGBTQI campaigns against sexual minority communities. The only public channel (ATV) on which opposition politicians can regularly appear is owned by a fundamentalist church, which is kept on a short leash by the government through various subsidies to the church and government advertisements.

At the same time, in 2020, pro-government circles – apparently with public funds – launched a new far-right public channel (Pesti TV), which was intended to appeal to young people, but the venture was such a failure that it is now being considered for closure. Despite the hundreds of millions HUF invested, its viewership is still too low to be measured.

There is concern that the privatisation process started in August 2021, could lead to a hegemonic position of the oligarchic network close to the government in the domestic telecoms sector. The transaction, which was still in progress when finalising our report, will see a majority ownership in the state-owned Antenna Hungária – the exclusive provider of digital terrestrial television and analogue radio broadcasting in Hungary – will be acquired by 4iG, an already huge company owned by one of the oligarchs in the prime minister's inner circle. This will allow Fidesz to control the entire domestic electronic broadcasting sector even after a possible change of government. In 2021, Antenna Hungária acquired MVM NET Távközlési Szolgáltató Zrt., thus taking control of several strategically important government telecommunications infrastructures, which will in the future be permanently controlled by Fidesz-related players through the aforementioned transaction.

In the media market, the biggest loser during the Covid-19 epidemic was the printed press, which had already been in steady decline. In 2020, 100 million fewer examples of press products were printed than a year earlier, due to a dramatic fall in advertising revenues and the drop in street sales occasioned by curfew restrictions. This already crisis-ridden situation was exacerbated by a spectacular fall in demand – by an average of 15 % – for the hundreds of daily, weekly or monthly newspapers that had been taken over by the pro-government media conglomerate (KESMA) a few years earlier. This is best illustrated by the example of daily papers in the countryside, whose circulation fell from 450,000 to 275,000 following their transfer to the pro-government foundation. Long years of government efforts have also resulted in the destruction of one of the most widely read opposition weekly newspapers, 168 óra (168 Hours), which, after repeated changes of ownership has moved closer to the government, and has changed its formerly critical, public profile for tabloid style. Although the

government has tried to revive several – mainly cultural – periodicals with public funds over the past 10 years, these efforts have failed at each attempt, and one or two of the press organs previously founded by the government have become independent and critical of the government (e.g. Válasz – i.e. Response). The latest news is that the companies that publish 168 Hours and the free Pesti Hírlap (The Pest Daily) are launching free local newspapers in 10 large provincial towns. One of the owners of the publisher is a close friend of the minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, who is also in charge of government propaganda, and the other person is the very owner of Pesti Hírlap.

In summer 2021, the two remaining non-government daily newspapers, Népszava and Blikk, suffered another significant blow. The state-owned Magyar Posta Zrt. (Hungarian Mail Service) terminated its distribution business and from then on, the very publishers had to ensure that the newspapers reached their subscribers. Given that the only one with a suitable network was Mediaworks, a foundation that publishes media close to Fidesz, the two independent dailies were forced to contract with this pro-government company. This left the newspapers vulnerable in their vital distribution area.

Operating under total pro-government occupation, the publicly funded news agency and the so-called public media are openly mouthpieces for government propaganda, their information activities are totally one-sided, biased, far-right and inciting, and have nothing to do with public service in the classical sense. This is illustrated, for example, by the fact that virtually no information was provided about the recent pre-elections the opposition parties held, which stirred up the public, and mobilised 850,000 citizens – 10 % of the adult population – to participate in this event. The state news agency and media reported on the campaigning in the first round of the primaries only once or twice, and in those cases commentary was provided only by pro-government analysts. No pictures of the event can be found in the news agency's photo archives. At the same time, daily information was provided about the absurd "Stop Karácsony! Stop Gyurcsány!" campaign, in which the ruling party collected signatures against these two opposition leaders. It can be stated with no doubt whatsoever that the exuberant amounts allocated for the publicly funded media (at least HUF 120 billion a year) are essentially used for government propaganda and to discredit the opposition and NGOs, as other content published in these press organs is, in fact, only filling for political propaganda activities.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic created an excellent opportunity for the authorities to further restrict access to information and to loosen privacy safeguards. Although in democratic states one of the most important means of countering the spread of a pandemic and the panic that followed in its wake is found in open, honest and complete information, in Hungary the government thwarted informing the public by means of manipulating data, concealing problems in the actual situation and by propagandising success, which essentially contributed to the fact that, in proportion to its population, Hungary produced one of the highest death rates from the disease in the world.

Access to information is hampered by several factors. The Criminal Code has been amended to threaten those who spread false information about the coronavirus with imprisonment, which leads to self-censorship among journalists and further discourages their sources from sharing information.

The daily press conferences held by the Operational Task Force, which was responsible for providing information on the epidemic, were relegated to the online space after a short period of time, and questions from independent media were generally ignored. The government's communication on the unfolding health and economic crisis, procurement of equipment, conditions in hospitals, and purchase of vaccines is confused and opaque, with most information of public interest kept secret. Health workers are not allowed to comment on the situation in hospitals; journalists are banned from health institutions; and epidemiological experts not "tied to the government" are only invited to speak in the independent media.

The provisions set forth in the Freedom of Information Act have remained unchanged; they oblige all "public bodies" to provide access to public data under their control if requested, subject to the exceptions set out in the Act. The statutory time limit for dealing with such requests is 15 days, which may be extended by 15 days. However, during the pandemic, the government issued a decree allowing the authorities to delay access to public records for up to 90 days if the provision of information would "jeopardise the public body's ability to fulfil its obligations under the state of emergency".⁸⁷

This option is often abused by the authorities, making the work of independent journalists in particular difficult or impossible, as the issue of numerous data on public expenditure, health and vaccinations is delayed or not available at all.

⁸⁷ <https://mertek.eu/2021/07/20/az-europai-bizottsag-jogallamisagi-jelentese-a-media-helyzeterol/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

When 30 news media published an open letter in March 2021 requesting that the information blockade be lifted, the government refused and accused the independent media of spreading fake news. "The European Union, for its part, seems helpless. The infringement proceedings against Hungary have not progressed and a newly created mechanism for access to EU funds on the basis of compliance with the rules of law does not take into account the freedom of the press."⁸⁸

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT OF THE PANDEMIC

THE BEGINNINGS, THE FIRST WAVE

In the early days of 2020, no one in Europe could have guessed that in less than a month's time, the Covid epidemic – now in its fourth wave – would arrive. By the end of January, however, it was clear that not only had the virus appeared, but it was spreading at breakneck speed. "There are no coronavirus patients in Hungary and the chances of an outbreak are low,"⁸⁹ – the National Centre for Public Health claimed to reassure the general public, while on 30 January the WHO declared an international state of emergency. "Each and every Hungarian hospital is prepared to receive patients with coronavirus," Minister of Human Resources Miklós Kásler told the public then.⁹⁰ "Hungary is doing its utmost to combat the coronavirus, and the measures taken so far have proved to be effective,"⁹¹ said Interior Minister Sándor Pintér in early February, but what those measures were, no one knew, and there is no sign that the government made any meaningful preparations to prevent the spread of the epidemic.

On 4 March, Viktor Orbán announced that the first coronavirus patient had been identified, and a few hours later the spokesperson of the governing party said at a press conference that the "migration-related Covid epidemic or the coronavirus epidemic wave threatens not only with the immediate presence of terrorism, but also with coronavirus infection"⁹².

From then on, for weeks, the government's communication strategy focused on linking migration with the epidemic. Some Iranian students studying in Budapest who became infected were scapegoated by being criminalised, and then expelled from the country.⁹³

The National Chief Medical Officer, the head of the so-called Operational Staff, said at the beginning of March that only those who were ill should wear masks, because for others wearing masks was expressly contra-indicated.⁹⁴

In the first two weeks of March, however, a number of strict measures were put in place: all 15 March commemorations were canceled, hospitals and nursing homes were closed to the public, the first quarantine hospital was set up, a state of emergency was declared, state borders were closed, public cultural institutions were closed, most shops and restaurants were permitted to stay open only until 3 o'clock p.m. and curfews were gradually introduced.

On the morning of 13 March, when schools were already closed everywhere in neighbouring countries, Viktor Orbán not only informed the public that there would be no school closures in Hungary, but also threatened teachers who were opposing to carry on with their teaching work at schools by way of physical attendance lest they be obliged to go on unpaid leave. Then, on the same day, after an unexpected meeting of parliamentary parties, including the ruling Fidesz-KDNP, the political parties unanimously agreed to close schools, the Prime Minister made a 180-degree turn, and announced that all educational institutions would be closed immediately, and would switch to teaching online.⁹⁵

Although the number of registered infected people had not yet reached five hundred, the government's strict and swift decisions in these weeks were indeed aimed at preventing the spread of the epidemic and saving lives. However, in many areas of epidemic protection, the situation was completely chaotic. Pharmacies were quickly running out of masks, gloves and disinfectants, and an increasing number of reports came to light on chronic shortages of medicines and equipment in

⁸⁸ <https://mertek.eu/2021/04/20/riporterek-hatarok-nelkul-sajtoszabadsag-index-2021-az-eu-nehezen-vedi-meg-sajat-ertekeit/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁸⁹ <https://hirado.hu/belfold/kozelet/cikk/2020/01/24/magyarorszagon-nincs-koronavirusos-beteg-keves-az-eselye-a-jarvanynak>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹⁰ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/01/28/koronavirus-magyar-korhazak-keszultseg-kasler-miklos/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021

⁹¹ <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20200207-pinter-sandor-magyarorszag-mindent-megtesz-a-koronavirus-elleni-vedekezesben.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹² <https://24.hu/kulfold/2020/03/04/koronavirus-migransok-fidesz-hollik-istvan/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹³ The government was eventually forced to back down from the measures taken against them. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200729_Visszakozott_a_kormany_a_kiutasított_irani_diakok_ugyeben, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹⁴ <https://24.hu/kozelet/2020/03/26/muller-cecilia-ha-nem-vagyunk-betegek-a-maszk-viselese-meg-karos-is-lehet/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

⁹⁵ A Fidesz-frakció is az iskolák bezárását kéri [The Fidesz parliamentary group also calls for the closure of schools], [hvg.hu, 2020.márc. 13. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200313_A_Fideszfrakcio_is_az_iskolak_bezarasat_keri_koronavirus](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200313_A_Fideszfrakcio_is_az_iskolak_bezarasat_keri_koronavirus), last seen 30. 12. 2021.

hospitals. These reports were confirmed by the Hungarian Medical Chamber. The government responded by appointing "hospital commanders" to each hospital to control the stock and consumption of medicines and the use of equipment.⁹⁶

There were also a growing number of worrying reports about the shortcomings in testing and contact research: it was clear that far fewer tests were carried out in Hungary than were necessary, and contact research was a slow process from the start. In a radio interview, Viktor Orbán said that "I would like to point out that the nature of the virus is such that we cannot screen it, so it is not possible to identify it by screening."⁹⁷ But as slowly as the organisation of the protective measures were progressing, the government was quick to discover the potential for power concentration and opportunities for financial gain in the epidemic. Nine days after the declaration of the state of emergency, on 20 March 2020, the deputy prime minister submitted to Parliament the so-called Authorisation (Enabling) Act,⁹⁸ which removed parliament's exclusive legislative and supervisory (oversight) powers over acts of government indefinitely. The proposal was adopted by a two-third majority vote in Parliament, while 53 opposition MPs rejected it.⁹⁹

Although the Operational Staff held daily press conferences on the epidemic situation in military settings, the public was not allowed to know even the most basic information, such as the geographical distribution of the outbreak or the conditions in hospitals, beyond the number of deaths and infected individuals.¹⁰⁰ At the briefings, opposition journalists' questions remained unanswered, or were replied to vaguely. The media were banned from hospitals, and doctors and nurses were not allowed to comment on anything. The Hungarian public could only learn about what was happening in the Covid wards from foreign media.

As time went on, the government's management of the epidemic became increasingly political. Unemployment was rising by the day, businesses were finding it harder and harder to survive, but the prime minister promised to "create as many jobs as many were lost".¹⁰¹ Some spectacular measures were taken: political parties were obligated to pay half of their state subsidies into the treasury; a special tax was levied on multinational businesses and banks (later reimbursed by the government); and local authorities were deprived of their revenues from motor vehicle tax. The latter measure, like the abolition of parking charges, was clearly intended to serve political ends, to bleed opposition municipalities dry. The shortest period for unemployment benefit payment in Europe – 3 months – was not changed in duration or amount; private entrepreneurs most affected by the epidemic – tour guides, artists, catering and hotel employees – received either no financial support, or only enough to live on for a week or two, and only those close to the government received significant financial support among larger businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses went bankrupt en masse, their licences were surrendered, and the more valuable of the failed businesses were bought up by pro-government entrepreneurs at bargain prices.

In mid-April, the epidemic accelerated further, with around a thousand people in hospital and the number of new infections rising rapidly to over a hundred a day. In these weeks, as everywhere else in the world, the virus spread fastest in closed communities, among the most vulnerable age group, and there were some homes providing care for elderly people where 60 % of the residents contracted the infection. Masks, protective gear and all other necessary protective equipment were in short supply in the homes. But the most serious problem was that elderly people who had been hospitalised were returned to their respective homes without being tested, which multiplied the speed at which the infection spread.

The accelerating rate of the spread of the disease prompted the government to rush into action, with Minister Miklós Kásler sending a letter to hospital managers urging them to immediately make available 60 % of their beds for potential Covid patients. During the evacuation process under the regulations in a state of emergency, dying patients, terminally ill cancer patients, patients unable to move or care for themselves were sent home at a single weekend. This measure was completely unnecessary, as even at the height of the much more serious second wave of the epidemic, there was no need for the number of beds that were made available in this way.¹⁰² The hospital evacuation affected around 20,000 patients, while an average number of 1,000 people were in hospital with Covid infection during those days. The Prime Minister himself

96 <https://koronavirus.gov.hu/cikkek/hetfotol-korhazparancsnokok-segitik-korhazak-mukodeset-es-az-egeszsegugyi-keszlet-vedelmet>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

97 <https://444.hu/2020/03/16/orban-viktor-olyan-a-virus-termeszete-hogy-nem-tudjuk-szurni-tehat-nem-leheteseg-kiszurni>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

98 <https://444.hu/2020/03/21/benyujtottak-a-felhatalmazasi-torvenyt-a-kormany-erre-az-evre-kiiiktatna-a-parlamentet-hogy-rendeletekkel-iranyitson>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

99 Német, Tamás; Pintér, Luca; Presinszky, Judit: Megszavazta az Országgyűlés a koronavírus-törvényt, Áder pedig ki is hirdette [The National Assembly has voted in favour of the coronavirus law, and Áder has announced it], Index, 30. 03. 2020. https://index.hu/belfold/2020/03/30/koronavirus-torveny_koronavirus_szavazas_parlament/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

100 Ferenci, Tamás, a researcher in biostatics gave a detailed analysis on the heavy lack of transparency, <https://github.com/tamas-ferenci/GondolatokAJarvanyugyiAdatokKozleserol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

101 <https://koronavirus.gov.hu/cikkek/orban-viktor-annyi-munkahelyet-fogunk-letrehozni-amennyit-koronavirus-elpusztit>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

102 <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/04/15/koronavirus-korhaz-kiurites/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

admitted that all intensive care units together were capable of treating up to 2,000 patients in need of intensive therapy, and estimated the maximum number of patients who would need intensive care to be around 8,000.

At the same time, the country purchased 16,000 (20,000 according to other sources) respirators from China in a short period of time, despite the fact that only 2,000 qualified medical staff were available to operate respirators. The respirators were not purchased directly by the state, but through contractors close to the government, sometimes at two to three times¹⁰³ above the normal price, despite the direct involvement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the deal. One contractor made a profit of HUF 16 billion in a few weeks on the purchase of the machines, the vast majority of which are still sitting in warehouses.

Hungary is the only country in the whole of Europe where private individuals can still have themselves tested for a skyrocketing fee of HUF 15-20 thousand (cca 42-56 EUR). Free testing is only available for people who are admitted to hospital or referred by their family practitioner. Meanwhile, the public health service has been forced to destroy unused PCR test packages worth HUF 5 billion (ca. 14 million EUR) because their shelf-life warranty expired.¹⁰⁴

From the beginning of May, all indicators started to improve and the country started to reopen. In these weeks, not only the European Commission and all the economic forecasting institutions, but also the Hungarian Prime Minister predicted brutal economic recession for the second half of the year, while György Matolcsy, President of the Hungarian Central Bank, promised that there would be no recession, on the contrary, Hungary's economy would grow by 2-3 %.

At the end of May, Miklós Kásler, Minister of Human Resources announced that health employees would receive a one-off bonus of HUF 500,000 (cca 1,400 EUR), but social workers, who also worked hard to protect the public, were not given a single penny.

On 17 June, the members of the Steering Group also referred to as Operative Staff said a spectacular farewell to the public, marking the end of their activities. Hungary had, after all, weathered the first wave relatively well, with 588 deaths.

In early summer, despite warnings from experts, the government gradually relaxed its control measures. Although in July Viktor Orbán issued the slogan "more Lake Balaton, less Adriatic", it turned out later that he and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade had spent their holidays on the coast of Croatia.

Infection figures continued to improve in July but started to rise again in August and epidemiological data from countries around Hungary clearly indicated that a second wave was underway. The Minister of Human Resources announced that "the second wave has started in our area, a situation which I believe is very similar to the one we had in early March".¹⁰⁵ In mid-July, it was announced that mass events would be cancelled, including the grand fireworks display on 20 August. However, Béla Merkely, Rector of Semmelweis Medical University, Budapest, who is in charge of the medical part of the protective actions, said that "it is not possible to close a country twice in one year, so a different strategy will be needed".¹⁰⁶

THE SECOND WAVE

By the end of August, there was a marked increase in the number of people infected and hospitalised, but the number of deaths remained relatively low, mainly because the virus was spreading among young people who had been partying and travelling, and who recovered from the infection more easily but, because they were in contact with many more people, spread the disease more widely.

In mid-August, the Prime Minister was already talking about impending tightening measures: "I'm not saying it will be like a vise (i.e. shutdown), but close to it".¹⁰⁷ Yet on 1 September the school year started as usual, only with tightening control at the state borders – which by then was completely pointless – and no restrictions, despite the fact that there were already more active infection cases than at the time of the peak of the epidemic in May.

By mid-September, controlling the spread of the epidemic was clearly out of the government's hands. Of the tests carried out, the hit rate for positivity was well over 5 %, the ambulance personnel arrived at test sites to carry out tests only days

¹⁰³ The average price of the respirators bought in spring 2020 was 57,106 EUR, <https://www.direkt36.hu/a-kormany-dicsekedett-a-lelegeztetogepek-vasarlasaval-megis-ok-kotottek-a-legrosszabb-uzletet-kinaval-az-egesz-eu-bol/>, last seen 30.12. 2021.

¹⁰⁴ <https://444.hu/2021/11/24/valoban-megsemmitik-a-pcr-tesztek-et-de-olcsobban>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁰⁵ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/07/11/masodik-hullam-kasler-miklos/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁰⁶ <https://hirado.hu/koronavirus/cikk/2020/07/16/merkely-bela-zart-terben-ujra-maszkot-kellene-hordani>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁰⁷ <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/08/21/koronavirus-orban-viktor-szeptember-tilto-intezkedesek-beutazas-oktatas-iskola-szigoritasjabb-tilto-intezkedesekre/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

later, and contact tracing was not working at all. As the epidemic spread, the number of hospital admissions rose rapidly, and the number of fatalities began to follow with some delay. This time, the Ministry of Human Resources obliged hospitals to make available only 20 % of hospital beds, instead of the disproportionately high 60 % previously. A ban on visits and admissions was imposed in all closed institutions in mid-September. First the Mayor of Budapest made it compulsory again to wear masks in enclosed spaces, which had become a habit for many, and a week later the government joined in, imposing an 11 PM closure of nightclubs and a uniform, officially established (high) fee for PCR tests. The testing process slowed down, schools that remained open did not test teachers or students at all, the contact testing process, already sporadic, collapsed, and the capacity of hospitals did not increase. It was clear that the government was not at all prepared for the second wave. On 19 September, the number of infected people registered in one day rose for the first time to over 1,000, but five days later the UEFA Super Cup final was played before a mass of spectators of 20,000 in the Puskás Arena. While football matches with spectator attendance were banned all over Europe, in October in Hungary there were still back-to-back sold-out matches.

"Everyone can calm down, because if you catch the disease, we will cure you,"¹⁰⁸ Viktor Orbán reassured the public on the day the 663rd victim died of Covid, and the number of infected people rose dramatically. The focus of government communication then shifted from the number of people infected to the number of dead. With the death toll also rising by the day, the campaign was stopped and the opposition was accused of siding with the virus and waging a "death campaign" with unfounded criticism of the government's handling of the epidemic.

October saw a dramatic increase in test positivity rates, but the low number of tests meant that the number of people infected could not be estimated, while the number of people in hospital, on respirators and the number of deaths increased dramatically. In one month, the number of people in hospital increased sixfold and it was revealed that as many as 800 nurses and doctors had been transferred to Covid units in hospitals from other wards. Despite the rapid spread of the virus, the only tightening of the government's grip in October was the multiplication of penalties for those who broke quarantine rules. By early November, the introduction of a curfew was inevitable: a few days after the government argued against tougher restrictions, it introduced more restrictive measures than in the spring, including mandatory wearing of masks in the streets and a curfew from midnight to 5 am.

Two days later, the number of deaths in one day crossed the psychological threshold of 100. The health system was shifted into maximum gear: all hospitals were included in Covid care and a new procedure was put in place to send home those who were not fully recovered. A week later, the rules were tightened further: curfews started as early as 8 p.m., gatherings and private events with the participation of more than 10 people were banned, catering establishments were closed, and digital education was gradually reintroduced. By then it was clear that only a vaccine could effectively stop the epidemic. In December, different types of vaccines, one after another were licensed worldwide and mass production of these vaccines began. However, manufacturers were slow to respond to the huge increase in demand, and the Hungarian government continued to blame the European Union for the delayed delivery of vaccines.

After the peak in mid-December, the figures indicating the spread of the epidemic began to decline, but by then there were already close to 200,000 active cases (the largest number of new cases, 6,819, was reported on 28 November, and that of victims, 193, on 4 December), the number of deaths remained high, essentially not falling below 100 per day until the end of the year. The situation did not improve enough for the government to relax the curfew, so it was not lifted until 24 December.

The first shipment of vaccines from Pfizer-Biontech arrived in Hungary on 26 December. The Prime Minister announced in November that the vaccination plan had been finalised and that vaccines would be administered first to those most at risk as soon as the vaccines arrived. He also stated if there were enough vaccines, the whole country could be vaccinated in a weekend. However, it soon became clear that there was no vaccination plan whatsoever, and there was complete chaos around the vaccination process. The required registration was difficult or non-existent, some vaccination centres accepted anyone's application, others were unable to book appointments for those who would have been eligible in the first place.

On 19 December, the Prime Minister announced further economic measures: an extension of the moratorium on loan redemptions and the order to halve local business tax, another blow to the metropolitan and provincial municipalities, whose main source of revenue was from this particular tax. A week later, the municipalities led by mayors close to the governing party were compensated from the central budget, but not the ones with opposition leadership.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=788874521872733>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

"We've managed to contain the virus, if not neutralise it, but now we have a ground fight. We have taken it to the wrestling mat," Orbán said in late December,¹⁰⁹ and in January it was obvious that vaccines were not arriving in Hungary at the pace the government had planned. So another anti-EU and anti-Brussels political campaign was launched. "It is because of Brussels' mistakes that we are lagging behind America, Britain and Israel in the area of being supplied with coronavirus vaccine,"¹¹⁰ government members kept saying on every public platform.

And then – right after the respirator business – the vaccine business took off. The government signed a multi-million dollar vaccine purchase agreement with Russia and China, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade agreed with the Russians on the purchase of Sputnik vaccine, enough to vaccinate a million people. At that time, the Russian authorities had not even submitted the Sputnik vaccine to the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for authorisation, but the Hungarian government, through open political pressure and by amending the authorisation conditions by a decree, managed to get the vaccine authorised by the Hungarian EMA in Hungary within a few weeks. The Sputnik vaccine was authorised on 22 January without completed Phase 3 trials, with regard to pending partial results of the Russian trials. China's Sinopharm was granted licence on 29 January with the formal vaccine licensing process completely abandoned. A publication about this vaccine was already published in January 2021, which pointed out that "even in China, it is only used to vaccinate adults under 60 years of age, because there are no clinical trial results for the older age group yet."¹¹¹ In our country, however, it was mainly members of the 60+ age group who were initially vaccinated with Sinopharm on a mass scale. It later emerged that both vaccines were priced well above the EU-supplied vaccines, with Sputnik costing one and a half times and Sinopharm more than twice as much as a dose of the vaccine developed by Pfizer. The government also purchased the vaccines through intermediaries, so the suppliers close to it made huge profits on the deal.

In January 2021, the epidemic slowly began to decline, but the death toll remained around 100. By early February, the outbreak appeared to be in retreat, but the rate of vaccinations was slow. On 16 February, the first Sinopharm shipment arrived. The pace of vaccine administration accelerated, but there were continuing disruptions due to the lack of a well-established vaccination schedule. At that time, vaccines could be administered outside the designated vaccination points at the general practitioners' clinics, but neither the infrastructure nor the staffing conditions were adequate, and the administration of vaccines was characterised by tumultuous scenes, risk of infection and disorganisation. There was a series of failures in the IT support of the vaccination campaign. In addition, the Chinese vaccine was widely rejected by both family practitioners and the general public, despite the fact that Hungary's President János Áder and Viktor Orbán claimed to have been vaccinated with it. However, with the arrival of the Chinese and Russian vaccines, vaccination coverage accelerated, and government propaganda from then on saw this as the key to successful epidemic control. In fact, Hungary was the most vaccinated country in the European Union for months, with unauthorised vaccines being purchased, and the government celebrated this with a huge billboard campaign across the country.

While it was common knowledge that the EU was already prepared to produce vaccination certificates valid in all EU countries, the Hungarian government ordered 8 million plastic cards from a company close to it for 10 billion forints (ca. 27 million EUR) – several times the market price – on which the number of vaccinations of the person concerned was recorded, without revealing whether the vaccination was carried out with vaccines authorised or not authorised in the EU (Russian, Chinese).

THE THIRD WAVE

The second wave was still ongoing when the third wave of the epidemic occurred in February 2021 with the rapid spread of the British mutation. "I have all the bad news. The situation looks like we are facing the most difficult two weeks of the epidemic so far,"¹¹² the Prime Minister said on 25 February, as a so-called national consultation was well under way, with the government trying to gain legitimacy for its policy of no austerity measures in its usual manipulative way. While a few days earlier government officials had been talking about a slow opening, the narrative suddenly changed, it became clear that "we are in the grip of an epidemic" and the possibility of further austerity measures was raised.

¹⁰⁹ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/keszen-allunk-a-tomeges-oltasra-amint-lesz-elegendo-vakcina>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹⁰ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/menczer-brusszel-hibai-miatt-vagyunk-lemaradva>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹¹ Magyar, Ádám: Kínai vakcinától várja a járvány gyors legyőzését a magyar kormány, [The Hungarian government expects Chinese vaccines to quickly fight the epidemic], Euronews.com, 2021. jan. 18. <https://hu.euronews.com/2021/01/18/kinai-vakcinatol-varja-a-jarvany-gyors-legyozeset-a-magyar-kormany>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹² <https://atlatso.hu/kozugy/2021/10/26/a-nisz-8-millio-darab-vedettsegi-igazolvanyt-rendelt-kozel-10-milliard-forintert/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹³ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/az-egesz-jarvany-legnehezebb-ket-hete-jon>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

In the same period – on 22 February – Orbán declared that "things are going well for us in Central Europe", that economic data are "excellent", that public finances are "in the best shape" and that "our labour-centred policies have resulted in almost full employment".¹¹⁴ Therefore, no new economic protection measures were taken, despite the fact that the unemployment rate rose again spectacularly and small businesses in tourism, catering and commerce went bankrupt in quick succession. The government also distributed enormous budgetary aid on the basis of political considerations, with only oligarchs close to the government receiving extremely huge support from these funds.

By March, the steadily rising epidemic indicators were a clear sign that a third wave was on the way, which prompted the government to introduce more stringent measures than ever on the anniversary of the outbreak.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, the positive test rate remained consistently above 20 %, with the number of tests carried out each day being a fraction of what experts considered necessary for safe protection. Contact tracing was no longer even attempted. All these factors, together with the poor health status of the population and the shortcomings in health care, rapidly placed Hungary at the top of the ranking of countries with the highest proportion of Covid deaths in ratio of the number of the population.

As an indication of the severity of the third wave, the daily number of new infections was 6,819 during the peak in autumn 2020 and 11,265 during the peak in spring 2021, while the number of hospitalised individuals with Covid infection was 8,045 at the peak of the second wave, at the peak of the third wave it was 12,553, the number of people on respirators at any given time was 656 in the autumn and 1,529 in the spring. 193 people died of Covid on the day with the highest death toll in the autumn and 311 people respectively, in the spring.

The third wave ended in mid-summer, and although there were already signs of the onset of the fourth wave, the government leaned back and relaxed just as much as it did the previous summer. Hungary was still in a relatively good position in vaccination ranking, although the earlier lead had practically disappeared.¹¹⁶ The Rector of Semmelweis University, who by then was virtually the only one of the experts who had taken on an advisory role in the management of the epidemic to appear in public, said that there would be no fourth wave in Hungary¹¹⁷ and the government took note of this. That summer, unlike in other European countries, where the number of spectators was severely restricted, in Hungary international soccer cup matches were played before 60,000 spectators, all the restaurants and nightclubs were opened, and wearing masks and keeping distance was completely off the agenda. On 20 August, the foundation of the Hungarian state was celebrated with huge mass events and fireworks; the International Eucharistic Congress, attended by the Pope and by hundreds of thousands of people from the countryside and abroad, lasted for a week in the first days of September; and the "Hunting and Nature" World Exhibition, which cost 70 billion and was also attended by many spectators, was also a public event. Until 23 October, when the so-called Peace March organised by the ruling party took place, the government did not take any substantial protective measures, while the number of infected people continued to rise, and it was clear that the fourth wave had arrived. What is more, convoys of buses were transporting the marchers not only from the countryside, but also from Romania, which was at the time the most infected area in the world.

In the meantime, it was also revealed that the Chinese vaccine offered a low level of protection in the population over 60 years of age, but in Hungary 500,000 people in that age group had been vaccinated with it. The government, unwilling to admit this fatal mistake, rushed to launch the third wave of vaccination, but carefully concealed the fact that a third dose of a vaccine should be received primarily by those who had previously been vaccinated with Chinese vaccines.

THE FOURTH WAVE

The first – very mild – tightening measures were only introduced in the days after the Peace March, when the number of new cases and the number of people admitted to hospital and receiving respirator treatment was already increasing exponentially. In the surrounding countries, where much more testing was performed than in Hungary, 8-10 times as many infected people were found in proportion to the population. In mid-November, the daily the daily death toll was already around 100 and the high rate of positive tests again showed that the government's handling of the epidemic again got out of hand. At the closing of our manuscript (end of December 2021), positivity reached 25 % instead of the expected maximum

¹¹⁴ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/minel-hamarabb-minel-tobb-vakcinat-kell-szerezni>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹⁵ <https://24.hu/belfold/2021/03/04/kormanyinfo-jarvany-lezaras-bejelentes-gulyas-gergely/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹⁶ <https://24.hu/kulfold/2021/06/24/heti-vakcinaosszegzo-vakcina-statisztika-atoltottsag-nyajimmunitas/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.kemma.hu/orszag-vilag/2021/06/merkely-bela-magyarorszagon-nem-lesz-negyedik-hullam>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

of 5 %, and hospitals reached the boundaries of their capacity, with all the intensive care units, one after the other fully occupied by Covid patients. The number of people hospitalised and on respirators, approached the peak of a year ago, putting Hungary among countries to manage the epidemic most poorly for the third time. The vaccination rate among the adult population was still just below 70 % in mid-November. What changed compared to June is that people aged 12-18 years reached this vaccination rate, and most of those who had previously been vaccinated twice now received a third dose of a vaccine. This put Hungary among the leaders in vaccination coverage in Europe.¹¹⁸ In the month since then, it became possible for the first time for the population to get vaccinated without registering online. This raised the vaccination coverage by a few percentage points, although most of the vaccines administered without registration were third doses and those who had not been vaccinated at all were reached to a lesser extent.

In addition to the government's unprofessional, voluntaristic and politics-subordinated management of the epidemic, the scandalous lack of information provided to the population played an equally important role in the dramatic situation¹¹⁹ that arose once again. As 444, an online news magazine, among others, noted, "The Hungarian government's epidemiological reporting is the poorest in the EU. Even the scarce data on the central website is presented in a way that is not transparent, without giving any overall picture of the situation."¹²⁰ It is not known how many of the hospitalised, respirator-treated and deceased individuals were unvaccinated or vaccinated once, twice or three times, and who among them was vaccinated with which vaccine. All these data are kept in silence for obvious reasons: not to reveal that, as other sources have made it clear, the Chinese vaccine, bought at great expense, is much less effective in protecting against the Covid infection. Local authorities are not being given any information about the epidemic situation in their own areas, health employees are not allowed to make statements to the media, and members of the public are not allowed into hospitals at all, even though it is obvious that the main argument in favour of vaccination would be to demonstrate the dramatic impact of the disease. It is therefore not surprising that, kept in the dark, the majority of people have no idea of the seriousness of the epidemic and that alarming scenarios relating to vaccines are freely circulating on social media without being reflected.

According to Tamás Ferenci's previously quoted article,¹²¹ the availability of Hungarian epidemiological data was below the level of countries with a lower level of democracy and public accessibility. However, one of the most important factors for successful disease management is to gain the trust and cooperation of the population, for which "open and transparent epidemiological communication" is essential.¹²²

The central theme of the Prime Minister's propagandistic speeches since the beginning of the year has been that vaccination will solve everything. This has had serious consequences in two respects. On the one hand, it has led to the neglect of other means of combating the epidemic (wearing masks, distancing, testing, contact research, isolation). On the other hand, when it became clear that, like any other vaccine, the COVID vaccine did not provide full safety either, its negative impact was multiplied by exaggerated expectations, especially among a section of the population that already had reservations and fears about vaccination.

The management of the epidemic also involved a series of seemingly dubious economic transactions (respirators, vaccines, purchase of vaccination certificates, etc), which may explain the lack of transparency. On the other hand, it is reasonable to speculate that in more than one decision, the government has subordinated the efficiency of disease management to political gain. For example, when opposition politicians objected to the mass administration of the Chinese vaccine to senior citizens (which was not recommended even by the manufacturer), the government accused the opposition of taking an anti-vaccination stance. For a long time, the official propaganda echoed the above mentioned blatantly false claim that the opposition was "on the side of the virus", waging a "death campaign".¹²³

In conclusion, we argue that the management of the epidemic has shown the weaknesses of the NER in a concentrated way: the epidemic has been subordinated to short-term foreign and domestic policy objectives and the inevitable economic profit motive. Professional considerations, as well as the opinions of professional organisations and independent experts, have been sidelined. The government's handling of the epidemic was unprofessional, ill-considered, hasty and at the same

118 <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20211118/friss-terkep-erkezett-igy-all-most-az-atoltottsag-magyarorszagon-511616>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

119 <https://444.hu/koronavirus-covid-19-jarvany-dat>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

120 <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20211118/friss-terkep-erkezett-igy-all-most-az-atoltottsag-magyarorszagon-511616>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

121 See: <https://github.com/tamas-ferenci/GondolatokAJarvanyugyiAdatokKozleserol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

122 Ibid.

123 On the contrary, when the pseudo-opposition far-right dwarf party, Our Homeland, heavily backed by the pro-government press, is running a truly anti-vaccination campaign with huge resources, the government does not react.

time voluntaristic: health related data were concealed and manipulated; decision making centres were multiplied and the entire system made opaque; some issues were centralised in a senseless way, and responsibilities were blurred in some other areas; popular measures were used for propaganda purposes, unpopular decisions were delayed or passed on to others (municipalities, schools, employers, etc.).

Irresponsible and bad governance in the case of the pandemic is not comparable to the damage done in the cultural field. In this area, the loss is measured in human lives. At the end of December 2021, when our report was finalised, nearly 39,000 Hungarian citizens had already died of the coronavirus infection – 395 per 100,000 inhabitants.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/hungary>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Since 2010, the relationship between the political system and women has fundamentally changed. In many cases, it may seem as if the NER¹²⁵ is realizing the aspirations of feminism. However, upon closer examination, it appears that the adoption of feminist concepts and certain demands of the women's movements serve the realization of policies that are completely contrary to the goals of emancipation, favouring only demographic considerations. If we define feminist policies as activities and actions aimed at transforming unequal gender power, norms and practices by politicizing gender issues and empowering women, the NER's women's policy does the opposite: we find that any measure that "supports" women, in some way, serves to restore traditional gender relations and the subordination of women. Instead of increasing room for opportunities, the aim is to reduce space for manoeuvre and freedom of choice. The empowerment of women can be interpreted in the dimension of autonomy: policies that allow women to exercise their freedom of choice in their lives, their economic independence, and their sexual and reproductive rights. The measures taken by the Orbán regime over the last 10 years should be examined, compared to this benchmark.

The NER's strategy for women and the family clearly shows – and can be evidently distinguished from emancipation policies – the real aspirations of power. State interventions and normative rules affecting women are not primarily about women, but about the family – a family in which *"the mother is a woman, the father is a man"*¹²⁶ – where the traditional role of women as carers is self-evident. The purpose of state regulation is to solve the nation's demographic problems by creating a middle class that gives up political autonomy and loyally supports the regime. Even the policies that directly target women, such as the possibility of retiring after 40 years of service,¹²⁷ essentially aim to utilise the role of women as grandparents. Public policies affecting women rest on maternalistic foundations, primarily serving to acquiesce to their subjugation, to accept the carrying of extra burdens,¹²⁸ to settle for a new *"social contract"* that narrows their life paths and horizons in a society that favours male dominance.

The regime's policies for women and families implement selective biopolitics¹²⁹ that explicitly support certain social groups and do not seek to reduce the disadvantages and social exclusion of other groups. The family model of NER is a nostalgia for the idyllic middle-class family ideal propagated by the Hungarian governments of the 1930s, which even then existed only in the imaginations of politicians. From all this follows the nature of selective biopolitics, which, although it treats society as a mostly homogeneous mass in its rhetoric, nevertheless shows a different face towards the privileged and the marginalised and seeks to influence the composition and structure of society. On the one hand, this policy motivates the birth of more (preferably middle-class) children by providing a wide range of support¹³⁰ to families in employment, while on the other hand it keeps low (on the level of 2008¹³¹) vital universal benefits for the poorest. As a result, the deprivation rate for children remains high at 15.2% (EU: 6.4%) and 22% for those with three or more children, the highest rate in the EU (EU: 6.7%). 43.7% of Roma people, typically with many children, live in severe deprivation.¹³²

The concept of gender equality — its language, policies, and practises — has become the political and rhetorical counterpoint to the regime's self-interpretation over the past 10 years, as has the concept of gender. The silencing of gender mainstreaming and gender equality aspirations and "witch hunt" going on in this field have become leading issues in opposition to the EU.

125 Liberal democracy has been replaced by the Orwellian sounding "System of National Cooperation" (NER), which in practice functions as a competitive autocratic regime.

126 Amendment 9 to the Basic Law Article L (1) 22 December, 2020.

127 1997 LXXXI. The law on social security pensions was amended in 2010.

128 Katalin Novák, Minister Responsible for Families, stated in a video clip: women are "strong" who can "carry the burdens of others". The fourfold burden is already quite obvious: housework/childcare/elderly-care/breadwinning activities. And of course, "there's nothing wrong with that if a woman earns less than a man." See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaVOfr3CE8>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

129 The concept of biopolitics by Michel Foucault means rule over life. According to Foucault, biopolitics is selective in that it separates social groups according to who it considers valuable and who deplorable and "let them die" (Foucault, M. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*. Michel Senellart (ed.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Kóvér, Á. 2020. *Family Policy, Biopolitics, Political Technologies*. *Social Pedagogical* 15/2020. 31–51).

130 E.g., Family Home Creation Discount (CSOK); Baby expecting allowance (loan), etc.

131 Which was already considered low at that time.

132 Poverty Report 2020. Hungary. Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network 2020. *Esély Labor Egyesület*.

Although the previous parliament adopted a government resolution entitled "*National Strategy for the Promotion of Social Equality between Women and Men – Directions and Goals 2010–2021*"¹³³ in 2010, and the European Pact for Gender Equality was adopted in 2011 under the Hungarian EU Presidency, following the success of the re-election of Fidesz in 2014, a change in the language of gender equality and a governmental reinterpretation of the then still legitimate concept of gender began. In 2014, the Family Policy Department of the Ministry of Human Resources issued a document entitled "*A New Path for Equality between Women and Men*", but the concept of equality between men and women has already been narrowed down and adapted to the regime's ideology: in the frame of "*equality between men and women we emphasise harmonious cooperation in a familist approach*".¹³⁴ The "familist approach" has evolved to the point that in 2021, due to Hungary's lobbying activities, the term "gender equality" was deleted from the Declaration on Promoting Social Cohesion in the European Union.¹³⁵ The term "gender" is still used in ministerial texts in 2014, and attempts are being made to explain it that is compatible with government ideology. By 2017, however, the forces urging the complete exclusion and demonization of the concept of gender had prevailed, making the term inadmissible save as a profanity in government rhetoric. The appearance of centrally designed and maliciously assembled attacks on the Gender Studies university master program can be linked to this date, and in 2018 the program was deleted from the training and degree offer of Hungarian universities, an action in clear disregard of university autonomy. This action was performed in parallel with the complete abolition of the concept, language, and policy of gender equality.

The Orbán system did not merely content itself by normatively enforcing its own conception of the family, it also needed to declare the concept of gender as enemy. This bending in nomenclature provided an opportunity to abolish feminist emancipation policies and stigmatize LMBTQI sexualities. The policy of the Orbán regime has increasingly shifted to the far right, with right-wing populist narratives seeing "genderism" as an ideology aimed at confusing men and women and thereby destroying the organic unity of the nation. The growing societal rights of women and LGBTQI rights are thus not seen as the product of a decades-long social struggle, but as an integral part of a conspiracy to undermine the nation by "*globalist elites*" and their "*local agents*".

THE UNFOLDING OF DEMOGRAPHIC GOVERNANCE

"*We want our daughters to consider the birth of grandchildren to be the pinnacle of self-realisation*", said László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly, at the 2015 Fidesz Congress.¹³⁶ Then in 2017, Szilárd Németh, vice-president of Fidesz, claimed that "*the world is for those who labour it full of children*".¹³⁷ The above remarks by the representatives of the ruling power could even serve as a motto for demographic governance. In 2018, after its third election victory, Fidesz proclaimed demographic governance, which was introduced by a so-called "national consultation". The prime minister offered a "*separate contract*" for women, proposing them "*donations*" in return for their reconciliation with traditional female roles. It has been more and more common to hear from politicians the right-wing natalist construction of a "*successful female life path*" in which the professional paths of self-fulfilment contrast with the paths of motherhood. Slogans, like "*women's self-realisation takes place in motherhood*"¹³⁸ question and deny women's creative public role. This approach provokes rejection in a modern society where studying, brainchilding, creation, career, and work are the most meaningful part of the fulfilment of hu(wo)man personality. Let us not forget that the democratisation of higher education since the 1990s and the influx of large numbers of students into higher education have resulted in a predominance of women over men in terms of education. The traditional image of family and women voiced by older male politicians has little to do with the everyday experiences and perceptions of young women and men.

The "didactic" questions in the National Consultation Questionnaire, which preliminarily suggested the answer expected by the government, made staying at home, caring and serving others (men, children and the elderly) a desirable expectation of women. Meanwhile, the decrying and frequent contempt for women who are successful and in the public domain (e.g.,

¹³³ Government Resolution No. 1004/2010 (I. 21.)

¹³⁴ <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:3BdyAb1P0c0J:www.manorka.net/uploads/images/Prezent%25C3%25A1ci%25C3%25B3k/T%25C3%25960SZ%2520gender.pptx+&cd=11&hl=hu&ct=clnk&gl=hu>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹³⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-hungary-push-against-gender-equality-eu-social-summit-2021-05-07/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹³⁶ https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20151213_kover_nem_akarjuk_a_soros_felek_nyitott_tarsadalmat, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹³⁷ https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20170524_nemeth_aki_telezuli_aze_a_vilag last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹³⁸ Harrach, Péter (Christian-democrat MP): (2014): "Mother's Day is about those who have taken on children and experienced that motherhood is the surest and most natural way of self-realisation for a woman." <https://magyarnarancs.hu/villamnarancs/harrach-peter-eligazitja-a-english-noket-89905>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

calling female MPs in the Parliament "*sweetie pie*" or "*blue stockings*" etc.) set a pattern for what a woman might expect if entered in the "*big game of men*"¹³⁹.

There is essentially a "state maternalism" behind the ten questions of the consultation, which is not a recognition of the strivings of certain social groups, but rather an explanation of policies centrally devised by the regime to address the politically utilised demographic problem serving the government's ideas. The political relevance of women is determined by demographic needs, whereas the world of work and public domain, where men predominate, is dominated by an ethos of male solidarity and comradeship rooted in feudal traditions. Hegemonic masculinity¹⁴⁰ organises male society into a strict hierarchy in which the more valuable is the one who has more power and / or money — of course, the two are closely related. At the top of the hierarchy is the "charismatic leader" who keeps the edifice built on a network of personal dependencies under his personal rule and constant control.¹⁴¹

Demographic governance is set out in the Family Protection Action Plan, which includes the "baby expecting allowance" (loan)¹⁴², the extension of the Family Home Creation Discount (CSOK) loan¹⁴³, the mortgage discount¹⁴⁴, the car purchase allowance for large families¹⁴⁵, the PIT exemption for mothers with four or more children, the grandparent Child Care Fee (GYED)¹⁴⁶, the multi-generational CSOK¹⁴⁷, the increase of the amount of the 6-month Infant Care Fee (CSED) from 70% to 100% of the previous salary. The generous allowances listed above are linked exclusively to an insurance relationship, i.e., employment. If we examine the family policy discourses and measures of the regime, we can discover in them the aspirations to grow the population in an exclusionary and selective way. In other words, they make it clear which groups should have and which should not have children or multiple children. For example, the 'baby expecting loan' is tied to a 3-year continuous employment insurance relationship, in which only one year can be accepted as a public employment. But these measures affect the lives of individuals and families in other ways as well. The "baby expecting loan" can only be obtained by spouses, and the first marriage is preferred by the law. According to the regulations, the family must reside habitually at least ten years in the real estate purchased or built using CSOK loan, and the state registers a ban on alienation and encumbrance for this period on the property. If, for any reason, the loan (CSOK allowance) must be repaid, it will bear punitive interest. These criteria have a direct impact on people's behaviour and decisions. For example, people are forced to maintain their marriage under any circumstances, possibly even if it is an abusive relationship.

DOUBLE TWIST: WOMEN AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The Orbán regime also places new emphasis on the presence of women in the labour market. The second half of the decade is characterised by allowing eight hours of daily work for mothers on Child Care Fee (GYED)¹⁴⁸ and Child Care Allowance (GYES)¹⁴⁹ and by increasing nursery capacity — using EU funds — even in rural areas.¹⁵⁰ However, the structure and

¹³⁹ Kővér, Á. 2015. *Timike and the Sweetie Pies: Fragmented Discourses about Women in the Hungarian Public Life*. In Krasztev, P. –Van Til, J. (eds) *Hungarian Patient*, Budapest: CEU Press, 111–132.

¹⁴⁰ Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimises the dominance of men in society and justifies the subordination of the average (powerless) male population and women and other marginalised ways of being male. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with white men, heterosexuality, marriage, authority, and physical strength (Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).

¹⁴¹ In order to realise the masculine world's artificial and pointless habits, the regime does not regret spending billions e.g. the government spent HUF 17 billion on hunting exhibition, meanwhile only HUF 5.8 billion was spent on child, youth and family policy programs (Act XC of 2020 on the Central Budget of Hungary in 2021 <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000090.tv>, last seen 30. 12. 2021).

¹⁴² 44/2019. (III. 12.) Government Decree: Every married couple, where the wife is between the ages of 18 and 41, and at least one of them has an insurance relationship for 3 years, can apply for an interest-free, free-use loan of up to HUF 10 million (27,000 Euro) at banks.

¹⁴³ 16/2016. (II. 10.) Government Decree: The Family Home Creation Discount is a non-refundable state subsidy of up to HUF 10 million for the purchase, construction and renovation of a home, in the case of three children included in the contract and born. This decree was amended by a new passage including the possibility of the subsidy for people living in villages.

¹⁴⁴ The subsidy for mortgage debts in the event of the birth of a child will be extended to the birth of a second child in the amount of HUF 1 million, and the amount of the credit validated after the birth of a third or additional child will increase to HUF 4 million.

¹⁴⁵ Families with three or more children can apply for a subsidy of HUF 2.5 million (but not more than 50% of the purchase price) from the Hungarian State Treasury for the purchase of a new car with at least 7 seats.

¹⁴⁶ From the age of one to the age of three of the grandchildren the active grandparents can claim the grandparent-Child Care Fee according to the rules of the GYED.

¹⁴⁷ From 1 January 2021, the support for moving together with grandparents will be HUF 10 million, non-refundable for 3 children.

¹⁴⁸ After the 24 weeks of maternity leave, the mother can take up 8 hours of work so that, in addition to her salary, she also receives the amount of GYED until the child is 2 years old, which is 70% of the mother's prenatal earnings.

¹⁴⁹ GYES is paid to the mother until the child's age of 3, regardless of whether she had an employment relationship before giving birth. Its amount is HUF 28,500 (EUR 77). In addition to GYES, the mother is allowed to work for 8 hours.

¹⁵⁰ In two-thirds of districts the one-tenth of children under the age of 4 receive places in nursery, and there is still an astonishingly low number of places in much of the country. <https://g7.hu/adat/20190307/szazezer-ember-nem-tud-dolgozni-mert-nincs-eleg-bolcsode/>. Over the past 2 years, increased government efforts have been made to raise nursery capacity, however, of the 3155 settlements, 740 settlements provide access to nursery, which provides 51,000 beds.

operational logic of the primary labour market exacerbates the rather antagonistic tensions between caring responsibilities and employment and highlights the complete lack of policies to promote gender equality. Caring responsibilities and motherhood are in stark contrast to the image of the ideal worker¹⁵¹, generating negative assumptions about mothers' work-commitment and expertise. Take a look at ways to resolve the conflict between work and private/family life. The regime primarily passes the task resolving the conflict on the individual/family level. Although public policy supports, in fact, expects women's participation in the labour market, in the absence of equality policies, an increasing proportion of women workers are trapped in humiliatingly underpaid jobs, where they have to struggle to maintain their position meanwhile fulfilling their caring responsibilities.¹⁵² They are often trapped in public employment¹⁵³, which in most cases provides work with minimum income for women with children, whom the primary labour market is unable to provide the same flexible opportunities for raising children. As the Orbán regime links substantial family-related benefits to labour market participation, women are forced to participate in employment, even if in the secondary labour market. The proportion of women in public employment¹⁵⁴ is steadily rising, despite the recent decline in the number of people in public employment. The word "exploitation" is not very strong to use, considering that the income paid for the valuable work of public employees is not even close to the minimum wage.¹⁵⁵

Recent research shows that reconciliation of work and private life is only possible for women in public employment, which means that significant sections of society can achieve a satisfactory level of work-family balance only in the secondary economy. Here, it is important to clearly emphasise the openly gendered nature of the concept of the ideal worker. A workplace and employment environment designed for the ideal (male) worker penalises motherhood in the primary labour market and crowds out women with caring responsibilities, often with lower qualifications. The maternity penalty appears in the difficulties of entering and returning to the labour market, in the pay gap, in the difficulties of promotion. All of this is strongly driving women towards public employment.

The regime essentially has been withdrawing from resolving work-life balance by passing the problem on to families, expecting the reliance on the background support of relatives, especially grandparents. The aforementioned Women40 measure is a good example which allows women to retire in active age; as well as the rule which makes Child Care Fee available to grandparents in active age. Under the slogan "*strengthening intergenerational cooperation*",¹⁵⁶ essentially the older generations, especially grandmothers, are utilised in the reproduction process.

With its support policy, the regime clearly sets out the path that women should take. Additional options,¹⁵⁷ that would be theoretically available at the individual or family level are not supported in the current policy.

Regarding a fair division of labour within family and relationships, we find that anti-gender and anti-equality policies interweave social institutions and practises. For example, the attitude and values of the National Core Curriculum (NAT), which omits the topic of gender equality and incorporates traditional family roles and principles, well characterises public education as a scene of gender socialisation. At the same time, the state occupied by the government is deeply intertwined with the churches that the system considers to be within its own territory of power. The transfer of a significant portion of public education to established, traditionalist churches reinforce traditional female and family roles in school socialisation. The representation of women in the public media occupied by the government achieves the same goal. Significant gender differences are signified by the period of paternity leave, which is only 5 days by the law¹⁵⁸ – indicating the "weight and importance" of fathership, as well as the division of care work expected by the regime, between the genders.

151 The ideal worker norm constitutes typically male workers who are not constrained in profit-making by child-related tasks or childbirth-related absenteeism. The concept of the ideal worker is closely intertwined with traditional gender roles and is based on the invisible work of women at home (Kelly, EL - Ammons, SK - Chermack, K. - Moen, P. 2010. Gendered challenge, gendered response: Confronting the ideal worker norm in the white-collar organisation, *Gender & Society*, 24 (3) 281–303 quoted Fekete, D. 2020. "It's Good for Me Now for the Little Girl" Women's Experiences in the Public Employment Program. *Sociological Review* 30 (3) 70–95).

152 Gregor, A.; Kováts, E., 2018. *Nőügyek 2018. Társadalmi problémák és megoldási stratégiák* [Women Affairs 2018. Social problems and strategies of solution]. Budapest: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

153 Public employment does not facilitate the return to the primary labour market, but is a form of exploitation, as the people involved often work for public employment wages that would be available in the primary labour market for a decent wage.

154 Fekete, D. 2020. "It's Good for Me Now for the Little Girl" Women's Experiences in the Public Employment Program. *Sociological Review* 30 (3) 70–95).

155 In 2012, the wage in public employment was still 77.2 % of the "normal" minimum wage, which fell to 59.1 % by 2018 and only 55 per cent in 2022.

156 https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/belfold/Egyuttmukodes_kell_a_generaciok_kozott, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

157 The support system based on civic self-organisation has no tradition in Hungary Participation in civic self-organisations is traditionally low. Additionally, public policy conditions aimed at centralization and the undermining of local government have had an adverse effect on the strengthening of civil capital. However, market-based support networks are only available to the wealthiest.

158 Section 4 of paragraph 118. of Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code.

Orban's policy tries to motivate women's participation in the labour market in many ways. However, this clearly leads to a double or multiple burden on women in a legal and public policy environment that reinforces traditional roles and rejects the principles of equality. Additionally, if we consider that most families cannot afford the single-breadwinner model, we are facing a truly coercive situation in which the reality of increasing multiple exploitation of women is reflected. The regime's attempt to harvest women's workforce, as well as to utilise their childbearing and caring capacities at the same time, is quite clear.

Women workers, who have usually weak ability to assert their interests, have previously been able to assert their equality claims in the labour market before the Equal Treatment Authority, which has been in operation since 2004. This institution was abolished by the Orbán regime on 1 January 2021 and merged into the institution of the General Ombudsman. All this weakens the enforcement of the requirement of equal treatment. ETA treated the discrimination cases as quasi-administrative infraction and had the right to impose multifarious penalties in case of violating the requirement of equal treatment. The nature of the institution of ombudsman is profoundly different from ETA; consequently, its effectiveness in discrimination cases is fundamentally questionable.

Dual exploitation means that women must perform the invisible work and caring tasks assigned to them self-evidently, while their participation in the labour market is both an expectation and a compulsion, under circumstances that neither structural conditions nor gender equality measures support them.

Women's earnings are still 16% lower than men's, resulting in a 10% pension gap between women and men in favour of men. The gap between men and women among the retired population over the age of 65 at risk of poverty is even more informative. In December 2020, women were 14% more exposed to poverty than men. This rate was only 4.5% in December 2012.¹⁵⁹ Women retiring under the Women40 program receive 17.5% lower pensions than their male counterparts.

WOMEN 'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

There have been cycles in the last decade where there have been no women in government at all and then one in which up to two women ministers have been appointed.¹⁶⁰ The proportion of female members of Parliament is just over 10 % of the total number of members.¹⁶¹ These MPs represent the 52.5 % of Hungary's population who are women.

The fact that the Prime Minister is proposing a woman to act as the next head of state¹⁶² will not much improve this situation — an eye-catching move that is not based on the results of a women's movement or the outcome of women's equal participation in politics and decision-making. Only short-term political interests lie behind this decision, which is a classic example of the phenomenon of "tokenism". To serve a more serious increase in women's political representation, there have also been three women's quota proposals in parliament over the past decade (2007, 2010, 2011), but none have yielded results. The parliamentary debate generated on the quota has clearly shown the distaste of a strong male majority parliament for any change towards gender balance. Following the 2011 proposal, the issue was no longer raised in the NER regime.

The dialogue and communication between political power and women's organisations has become one-sided. Whereas in the past women's organisations were given the opportunity to initiate discussions, and conciliation forums were working. After 2010 the ruling power and its representatives took the initiative and excluded a significant proportion of women's organisations from the discourse and established and exclusively supported organisations which were uncritical of the regime's policy. Changes in support for women's organisations were made in the first half of 2010. Exclusively those organisations received donations under the "reformed" civil society support system (NCF¹⁶³) which carried traditional role expectations even in their names. The transformations after 2010 paved the way for openly biased support procedures, in which organisations with primarily national and traditional values were supported in the name of "necessary restoration" of national values. At the same time the critical, advocacy or human rights and "watchdog" organisations have been excluded. This was also visible in the support of women's organisations. Only those organisations were supported whose names reflected the new narrative: nation, tradition, mother, faith, religion, and so on. At the same time, organizations that defend

¹⁵⁹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/hungary/at-risk-of-poverty-rate-for-pensioners-females-eurostat-data.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁶⁰ In 2020-21, with two ministers without portfolio, the number of women in the government is 3, and this 20% rate puts Hungary from the back to the fifth place in the EU.

¹⁶¹ At present, the proportion of women in parliament is 12.6%, which provides the last place for Hungary in the EU. This ratio was 8.8% from 2010, 9.4% in 2013 and 10.1% from 2014. <https://qubit.hu/2021/03/08/magyarorszagon-a-legkisebb-a-noi-parlamenti-kepviselek-aranya-az-eu-ban>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁶² The Prime Minister announced on 21 December 2021 that he proposes Katalin Novák, Minister Responsible for Families to be head of state.

¹⁶³ National "Cooperation" Fund, which distributes state grants to civilians among applicant organisations. One of the means of "reorganising" civil society after 2010 was the liquidation of the National Civil Fund, which was organised on the basis of civil self-governance and provided for the distribution of civil and state resources available to non-governmental organisations.

abused women, combat domestic violence, and work for gender equality, or advocacy organizations of sexual minorities could not expect support or participation in any dialogue with the authorities.

A major political achievement is the success of the 2012 battle to bring domestic violence into law, organised by women's civic groups. Parliament set the time for discussing the people's initiative, which resulted in more than 100,000 signatures, at 10 p.m. and was attended by a total of 7 MPs (out of 263) of the governmental parties. In the debate on this law, a pro-government MP said that "... maybe mothers should go back to raising children, give birth to two or three or rather four or five children, and then it would make sense to value each other better, and domestic violence would not occur at all... then if every woman has had two or three or four children, they can go to self-realisation."¹⁶⁴ Subsequently a bill on domestic violence was passed in 2013, which was blocked for a while by KDNP politicians because it was considered to be incompatible with their ideology, having put the words "family" and "violence"¹⁶⁵ side by side in the same sentence. Finally, the law came into force in July 2013 under the name of "relationship violence".

As part of the fight to end violence against women, independent women's organizations began calling for the signing of the Istanbul Convention in the autumn of 2012. Through three election cycles the Orbán regime policies have become more and more radically maternalistic and nativist, as well as exclusionary and anti-gender, which did not allow for ratification of the Convention. In 2020, the Parliament of Orbán voted against incorporating the Convention into the Hungarian legal system. The motion which suggested the refusal to ratify the Convention was signed by two men and a woman. The woman who signed was the Fidesz chairman of the Parliament's Subcommittee on Women's Dignity.¹⁶⁶

ATTACK AGAINST SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES

Restrictions on the fundamental human rights of LGBTQI people did not start with the propaganda law¹⁶⁷ passed by Parliament on 15 June 2021. The Constitution adopted in 2011 excluded marriage equality for same-sex couples at the highest legal level, when it stipulated that marriage was only acceptable as a life-long partnership between men and women. In 2013, the legal concept of family was also changed at the level of the Constitution: marriage and parent-child relationships became the basis of family relationship, which excluded same-sex and opposite-sex couples living in a partnership without common-law marriage from the concept of family. The rules on registered partnerships for same-sex couples, which were in force since 2009, have so far been left intact by the majority of the government, so that despite the constitutional and symbolic prohibition of marriage between LGBTQI couples and the government's anti-LGBTQI campaigns, an institution with legal consequences that are largely identical to marriage is still available for LGBTQI people.¹⁶⁸

Under the NER, 2019 saw a turnaround in government action against LGBTQI people. It was the first time that a statement by a senior government politician comparing LGBTQI people's right to adoption and marriage equality to paedophilia and ridiculing transgenderism and non-binary gender identity and its representation received major publicity.¹⁶⁹ This turn of events was not without precedent. In Lithuania, a law banning so-called "homosexual propaganda" was adopted at federal level¹⁷⁰ in 2010, in Russia in 2013, and in Hungary in 2016 a provincial municipality, Ásotthalom, adopted a local decree that banned "propaganda promoting marriage or families with children not based on the relationship between a male and a female".¹⁷¹ The decree was annulled by the Constitutional Court in 2017¹⁷², but in 2020 changes were made that made it

¹⁶⁴ István Varga, Fidesz, September 10, 2012. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20120911_Egy_ejszaka_alatt_mem_lett_a_fideszesbol, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁶⁵ In Hungarian, the term "domestic violence" corresponds to the term "violence inside the family", which contains the word "family".

¹⁶⁶ The committee was set up within the Culture Committee of the Parliament in 2015 under the leadership of Fidesz.

¹⁶⁷ Act LXXIX of 2021 (<https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2100079.TV>). The Act is called the Child Protection Act by government circles and is most often referred to as the Homophobic Act in public discourse, although the term "transphobic" would be equally justified.

¹⁶⁸ A registered partnership can be established as a result of Act XXIX of 2009 on this subject. An important difference compared to marriage is that registered partners cannot take each other's names, cannot adopt each other's children, lesbians in a registered partnership cannot receive artificial insemination treatment and a registered partner of a mother does not qualify as one of the parents of a child (there is no presumption of parenthood such as the presumption of paternity).

¹⁶⁹ <https://444.hu/2019/05/15/kover-a-pedofiliahoz-hasonlitotta-a-koveteldest-hogy-a-homoszexualisok-is-hazasodhassanak-es-fogadhassanak-orokbe>. The conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia by pro-government politicians has been around for a long time. For example, Zsolt Semjén, who is currently deputy prime minister, reacted to the now defunct SZDSZ's stand for the rights of same-sex couples in 2005 by saying that "anyone who wants their teenage son to have his first sexual experience with a bearded man should vote for SZDSZ" (<https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20050223homofob.html>) – but it has not been translated into law.

¹⁷⁰ Sebők, Noémi: Homofóbia Oroszországban [Homophobia in Russia]. https://edit.elte.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10831/37415/Poltud_tan_2014_Sebok_Noemi_113-122.pdf.

¹⁷¹ https://hvg.hu/itthon/20161124_toroczkai_asotthalom_muszlim_tiltas, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁷² <https://alkotmanybirosag.hu/kozlemeny/alaptorveny-ellenes-a-muszlim-vallas-gyakorlasat-valamint-a-hazassag-es-a-csalad-fogalmarol-szolo-velemeny-torlatozo-asotthalmi-szabalyozas>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

clear that homophobic and transphobic manifestations, which had previously seemed marginal, were being transformed into a unified government narrative and then into public policy.

In 2018, in contrast to previous practice, government bodies suspended the processing of gender and name change applications for transgender people, and in May 2020, a law banned transgender people from having their name and gender legally recognised.¹⁷³ An amendment to the Civil Status Procedures Act introduced the concept of "sex at birth" as an immutable personal datum with which the surname must be consistent.¹⁷⁴ The political rationality of the law and the public policy discourse surrounding its adoption may have been to divert public attention from the failures to deal with the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic and the cases concerning misappropriation of public property. However, the law is not merely symbolic. The likely impact is foreshadowed by research, both in Hungary¹⁷⁵ and abroad¹⁷⁶, which indicates a high degree of social marginalisation of transgender people and an increased risk of suicide. The adoption of Section 33 of the Act mentioned above is also a manifestation of the decline of the rule of law in Hungary. Despite the fact that, on the basis of previous case-law, this is clearly unconstitutional and incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights¹⁷⁷, the President of the Republic signed the law and the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights¹⁷⁸ did not refer the case to the Constitutional Court, even considering the fact that more than 105 000 signatories of a petition requested him to do so.¹⁷⁹ The Constitutional Court found no problem, either, in respect of fundamental rights with the prohibition of the legal recognition of gender and name but ruled that the law was inapplicable in pending cases.¹⁸⁰

In the autumn of 2020, the Labris Lesbian Association's storybook entitled "Fairyland Belongs to All of Us", including LGBTQI characters, became the focus of the government's anti-LGBTQI narrative, after a politician who is a member of Mi Hazánk ("Our Country"), a far-right dwarf party (labelled as opposition), demolished a copy of the storybook at a press conference, and called it "homosexual propaganda", to the loud approval and wide publicity of the pro-government press.¹⁸¹ Another children's book entitled "What a Family" was similarly judged by pro-government MPs with the result that books dealing with such topics are required to be specially marked and sold only in closed plastic wrappers. From this point onwards, the government's narrative reintroduced the conflation of the LGBTQI community with paedophilia. This direction was set out by the Prime Minister in a radio interview, during which he stated: "Leave our children alone"¹⁸². Following this statement, government declarations and then legislative action focused on the role of LGBTQI people in adopting children and on the restriction of the participation of LGBTQI activists in school programmes. At this point the sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBTQI people was also linked with paedophilia. In December 2020, the Ninth Amendment to the Constitution made adoption virtually impossible for same-sex couples and single persons. The Parliament merged the Equal Treatment Authority, formerly an important organisation for the protection of vulnerable groups, into the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights on 1 January 2021. With this step, the level of legal protection of LGBTQI people was significantly reduced¹⁸³, because, instead of the organisation that previously made important decisions in the protection of their rights, the Ombudsman, who had never spoken up for the rights of the social group concerned¹⁸⁴, and is not independent according to international assessments¹⁸⁵, was to take over the tasks of protecting human rights.

On 15 June 2021, a package of laws was passed by Parliament, which will make it significantly more difficult to access content concerning LGBTQI people. The text of the original law on the fight against paedophilia included an amendment that was added to the legal text just 4 working days before the final vote, which aimed to restrict the programmes on LGBTQI-related topics that NGOs could provide in public schools, the advertising and social advertising in this matter to people under 18, and the age rating for films, which would result in films covered by the law only being broadcast after 10 p. m. In several cases,

173 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/05/hungary-drop33/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

174 Act XXX of 2020 amending certain administrative acts, § 33: Amendment of the Act on Birth Registration Procedure 2010. The current text of the Birth Registration Procedure Act after the amendments: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1000001.tv>, see in particular: § 3 x, § 44 (3).

175 https://transvanilla.hu/infografikak/letoltesek/transz*-emberek-ongyilkossagi-k%C3%ADs%C3%A9rletei-magyarorsz%C3%A1gon, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

176 <https://humenonline.hu/felmeres-bizoniyitja-hogy-a-transz-fiatalok-koreben-gyakoribb-az-ongyilkossagi-hajlam>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

177 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur27/2085/2020/en/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

178 <https://alkotmanybirosag.hu/kozlemeny/transzszexualis-menekult-ugyeben-dontott-az-alkotmanybirosag>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

179 <https://www.amnesty.hu/mar-tobb-mint-100-ezren-kerik-kozma-akost-hogy-vegezze-a-munkajat/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

180 Decision No. 11/2021. (IV. 7), <http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/CB4CA4E8F72D33DFC125863A00604976?OpenDocument&english>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

181 <https://magyarnarancs.hu/feketelyuk/duro-dora-ledaralt-egy-mesekonyvet-mert-szerinte-meseország-nem-az-aberraltake-133498>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

182 https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20201004_orban_viktor_a_jarvany_nem_ellene_hanem_mellette_szol_hogy_az_orvosok_beret_emeljuk, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

183 <https://helsinki.hu/nagyon-rossz-lepes-az-egyeno-banasmod-hatosag-beolvasztasa-az-alapveto-jogok-biztosanak-hivatalaba/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

184 <https://www.amnesty.hu/orokbefogadas/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

185 https://hvg.hu/itthon/20210804_alapveto_jogok_biztosa_ombudsman_kozma_akos_leminosites, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

the pro-government media have sought to portray experts¹⁸⁶ and human rights activists¹⁸⁷ who raised their voice against the law as supporters of paedophilia. Tens of thousands of protesters organised rallies in Budapest against the law. The European Commission¹⁸⁸ launched infringement proceedings against the law, the majority of EU states submitted letters of disagreement,¹⁸⁹ and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the law¹⁹⁰, while the Hungarian Commissioner for Fundamental Rights still did not make a statement on the matter at the time this manuscript "went to press". The legislation, which uses terms that are difficult to define in law ("depicting, promoting", "gender reassignment"), could, due to some of its features pointing to inapplicability, be used for silencing organisations, media providers, professional groups presumed to be involved in this matter because of the so-called "chilling effect" attributed to their activities¹⁹¹. At the same time, the Prime Minister called for a "referendum on child protection". The aim of this is nothing less than to use tendentious, manipulative questions to demonstrate public support for the law. Of the five questions submitted by the government, one was rejected by the Curia, while the National Assembly decided on 30 November 2021 to submit the remaining questions to a referendum.

The above processes have resulted in a significant deterioration of the legal situation of LGBTQI people in Hungary over the past decade. According to the annual assessment of the LGBTI umbrella organisation ILGA-Europe, the situation of LGBTI persons and communities deteriorated almost continuously since 2013, and overall deteriorated significantly.¹⁹² According to a statement by the Háttér Társaság (Background Society, an LGBTQI NGO), the number of hate crimes and abuse reports received by their legal aid service increased following the adoption of the homophobic and transphobic propaganda law.¹⁹³ According to a public interest information request filed, the number of complaints received by the media authority about the portrayal of homosexuality increased sevenfold in July-August 2021 compared to the previous year.¹⁹⁴ For young LGBTQI persons, bullying is a common problem in the education system: according to a 2019 survey, 82% of LGBTQI students reported being verbally bullied, 22% reported being physically bullied, and 13% reported being physically bullied in the year prior to responding to the questions.¹⁹⁵ A comparative European study found that LGBTQI people in Hungary were twice as compelled to hide their identity as the EU average. The marginalisation documented by research does not affect members of the LGBTQI community equally: it is primarily in the intersection of gender, wealth, ethnicity and gender identity¹⁹⁶, as well as in the intersection of disadvantageous situation entailing the features listed above where the chances for increasing social exclusion of LGBTQI persons are manifested most.

Despite these trends, recent surveys show that Hungarian society as a whole is becoming more accepting and the proportion of people who know LGBTQI people has increased. According to a July 2021 survey, 56% of respondents accept the phenomenon, and 23% know an LGBTQI person.¹⁹⁷ Another survey, released in August 2021, found that 73% of respondents disagree with claims that LGBTQI people are inclined to rape children, with 74.5% saying that transgender people should be allowed to have their name and gender officially recognised in their documents. 69% of the respondents think same-sex couples can be as good parents as opposite-sex couples and 59% support marriage equality. 83% do not believe that hearing about the topic of homosexuality at school would make anyone gay. Furthermore, 90% believe that age-appropriate sex education should be provided in schools, and 86% think it should be up to parents and teachers, not the government, to decide what to teach on the subject.

186 <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20210710-a-baloldal-gondosan-felepitett-hazugsagkampanya-a-gyermekvedelmi-torveny-tamadasa.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

187 <https://propeller.hu/itthon/3676679-kormany-propagandistaja-szerint-aki-reszt-vesz-mai-tuntetesen>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

188 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3668, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

189 <https://www.politico.eu/article/16-eu-leaders-sign-lgbtq-rights-letter-in-response-to-hungary-anti-gay-law/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

190 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-mijatovic-urges-hungary-s-parliamentarians-to-reject-draft-amendments-banning-discussion-about-sexual-and-gender-identity-and-diversity>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

191 In response to journalists' questions, the Minister in charge was unable or unwilling to define these terms clearly: <https://444.hu/2021/07/07/gulyas-gergely-perceken-at-keptelen-volt-definiálni-hogy-mit-jelent-a-homoszexualitás-nepszerúsítése>, last seen 30. 12. 2021. The aforementioned storm over the storybook "Fairlyland for All" is a worrying indication of what they want to ban under the heading of "the display and promotion of homosexuality".

192 <https://hatter.hu/hirek/ilga-jelentosen-romlott-az-lmbti-kozosseg-helyzete-magyarorszagon>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

193 <https://444.hu/2021/07/18/hatter-tarsasag-a-homofob-torveny-ota-tobb-a-homofob-tamadas>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

194 <https://hang.hu/belfold/pedofiltorveny-hetszer-tobb-bejelentes-a-mediahatosagnal-130191>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

195 <https://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/iskolai-kutatasi-jelentes-online.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

196 https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

197 <https://media1.hu/2021/07/14/az-rtl-klub-tobb-musora-is-homoszexualitast-erinto-temakrol-kozol-riportokat-a-kovetkezo-hetekben/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

In the way Fidesz, the party that has been in government since 2010, approaches the concept of culture, this word always and without exception occurs together with the adjective "national". In the party's rhetoric, the concept of national culture is just as clearly a marker of identity. As Chapter I of Act CXXIV of 2019 sets forth: "National culture is the safeguard for the survival of national identity, which serves the maintenance, prosperity and growth of the nation through the means of traditions, cultural symbols and common memory."¹⁹⁸ National identity, in this way of thinking, is a value that was created in the past on an essentially unchanging and homogeneous ethnic entity. In the party's memory policy, it is mostly given content by narratives constructed on traumatic events, conspiracy theories and myths that cannot be validated by scientifically reliable sources. "The museum must also present scientifically refuted legends if they are to construct national identity," said László L. Simon, the new director of the Hungarian National Museum, in his inaugural speech in September 2021.¹⁹⁹ The aim of these narratives is to completely expropriate the concept of nation and to arbitrarily define what belongs to it. A multitude of government-funded institutions produce and disseminate simple constructs in areas outside political public domains, notably in public education and popular culture, that divide the political community into good and evil, morally justified victims and clearly labelled perpetrators, and in which the positive meanings are clearly and exclusively associated with the ruling party, most notably with its leader, Viktor Orbán, while the negative ones are associated with the party's political opponents, or arbitrarily designated enemies (the European Union, the United States of America, "migrants", the Roma, the LGBTQI community, George Soros and left-wing political figures).

If we were to define the nature of Fidesz's cultural policy, we should distinguish two concepts of culture. The narrower concept of culture focuses on the values created by arts and sciences, their preservation and transfer. This concept of culture is primarily concerned with the values created and consumed by the elite. This also has an emancipatory dimension, in so far as it is assumed and desired that these values will also have a beneficial effect on society as a whole in the longer term. The broad concept of culture encompasses the whole of a common set of reflexes and knowledge structures acquired and developed through learning and does not therefore focus on a single set of values or social stratum. Culture in this case refers to the complex mental, moral, cognitive and social-psychological foundations which, in their stratified and heterogeneous nature, determine how a society functions.

The single goal of the cultural policy Fidesz pursues is above all to stay in power. For the party's leader, the acquisition and securing of power has at all times been a ceaseless war against designated enemies. The framework of struggle for political power in the area of culture is determined by the narrow concept of culture itself. It is a policy aimed at intellectuals, and to convert a certain group of intellectuals into clients of the ruling party to the detriment of other competing groups.

This policy is institution-focused in that it sees cultural institutions run by loyal members of the elite as centres of power and ideology. At the same time Fidesz as a party, which thinks in terms of a closed concept of culture, also assumes that the institutions it controls can convey their ideological messages across to the whole society, and it finds a means to do so primarily in popular culture. Right after the representative re-design of Buda Castle and other parts of Budapest, and with far lesser finances, Fidesz made efforts to turn popular music into a political player.

The novelty of its current term in power is that Fidesz has recognised culture as a long-term means for shaping consciousness in general. Viktor Orbán is in charge of the ideological direction of cultural policy. Cultural narratives are not determined by the under-secretary responsible for the area, but by a few journalists and institutional leaders whose views may differ in many details, but who agree that cultural narratives (myths, beliefs) can achieve what daily political narratives, driven by short-term interests, cannot. They implant fundamental patterns as evidence in people's minds, identity-forming symbols and imaginary forms that portray Fidesz and its leader as distinguished fighters for noble Hungarian national causes. This essential aspect of cultural policy is strongly reminiscent of the Stalinist model of the 1950s.

¹⁹⁸ <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1900124.TV>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

¹⁹⁹ <https://telex.hu/kult/2021/09/03/nemzeti-muzeum-kulturpolitika-l-simon-laszlo-beiktatasi-beszed>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Viktor Orbán has repeatedly stated that he sees culture as a "battlefield", which, as he explained in his speech at György Fekete's funeral²⁰⁰ on 23 June 2020, is today being waged against the lifestyles and attitudes that prevail in the West and that have caused horror in the minds of those committed to national culture, and directly against those for whom national engagement differs from that of Fidesz devotees, and for whom the content and language expressing national commitment are not identical with the language used by the leader of the party, and the language he uses when talking about the world and Europe. The reason why it is impossible to capture the cultural aspects of national commitment in Fidesz's way of thinking is that it has no aesthetic component, only a political one. Thus, there is nothing to prevent national culture from being a genuinely combative concept in Fidesz rhetoric, and from it being played against anyone, against any institution, if the current interests of the party in power so desire. "We Hungarians", Viktor Orbán, who is fond of speaking on behalf of the national community as a whole, continued in his speech mentioned above, "want an alliance of national commitment and self-principled artistic aspirations".²⁰¹ What is striking in this sentence is not only the total appropriation of the identity marker "Hungarians", but also the compulsive repetition of the early Kádár-era version of the opposition between commitment and autonomy, a familiar twentieth-century opposition, and the fact that it is will that determines the relationship between commitment and autonomy. Moreover, "will" overrides "autonomy" with the support of "commitment", which in the former sense means the enthusiastic representation of the political content designated by Fidesz. The framework of cultural policy is also defined by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's statement of principles speech on 10 May 2018: "Distinguished Members of Parliament, One cannot renew an entire nation in secret. In my view, the success we have achieved so far is due to the fact that we have openly declared that the era of liberal democracy is over."²⁰²

The power discourse of the last two years has been dominated by the expression and rhetoric of the "Kulturkampf". The Fidesz's power apparatus realised that while it had succeeded to a large extent in imposing its will on structures and actors in the areas of Hungarian economy, the judiciary and the media, the same could not be said of a significant number of actors in the cultural arena. So actors in this area even in the 12th year of Fidesz rule by overwhelming majority in Parliament still have, although small, not totally negligible resistance potential in terms of social influence.

In 2020, Márton Békés, head of the Institute for the Study of Communism and a member of the board of trustees of the Hungarian Foundation for Culture, a body that had been established by Viktor Orbán, took over the management of a very significant amount of state property that was presented to the Foundation. Békés published a book entitled "Cultural Warfare. The Theory and Practice of Cultural Power", which aims to provide a theoretical framework for Fidesz's power politics in the area of culture. Based on Carl Schmitt's principles, the book argues that Fidesz's aim is to gain absolute power and secure total "hegemony" in the long term. To this end, it is essential to ensure cultural hegemony. This is the sole objective of cultural policy. In the introductory chapter of his book, Márton Békés says: "Ardent methodology and dogged consistency, sparing no time or energy, are the recipe for victory in the fight for culture. Timing must be adapted to the nature of the operation in which the strategy is to be implemented, and it must be done by means of a patient timeline that believes in long-term cultural work, i.e. in thorough intellectual preparation and careful execution, rather than in quick political successes. This is a long, tedious, persistent struggle: passing laws can be executed in a short time, but transforming public thinking is a decade-long task. The latter requires the creation, but even more so the operation and networking of institutions – in this case, it is not the type of weapon that determines the outcome of the struggle, but the other way round. (...) It is much more than the recognition of the culture-shaping role of education and training; it is the fact that the words that flow through various channels should influence consciousness and thinking. In other words, the solution is to a large extent in the institutions, the structure is the content. Institutions not only symbolise power, they represent power, and institutions themselves (also) actually are the equivalent for power. The construction of cultural hegemony is a protracted trench warfare, not a lightning-fast bayonet attack..."²⁰³

In the sense and spirit of the quoted lines, the structure of Fidesz's cultural policy is tautological and, as such, not inclusive. The content of power is the sovereign's desire for total power, and this determines the political strategy offered to the sovereign. The militant rhetoric, which draws its imagery from the idealisation of World War I, in this case coincides with the

²⁰⁰ György Fekete, former head of MMA (Hungarian Academy of Arts).

²⁰¹ <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-fekete-gyorgy-a-magyar-muveszeti-akademia-nehai-elnokenek-temetesen/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁰² <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-a-miniszterelnoki-eskuteletet-kovetoen/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁰³ Békés, Márton: *Kulturális hadviselés. A kulturális hatalom elmélete és gyakorlata [Cultural warfare. Theory and practice of cultural power]*, Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány, Budapest, 2020. 10.

aim of the narrative, which is the total militarisation of the area of culture, so that in this struggle Fidesz can conquer all institutions and achieve total victory in people's minds.

This ambition is equally prevalent when it comes to the protection of national heritage, the abolition of the professional autonomy of theatres, museums and public collections, the transformation of the architectural and sculptural symbolism of public spaces, the dismantling of the research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and to the total disenfranchisement of university senates. The cultural sector as a whole can be characterised by a significantly growing rate of vulnerability and reduction of autonomy.

LITERATURE

In the past two years, the tendencies observable in literary policy in Hungary were similar to those in the field of scientific research, higher education and in other areas of culture. (1) Centralization was continued: new leaders were appointed to state institutions, who are maximally loyal both to Viktor Orbán himself and his political system; the work of organisations and forums of the opposition were made more difficult and their resources were reduced. (2) New "power centres" were established in the cultural sector. (3) Literature, publishing and book trade still function as an arena for ideological fights. (4) It is a novel feature that circles close to Orbán intervene in the functioning of the market, using public money. (5) Public wealth is transferred to public trust foundations (KEKVAs).

(1) In February 2019, Szilárd Demeter was named as the director of the Petőfi Museum of Literature (PIM), which has the highest budget among institutions of Hungarian literature. Previously, PIM had leaders with significant professional history (e.g. as cultural managers or literary historians). The new director, however, had only a meagre professional background. His character is well illustrated by his statement in summer 2019: "I am an extreme Orbánist, I support the government policy to 110%."²⁰⁴ Demeter's appointment signalled the strengthening of Kulturkampf, and it also showed that in the pro-government sector time is running out for moderate players, who are to be replaced by radicals.

In a very short time, Demeter became one of the most powerful leaders of the Hungarian cultural sphere, reigning over several fields. Already in 2019, he was appointed to be a ministerial commissioner responsible for the "integrated development of the National Library, the Hungarian publishing industry, and the public literary collections", and in summer 2020, he became the ministerial commissioner for "the coordination and nationalisation of Hungarian popular music". Severe aversion was raised by this cumulation of titles, especially because he regularly puts forward provocative statements both in speech and in his publications, which contradict the ethic of civilised Europe and make all democrats indignant. In November 2020, for example, when the Hungarian and the Polish governments were planning to veto the EU budget, Demeter wrote this in a newspaper article: "Europe is George Soros' gas chamber: toxic gas flows from the capsule of a multicultural open society, which is deadly to the European way of life. And we, European nations, are doomed to tread on each other, to climb on each other in order to try and fight for the last sniff of air."²⁰⁵ (As a result of protests, Demeter's article was removed, and Demeter apologised.) The tone of his interviews, statements and longer or shorter newspaper articles is intended to be tough and cool; thus several of these are perfectly suitable for polarising and dominating public discourse, and also for tiring the leftist liberal intellectuals who react to these attacks.

(2) It has been the Fidesz government's long-standing ambition to extend their power over the Hungarian cultural sphere, at least at the institutional level. However, they were unable to handle culture as such, as it is an inconceivable entity. The expected results were not achieved by the cultural directives issued by the government, and institutions, organisations or platforms created to fulfil these goals ceased or were hollowed out. It is a justified fear of the government that the cultural system created by them will be deprived of its substance: the popular-national Christian culture with the mythological "turul" bird can only be traded up to a certain level, while the needs of the wide public cannot be ignored. This road is marked by defeated secretaries of state (László Simon L., Géza Szócs, Péter Hoppál), over financed institutions that have become useless (Kárpát-medencei Tehetséggondozó Nonprofit Kft. KMGMT – Carpathian Basin Talent Care Non-profit Ltd., Magyar Krónika Magazin – Hungarian Chronicle Magazine), and directors who proved to be too soft and thus were

²⁰⁴ Szántó, Eszter: Demeter: Megveszekedett orbánista vagyok, a kormány politikáját szánttíz százalékig támogatom [Demeter: I am an extreme Orbánist, I support the government policy to 110%]. 24.hu, 6 June 2019. <https://24.hu/kultura/2019/06/06/demeter-szilard-petofi-irodalmi-muzeum-orban-viktor-kulturharc/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁰⁵ Bereznay, István; Ágoston, Zoltán: Demeter Szilárd szerint Soros György a liberális Führer. Európa pedig a gázkamrája [According to Szilárd Demeter, George Soros is the liberal Führer, and Europe is his gas chamber]. 28 November 2020. Index.hu, https://index.hu/belfold/2020/11/28/demeter_szilard_soros/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

dismissed (e.g. Gergely Prőhle, former director of the PIM). This amount of failure is unusual for a government that is used to total victory. The next step on this path was the initiative to transform the PIM, and to put Szilárd Demeter in a position of a cultural secretary of state or a minister possibly. Incidentally, this latter ambition is a hidden unintentional acknowledgement by the government that the so-called mammoth ministries are inoperative, and sectors similar to culture would require independent representation.

Demeter started to extend the influence of the PIM, the top institution over several smaller museums, and his own power over the cultural sphere with full swing. The budget of the museum was increased, several scholarship schemes were subordinated to the museum. Additionally, the director general launched new grant programs with unprecedented sums in order to win the writers' sympathy. Although these scholarships are awarded by a professional board, Demeter insisted on himself retaining the right of veto. As the first step of this process, the Petőfi Literary Fund was established. Several scholarship programs, e.g. the Móricz Zsigmond Grant, were transferred to PIM. This was followed by the establishment of the Térey Scholarship (PIM – Digital Academy Author's Career Program), which almost led to the disintegration of the independent anti-government literary community.

Meanwhile, Demeter and professionals from his circles appeared in several boards of trustees for cultural awards. Their influence extended to the popular music sector as well. By now, it is very difficult to list the institutions, organisations, foundations, investments (Hajógyári Island, etc.) or specific buildings (Zichy Castle, Andrásy Palace, etc.) that are managed and controlled by Demeter. In April 2021, the Foundation for Hungarian Culture (Magyar Kultúráért Alapítvány) was established, which is to serve as the asset management company of the above listed institutions.²⁰⁶ Szilárd Demeter was also appointed to head this foundation, which had been created to outsource public wealth. Márton Békés, director of the House of Terror, the most important ideologist of Orbán's Kulturkampf at present, was also named as a member of the board of trustees. This way, the new institutional structure will get its final form, which is going to be more and less than a ministry of culture. In the long run, it is to permeate all segments of the cultural sector, but due to its build-up, it will not be controlled by the parliament in power.

(3) The following example illustrates the Hungarian Kulturkampf. In the past two years, the government's campaign against the LMBTQI community has strengthened and has become more and more explicit.²⁰⁷ This concept is not only formulated as political rhetoric, but also appears in legislation: domestic and international protests followed the act that restricts adoption by same-sex couples, then the act on the restriction of sexual education of children, which blurs the line between paedophilia and homosexuality. The implementing regulation of the latter act declares that products that display or promote deviation from one's birth gender identity, gender reassignment or homosexuality and products portraying sexuality in a self-serving way must not be sold within two hundred metres (approximately 656 feet) of any entrances of educational institutions, premises of child and youth protection services, churches and other places dedicated to the practice of religion.²⁰⁸ While the wording of the regulation can be interpreted in a flexible way, this rule is an example of ideological Kulturkampf, which does not only interfere with the content of education, but also with the market of books and periodicals.

(4) A new device for interfering with the book market is that Orbán's circles buy shares in the book trade segment. As a business transaction, the Mathias Corvinus Collegium Foundation, which was created to educate the pro-Orbán elite intellectuals and which is financed from public money, became an indirect strategic minority shareholder (30.94%) of one of the largest book trade companies, Libri–Bookline Zrt. in April 2021.²⁰⁹ This step shows that Orbán and his circles want to secure their economic and cultural power using the public money at their disposal even if they should retire from power for a shorter or longer period of time, sooner or later.

(5) This latter endeavour – both concerning the cultural sector and higher education – can be achieved at a large scale by the establishment of public trust foundations (KEKVA)s.²¹⁰ The above-mentioned Foundation for Hungarian Culture (Magyar

²⁰⁶ Act XVI of 2021 on the establishment of the Foundation for Hungarian Culture, and on wealth transfer to the Foundation for Hungarian Culture and the Petőfi Literary Fund Ltd. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A2100016.TV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁰⁷ See the chapter on the LMBTQI situation.

²⁰⁸ Megjelent egy végrehajtási rendelet a gyermekvédelmi törvényhez [An implementation regulation was published for the child protection act]. Infostart, 6 August 2021. <https://infostart.hu/belfold/2021/08/06/megjelent-egy-vegrehajitasi-rendelet-a-gyermekvedelmi-torvenyhez>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁰⁹ Kovács-Angel, Marianna: A Libri stratégiai kisebbségi tulajdonosa lett a NER elitképzője [The elite trainer of the System of National Cooperation (NER) become a strategic minority shareholder in Libri]. 24.hu, 8 April 2021. <https://24.hu/fn/gazdasag/2021/04/08/mathias-corvinus-collegium-libri/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²¹⁰ For details, consult the chapter on KEKVA)s in this volume.

Kultúraért Alapítvány)²¹¹, set up with a basic capital of HUF 600 million in May 2021, serves this purpose in the cultural sphere. When this KEKVA was founded, former public benefit companies and their real estates were transferred to this foundation: several artists' retreats and colonies in the country, the Zichy Castle and the Andrassy Palace in Budapest, and a part of an island in Budapest.²¹² These real estates are not managed by democratically elected and recallable board members, but by a board of trustees, whose irreplaceable members were chosen by the present government, and which is headed by the "extreme Orbanist" Szilárd Demeter. It is easy to notice that the outsourcing of culture, the setting up of a non-transparent institution system, and cementing hordes of the party faithful into boards of trustees and supervisory boards all serve to secure the government's power outside the parliament before the 2022 elections.

THEATRE ARTS

In the last two years, certain trends in theatre arts, identified in our previous report, have continued – the micro-management and centralisation of the field, now with generously funded programmes such as the Déryné Programme or the Thank you, Hungary! – others have intensified, through the support of "appropriate" institutions, (i.e. those openly loyal to the government): like the funds replacing the abolished Tao (Corporate Income Tax) subsidy²¹³ or the appointment to senior positions of people loyal to the government. In the autumn of 2021, rumours resurfaced that the government is rethinking from the ground up the funding of independent theatre companies,²¹⁴ which have been a thorn in its side for decades – "of course" without consulting those affected.²¹⁵ The issue of theatre arts deserves special attention in the period under review, because the online and live demonstrations linked to the slogan of The National Fund for Culture (December 2019, see below) and the abolition of the autonomy of the University of Theatre and Film²¹⁶ (autumn and winter 2020) clearly remained not only an internal affair of the theatre profession but reached and addressed a much wider audience than before, even if without spectacular results.

The pandemic has put a heavy burden on the sector. Although the cultural government, in its propaganda of success, repeatedly reported on the effective central management of the epidemic, which hit independent theatre-makers particularly hard, reality was different: improvisational and incompetent measures²¹⁷ were partly based on ideological expectations from those who received government subsidies. Linked to this is another general feature: in a divide and rule approach, some institutions receive incomprehensibly generous state funding in relation to their performance, while others are bled dry. In the previous report, we referred to the ongoing war within the theatre scene, which has been exacerbated by the epidemic: there are now fault lines not only between independent and permanent playhouses (we call stone theatres), but also among independent groups and among stone theatres, because of finances – this is *Hunger Games* as done in Hungary. One final characteristic: while the cultural government has some defensible, justified, even downright forward-looking ambitions, the entire system is ill-conceived, opaque and is based on a total lack of trust and bad faith vis-à-vis artists.

In December 2019, the news that the government intended to sweep matters fundamentally affecting the whole area of cultural funding into yet another kind of an omnibus legislation (called "salad law" by the Hungarian term) caused serious alarm, and for a good reason.²¹⁸ Rumours spread about the reorganisation (= abolition) of the National Cultural Fund (NKA),

²¹¹ Boros, Juli: 600 milliós alaptőkével indítják Demeter Szilárd új szervezetét [Demeter Szilárd's new organization receives HUF 600 million as capital stock]. 444.hu, 1 June 2021.

<https://444.hu/2021/06/01/600-millios-alaptokevel-inditjak-demeter-szilard-uj-szervezetet>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²¹² Hamvay, Péter: Komoly ingatlanbirodalmat ad Demeter Szilárd kezébe az állam [Significant amount of immovable property given to Szilárd Demeter by Hungarian state]. HVG, 1 April 2021. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20210401_PIM_Demeter_Szilard_alapitvany, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²¹³ Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1.

²¹⁴ <https://www.critical-stages.org/8/finita-la-commedia-the-debilitation-of-hungarian-independent-theatre-hungary/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²¹⁵ On the multi-component support system for independent theatres, see Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1. Since 2020, the categories of genre (theatre, dance, inclusive theatres, etc.) have been replaced by location: Budapest and provincial locations in the assessment of annual operating grants, opening a new front in the artificial war of capital versus countryside. While the Budapest-based companies' applications are decided transparently by a board of trustees appointed by the metropolitan municipality (see <https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/9001/minositessel-nem-rendelkezo-budapest-fovarosi-szinhazi-es-tanctmuveszet-eloado-muveszeti-szervezetek-emptv-szerinti-2021-evi-szakmai-program-megvalositasi-es-mukodesi-tamogatasa-dontesi-javaslatok-indoklasi/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.), the names of the trustees (!) are not even made public, apart from the controversial decisions of the committee set up by the State Secretariat for Culture to evaluate the applications by provincial theatre.

²¹⁶ See in detail in the chapter about higher education.

²¹⁷ For example, when hundreds of people worked at full speed to change the structure of the theatres and auditoriums in November 2020, and then the government closed them down: https://hvg.hu/360/20201109_szinhasz_korlatozasok_szinhaszbezaras_orban_viktor_koronavirus_streaming_eloadasok_kozvetitese, last seen 30. 12. 2021. Or when the legislator forgot about the theatres in April 2021, when the national reopening was scheduled:

https://hvg.hu/elet/20210426_Meg_maszk_sem_kell_majd_a_szinhaszakba_a_szineszekrol_megfeledkeze_a_rendelet, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²¹⁸ <https://artportal.hu/magazin/a-kormany-januartol-megszuntetne-a-nemzeti-kulturalis-alapot/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

which bled from many wounds for reasons already mentioned,²¹⁹ but which continued to be of crucial importance in certain areas. According to the draft, the centralisation efforts favoured by the government for a decade would culminate in the creation of a cultural strategy body, the National Cultural Council, where the heads of the largest cultural institutions would make decisions on the funding of their and everyone else's establishments. The aim of the new council, which will have control over the NKA's funds, is to "define the directions and priorities to be followed in Hungarian culture" and to "structure"²²⁰ part of the resources allocated to culture.

The said rumours were also about the complete abolition of subsidies²²¹ for independent theatres, and that the Minister of Human Resources, who also has control over the cultural domain, would be equipped with the right of consent when the directors of permanent theatres are appointed. As is so often the case in the (cultural) policy of Fidesz, the scenario that almost always prevails is centralised, improvisatory and well-suited to militant rhetoric. It is also created without consulting professional organisations, thus provoking serious indignation among the strata concerned. And, as in this particular case, once the waves of protest subside, the bill is passed in a gentler and/or more insidious form, causing serious damage to systems that, one way or the other, do function.²²² The bill²²³ submitted to Parliament is ultimately softer than the leaked original, but the devil lies in the details, as the story goes on to show.

What is it that prompted the cultural government to partially back down? The Independent Performing Arts Association (FESZ)²²⁴ launched an international petition²²⁵ against the destruction of Hungarian cultural life, which was signed by 55,000 people (!) in Hungary and worldwide, within a few days.²²⁶ On 9 December 2019, tens of thousands of people stood up for the independence of Hungarian culture in Madách Square in Budapest: the slogan "Culture is a national fund", as rephrased from the name of the National Fund for Culture, spread like wildfire on social media. Among the protesters were prominent figures from the Hungarian independent and established theatre scene. This time, their voices were stronger than those of some government representatives who, in the wake of the recent harassment cases at the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) and the Katona József Theatre, started to talk about²²⁷ "harassing theatres", referring to the combination of all institutions not openly loyal to the government and their employees.

The new law introduced a new concept: in addition to state-run theatres (e.g. the National Theatre) and municipality-run theatres (provincial theatres are typically such, but before the law was adopted, Budapest also had as many as thirteen theatres), there are now theatres run by mixed or joint management. Most permanent theatres in Hungary fall into the latter category: from now on, if a theatre requests central funds, it has to come to an agreement with the relevant ministry.

The ministry left no doubt that it would have a say in whatever it could, for example in the appointment of theatre directors. In provincial theatres (Pécs, Eger, Szombathely), the minister, in defiance of the recommendations of the local professional juries and the decision of the (opposition) city councils, used unprecedented blackmail (!) to get directors he preferred appointed.²²⁸ The law is seen by many as a move against Gergely Karácsony²²⁹-led Budapest: after a protracted series of negotiations on the fate of the capital's theatres, an agreement was reached between the government and the metropolitan municipality in April 2020. Under this agreement, the municipality undertook to finance three theatres (Katona József, Örkény and Radnóti), as well as Trafó – House of Contemporary Arts, without government subsidies until

219 Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1.

220 <https://artportal.hu/magazin/a-kormany-az-iranyitott-kultura-megteremtese-fele-indul-el/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

221 Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1.

222 At the end of the process, the obligatory element of the method is also "head-washing": the hobby of Péter Fekete, the State Secretary for Culture, is to inform foreign cultural institutions and foreign journalists interested in Hungarian cultural policy in circular letters. (He is also happy to write to representatives of Hungarian institutions that complain about this, but it is also reminiscent of bad times when he invites heads of institutions that criticise his measures to his office to tell them about the importance of gratitude.) These letters often say that the expenditure of the Hungarian government on culture is the highest in the EU. For an example from May 2020, see for example: gift 2020/2, 46-47: https://freitheater.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/gift2-2020_Online.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021. It is a regrettable fact, however, that the huge sums gladly cited by the secretary of state are not spent on culture (as described in our report at several places) but on the government's propagandistic aims: delocating museums and other cultural institutions the location of which are vindicated, building huge cultural empires based on foundations presented to their friends, rich support of course art and propagandistic entertainment of the public, etc.

223 <https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/08441/08441.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

224 On how it works see Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1.

225 <https://artportal.hu/magazin/peticio-indult-a-magyar-kulturalis-elet-szetverese-ellen/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

226 For more on what makes this an exceptional success, see <https://ahang.hu/kampanyok/4-nap-alatt-3-millio-e-mail/2019/12/13/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

227 In hindsight, it is clear what could only have been guessed during the rapid events: the path from the raising of the issue to the evisceration of the SZFE was a straight one.

228 <https://24.hu/kultura/2020/11/23/szinhaz-igazgatovalasztas-pecs-eger-szombathely-politika-fidesz/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

229 Lord mayor of Budapest.

s2024, while six other institutions would be maintained by the government.²³⁰ This is also how it happened – this time without any particular repercussions – that in autumn 2021 György Dörner, against whose appointment in 2012 a major wave of domestic and international protests was launched, could begin his third term as director of Új Színház (New Theatre).²³¹

Another hot topic of the past two years have been the anomalies surrounding the new system set up after the much-maligned retroactive abolition²³² of Corporate Income Tax subsidies. In allocating the 37 billion forints, an unprecedented amount in the area of performing arts, the anonymous assessors of the 30 grants available under the system do not even pay the slightest attention to how these allocations are perceived by the general public. While friendly institutions are not stopped from spending countless forints of public money, theatres or groups that make a critical noise (or that the anonymous decision-makers assume to be such) are always applying in vain, despite their considerable domestic and international presence, weight and extensive network of contacts.

In their success campaign, the government trumpeted that, in 2019, provincial theatres received 30 % more funding under the new system, while a 20 % increase went to independent theatres. There has been far less lively communication, however, about the millions in grants intended exclusively to support performing arts organisations, that were awarded to right-wing local authorities, fire brigades, a patient care company and even a newspaper business.²³³ The decision lists published in 2021, the third year in a row, clearly show the cultural government's specific expectations of the theatre sector: while hundreds of millions were granted to organisers of various equestrian theatres and boat entertainment events, and an extended circle of families and relatives of Fidesz MPs also benefited greatly, the decisions made it impossible for the Szeged THEALTER,²³⁴ the only international independent theatre festival in Hungary which had been running continuously for 31 years,²³⁵ to operate.

While reading the 2019 decision lists on how the terminated Corporate Income Tax subsidies are to be offset, many people were struck by a one billion HUF sum that the government allocated to a certain Déryné Nonprofit Nkft. At the time of the decision, the company was still in the process of being registered, which would have disqualified it from being a candidate, but that was no obstacle: the company, said to be registered under the address of the National Theatre and supervised by the theatre's staff and actors, materialised from nowhere, saw and won.²³⁶ The Déryné Programme,²³⁷ which has its own company and building, offices and a modern theatre, has an absolutely salutary aim: to take to small villages existing and new theatre productions carefully selected by Attila Vidnyánszky, the director of the National Theatre and the number one decision-maker in Hungarian theatre life, and his immediate colleagues, under the slogan "culture for everyone, not just for a narrow elite". Once again, there is nothing wrong with this aim, in a country with a capital that, among other things, traditionally has been a cultural hydrocephalus, i.e. where cultural mobility is virtually unknown in many provincial communities. The problem lies with the usual murky decision-making mechanism and the debatable quality of the performances that can be inferred from the decisions, which are often ideologically committed. There are, of course, other ways of providing theatrical art in small villages, which are also expensive. The question is whether the old and dilapidated provincial cultural centres are suitable venues for theatre, and whether the discontinuation/prohibition of the invitation-based system, which has been in place until now, whereby directors of cultural centres invited productions they thought would be of interest to local audiences, is compatible with the noble aims of the undertaking. Moreover, the State Déryné Theatre operated with a similar purpose between 1951 and 1991, and it is precisely because of the need to focus on professionalism, quality, travel conditions, etc., that it was closed down for good reason.

230 <https://infostart.hu/belfold/2020/04/06/megallapodott-a-kormany-es-a-fovaros-a-szinhazak-mukodteteserol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

231 Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1. 57–58.

232 Hungary Turns its Back on Europe Vol. 1. 57–58. That the liquidation was justified is shown by the sudden collapse of companies that had previously been fiddling billions: <https://g7.hu/kozelet/20210119/milliardos-cegek-tomeges-osszeomlasi-mutatja-hogyan-lophattak-szet-egy-allami-programot/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

233 For more information, see https://index.hu/kultur/2019/12/15/kultur-tao_tamogatas_eloado-muveszeti_tao_palyazat_egyseges_magyar_izraelita_hitkozseg_nemzeti_szinhaz/ and <https://g7.hu/kozelet/20191216/fideszes-kepviselo-szemelyi-edzo-es-ujsgarur-is-kapott-a-szinhazaknak-szant-allami-milliardokbol/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

234 https://hvg.hu/kultura/20210512_fuggetlen_szinhazak_tamogatas_a_emberi_eroforrasok_miniszteriuma_emmi_visszaeletek_gyanus_palyazatok, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

235 https://hvg.hu/kultura/20210611_szinhazi_tobblettamogatas_dontesek_lovas_szinhaz_a38_szentesi_szinhaz_theater, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

236 Just one example of the mafia-like structure that pervades cultural life: the managing director of the company is Mark Kis Domonkos, who was forced to resign from the Váci Dunakanyar Theatre, which he had founded, due to the misappropriation of tens of millions of Euros. The open government vendetta against the Váci theatre (i.e. the blocking of potential money taps) has been going on ever since, and Márk Kis Domonkos is adding to the growing number of job-holders in the cultural sector: he is a lecturer at the well-endowed University of Theatre and Film, among others, cf. <https://merce.hu/2021/02/04/mit-tanit-majd-az-szfe-n-a-tobb-tiz-millios-visszaelessel-lebukott-vaci-direktor/>.

237 <https://deryneprogram.hu/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

As mentioned already, the government claims that it has not abandoned independent performers, even during the pandemic. In fact, 3,000 artists received a grant of HUF 300,000 each. The National Museum and Institute of Theatre History (OSZMI)²³⁸, part of the cultural empire of Szilárd Demeter²³⁹, is also involved in the implementation of the Thank You Hungary²⁴⁰ programme, which also falls under the jurisdiction of Déryné Nkft. It has been allocated a new budget of one billion, earmarked just for Déryné. The programme has made it possible for artists to obtain the money they need to survive for a while under strict, not necessarily realistic, conditions.

The much-publicised homophobia law²⁴¹, which entered into force in the summer of 2021 in line with the government's family policy, will of course have consequences for the theatre programming policies, although these are not yet known. In addition to banning presentations on homosexuality to persons under 18 years of age, the law deprives theatres and their audiences of a series of classic dramas and makes the subject taboo for the very age group that would probably have the most questions about it. The fact that, for example, the production entitled Joy and Happiness, directed in the in Budaörs Theatre by Róbert Alföldi, about the lives of young gay people (from Transylvania) is not being seen by the very people for whom and about whom it was really written about, perfectly illustrates the cynicism of a law that deliberately conflates homosexuality with paedophilia. Furthermore, with Hungarian society constantly on edge and on alert, it is no surprise that a gay scene in a play by a popular private theatre was booed by an audience member.²⁴²

The fact that the Pécs National Theatre Festival (POSZT), which for almost a decade had been in the grip of politics, had been financed with state funds, and was considered the number one theatrical festival in Hungary on the basis of customary law rather than professional arguments, quietly died out in the spring of 2021, surprised but few people. As in the long process²⁴³ leading up to the announcement, a single name has emerged again and again behind the current upheavals in Hungarian theatre life, and it is this name that is usually the direct driving force behind and the cause of these changes. The saying that Attila Vidnyánszky is riding two horses with one butt does not capture the essence of this operation. In the autumn of 2020, theatre director Árpád Schilling compiled on his social network site a list of the public positions that the director had taken over the last decade: "Attila Vidnyánszky is a Kossuth Prize-winning theatre director, the managing director of the Hungarian Theatre of Transcarpathia, the chairman of the decision-preparatory body of the Human Resources Ministry, the Theatre Arts Committee, as well as of the Hungarian Theatre Society, which protects the professional interests of the theatre arts, Vice Rector for Art at the Rippl-Rónai Faculty of Arts of the University of Kaposvár, Artistic Director of the Madách Imre International Theatre Meeting (MITEM), General Director of the National Theatre, and now Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation that provides for the University of Theatre and Film Arts. "Although Vidnyánszky is widely known not to be a proponent of partners' dialogue, much rather that of verbal coercion only, some people may still manage sometimes to surprise him. In autumn 2021, the world-famous American director Robert Wilson donated half of his honorary fee received from the National Theatre's MITEM Festival for his play Oedipus, to the FreeSzfe Association²⁴⁴, which now employs all teachers and provides education for most students of the former SZFE.²⁴⁵

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

The situation in the field of fine arts has not improved compared to the previous report, although it has not deteriorated significantly either. During the COVID lockdowns, the government did not launch any aid program for visual artists. While some funds were available, the artists could apply for them only through the politically indoctrinated Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), which was refused by the majority of potential applicants. Critical art press has practically faded away and operates with almost zero budgets. Huge available resources have been allocated to the circles of a politically deeply devoted person, Szilárd Demeter²⁴⁶. Therefore, all those wishing to apply for support for a cultural or artistic journal can

²³⁸ A new addition to the interconnections within the system: from 1 May 2019, Géza Bodolay, a theatre director, will be the head of the OSZMI. He will also be one of the new managers of the SZFE from autumn 2020.

²³⁹ See in the chapter on Literature.

²⁴⁰ <https://koszonjukmagyarorszag.hu/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁴¹ See in the chapters on Gender and on LGBTQI.

²⁴² https://hvg.hu/kultura/20210812_Kifutyulte_egy_nezo_az_Orlai_Produkcio_eloadasanak_melegjelenetet, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁴³ https://hvg.hu/kultura/20210306_megszunik_a_poszt_vidnyanszky_attila_pecsi_orzagos_szinhazi_talalkozo_tortenete, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁴⁴ See his statement here: <https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/9213/a-budapesti-vendegjatekrol-es-a-freeszfe-rol/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁴⁵ See the story of SZFE in the chapter of Higher education.

²⁴⁶ Concerning Szilárd Demeter, see the chapter on Literature.

basically turn to Petőfi Literary Museum (PIM) headed by Demeter. An unprecedentedly high budget, 1.8 billion HUF is dedicated to this institution for sponsoring journals. Meanwhile, the National Cultural Fund (NKA) has only negligible sums at their disposal.

The impossibility of relying on public funds has become steady for the "producers" of art: it is extremely difficult to gain support for new works of art and new projects. The political devotion of NKA is increasing, thus the decision making process relies on professional arguments less and less, and the available low sums are dedicated to a high number of individual projects. The practice of the past 10 years continues, i.e. indirect censoring is strengthened: artworks are not banned, as it is more efficient to hinder the creation process itself. Even if works of art are created, they can only exercise their effect in a very limited circle, as it is impossible for them to reach the broader public.

Contemporary fine art has been steered into an almost counter-cultural position. The dual structure of culture has again emerged: official and unofficial culture exist side by side. A large proportion of professional artists would not cooperate with the leading art institutions of the state. The legitimacy of these organisations is almost nonexistent both at the national and the international levels. Their international relations are negligible, which leads to their isolation. (An interesting development must be noted. The international public started to understand the Hungarian institutional changes only when the same process was launched in Slovenia in 2020–21. The removal of Zdenka Badovinac from her post as the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana and of the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (MG+MSUM) created an international scandal, quite understandably. However, the changes in Slovenia succeeded those in Hungary by a 6-7-year delay: political changes in the leadership of institutions have been going on in Hungary since at least 2013.)

Cities and towns led by the opposition – primarily Budapest – could serve as free zones for art. However, these settlements suffer from a serious lack of resources, which makes it difficult to finance their own art institutions and programs. The sums available for these purposes are incomprehensible at a European scale in Szentendre, Dunaújváros or the capital, which strive to operate their institutions. The budget may allow the correct completion of the professional schedule in Pécs, but this is the end of the list. No other bases for progressive art that criticise society have remained.

The discrepancy is enormous: while a subsidiary of the Hungarian National Bank (MNB) has spent several billions of HUF on purchasing works of art from contemporary visual artists, the museums have scarce resources for enlarging their collections. The purchases of the MNB have also interfered with the market of commercial galleries. If several billion forints appear only once in a concentrated manner, it can generate unforeseeable processes in the art market. While it distorts the field of art collection, it does not improve the essential conditions of contemporary art.

The homophobic law²⁴⁷ affects the field of visual arts as well. In Budapest, the queer art scene is rather strong, with a distinct performative aspect. In the present situation, it is not at all clear how much these praxes, performances and shows are to be rendered impossible by the new law.

In present-day Hungary, neither realistic artist careers nor the entrance points into the institutional system are visible. This is one of the reasons why independent, peripheral, no-budget initiatives are flourishing outside of the corrupted structures. Young artists and curators take their careers into their own hands. However, these free and independent projects are based on self-exploitation; thus such projects are difficult to sustain. Even the internationally recognized OFF Biennale in Budapest relies on voluntary work to a large extent, while neither its background nor its future are secured.

Similarly to the case of FreeSZFE²⁴⁸, the strengthening of international, translocal networks and meta-institutions might ensure the survival of these initiatives. An example for such a cooperation is the East Europe Biennial Alliance (EEBA) composed of independent biennales of Budapest, Praha, Warszawa and Kyiv. It is of utmost importance that the European institutions should recognize, identify and understand these organisations in order that the EU sources to support initiatives not allocated to national frameworks could increase. It is also indispensable that such funds should be accessible more simply, without the burden of much bureaucracy, and that the conditions for these still unstable organisations be rendered more feasible.

²⁴⁷ See the chapter on the situation of LGBTQI people.

²⁴⁸ See the chapter on Higher education.

In our previous report, *Hungary Turns its Back on Europe*, we concluded the chapter on cinema by stating that "the top-down centralisation of film production support after 2011 has been relatively effective in recent years." We pointed out, however, that "as a result, the industry and society lost control of a very important cultural sector that absorbs a lot of budget money." At the same time, we indicated that new changes were expected following the unexpected death of government commissioner Andy Vajna on 20 January 2019.

In March 2019, the Prime Minister announced that no new government commissioner would be appointed and expressed his confidence in Ágnes Havas, CEO of the Hungarian National Film Fund. The establishment of the Vajna-era institutions, the appointment of the Decision Making Board, had been quite problematic and lacked the support of the professional community, but over time a transparent practice emerged that was not likely to change after Vajna's death.

No such luck. In August 2019, Csaba Káel was appointed as Government Commissioner and in September Ágnes Havas was sent into retirement. In 2019, the composition of the Decision Making Board changed several times, with only one member remaining from the previously tried and tested members.

At the end of the year, Act 106, promulgated on 16 December 2019, reorganised the operational framework of the film and cinema sector. On 1 January 2020, the National Film Institute was established as a non-profit public benefit corporation, which would be home to the Film Archive, the Film Lab, Mafilm and the Decision Making Board. Oversight of foreign contract film works has been transferred to government level. The Media Council's website announced: "The Hungarian Media Patronage Programme's applications for film-makers have been discontinued in view of recent changes in cinematography legislation. The National Film Institute, a non-profit public benefit corporation established as of 1 January 2020, is responsible for supporting works intended for television. The National Film Institute's online application platform will be open for applications from 17 February 2020."²⁴⁹

This is the organisation that is now operational. The CEO of the National Film Institute is not a representative of the film industry, but a professional in asset management. The value dimensions of its operation are not yet apparent from the experience gained so far. According to press reports, the preferences of the members of the Decision Making Board can be summarised as follows: money is not an issue; the point is to bring about spectacular cinematographic works with ideological and historical content that are in line with government interests. For example, a television series on János Hunyadi²⁵⁰, which won more than HUF 10 billion in various titles under a government decision, was among the winning entries²⁵¹. It is also worth mentioning that one of Fidesz's key propagandists, the pamphleteer Zsolt Bayer, is making his debut as a director, having received more than HUF 325 million for his television film „In the Footsteps of Balázs Orbán”.²⁵² Other satellites revolving around Fidesz without a filmmaking background (Philip Rákay and Ákos Kovács) are also being given state funding to make films.

Our knowledge of film production, cinematic successes and failures in the period after Andy Vajna's death is still limited, consequently our conclusions are limited. However, it is safe to say that the government's drive to control just about everything is being pursued by creating new institutions, filled with its own angry, aggrieved and often professionally marginalised cadres. They are a guarantee of the loyal functioning of the institutions. As is the case in other areas of culture, the government's control of the film industry is characterised by centralisation, the merging of agencies and professional organisations that take substantive decisions, and the abolition of their autonomy.

MUSEUMS

In 2020 and 2021, the pandemic left its mark on the operation of museums in Hungary. Unlike in many Western European countries, the institutions did not receive systematic state support. On the contrary, instead of ensuring continuity, the

²⁴⁹ <https://mecenatura.mediatanacs.hu/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁵⁰ A national hero winning battles against the Turks in the 15th century.

²⁵¹ <https://nfi.hu/hu/tv-palyazatok/nyertes-palyazatok?filter=Hunyadi>, illetve <https://24.hu/kultura/2021/07/16/hunyadi-sorozat-allami-tamogatas-10-milliard-robert-lantos/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁵² <https://nfi.hu/hu/tv-palyazatok/nyertes-palyazatok?filter=Orb%C3%A1n>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

government took a step that made institutional functioning even more precarious. According to Act XXXII of 2020, adopted in May 2020, the employment status of staff as civil servants in museums, archives, libraries and cultural institutions was abolished on 1 November 2020 and was replaced by that of common-law employment. The law, which was passed without public professional consultation and without taking into account professional objections, had serious consequences in many institutions: long-established staff left their jobs, making the professional operation of museums impossible, especially in rural areas. The government's future objectives for the law include, above all, the more efficient provision of public services by the state and local authorities and the promotion of financial recognition for further work, but these objectives are not provided for by the law. For example, as the Pulszky Society, the most important professional organisation in the field of museums in Hungary, has stated: the provision "does not contain any guarantees for the future regarding performance-related pay".

The law did not affect the different institutions in the same way. On the one hand, museums belonging to rural municipalities with smaller budgets – often hit by cuts after the 2019 local elections, depending on their political affiliation – found themselves in an even more difficult situation. The humiliatingly low salaries of rural museologists, close to the minimum wage, were increased by 6 % (not even everywhere) – while, for example, the Petőfi Literary Museum, or the Hungarian National Museum, which have a special status, saw their salaries increased by a much more significant amount. This dichotomy also draws attention to the serious distortions in the museum institutional system over the past decade: the lack of central, ministerial coordination; the emergence of museum "power centres" without reconciliation of interests; and the disintegration of local government systems. Expectations are the same, whether in terms of administration (loans, tenders, etc.) or the delivery of tasks, but funding differs significantly. At the moment, the state expects a uniform level of service in very different circumstances (buildings, staffing, equipment). The distortions in the local government system have made it much more difficult to maintain and care for museum collections. In many cases, although the collections are state-owned, the maintainers wish to dispose of certain parts of the collections and are doing so.

In the national museum structure, a third player joined the two existing centres of priority management, the Museum of Fine Arts and the Hungarian National Gallery, which were merged in 2011 and expanded with the investments of the Liget Budapest project, and the "new literary power centre" created by expanding the competences of the Petőfi Literary Museum, which is linked to Szilárd Demeter (and which is also linked to huge investment plans). In April 2021 László L. Simon, former Secretary of State and Fidesz MP, was appointed Ministerial Commissioner for Museum Integration. His tasks include the renewal of the Hungarian National Museum (a few months later, Mr Simon was also appointed Director General of this institution); setting the institutional future of the Natural History Museum, which is due to be transferred to Debrecen, and the Museum of Applied Arts, which has been awaiting renovation for years; centralisation of the archaeological and artefact protection activities of Hungarian museums, and the renewal of the entire museum sector.

As of 2021, there exist three centres of power in the field of museums, each in practice removed from the control of the relevant ministry. All three of these centres are linked to large-scale investments – independent of any other cultural objective – and largely removed from the context of longer-term national and metropolitan plans and social control, citing "national strategic interest". The centres, which are not subject to central coordination but are linked to the interests of a number of economic operators, follow a kind of "fiefdom" model. In this case, the slogan of centralisation (or integration) means extending the sphere of influence of each centre.

One of the most serious problems in the museum system is linked to investment in Budapest in relation to the fact that the government reserves public buildings. Currently, the Museum of Ethnography has been closed for several years – the handover of its new building has been further delayed – as well as the Museum of Transport and the Museum of Applied Arts. In a precarious situation are the Museum of Natural History – which is to be merged with the National Museum and transferred to Debrecen – and the Hungarian National Gallery (which would be allocated a new building as part of the Liget Budapest project). The biggest issue is no longer just the fact that several of the capital city's most visited museums have been closed for years at a time, but rather their uncertain future. In a context of ever tighter economic opportunities, the duration of restructuring (investments) is increasing, so that collections remain invisible for more than a decade, even for generations to come. The Museum of Applied Arts is currently in the most disadvantaged position in this respect. Uncertainty surrounds the museums housed in the Buda Castle Palace: the Hungarian National Gallery and the Budapest History Museum, as the transformation of the Castle as a site for governmental and political representation is ongoing, and seems unlikely to stop, despite the dwindling state resources.

An important development in cultural policy in the past two years was the increasing number of museum exhibitions that were in line with the current intentions of the government's memory policy – often representing a viewpoint that was diametrically opposed to previous historiographical concepts in the field of Hungarian prehistory, mediaeval historical events or Hungarian politics between the two world wars. (The Institute for Hungarian Studies, founded by the government in 2019, has already organised or had exhibitions organised in several museums across Budapest and the countryside manifesting highly questionable scientific credibility – e. g. Scythian-Hun-Hungarian kinship.) It is characteristic that the application submitted by László L. Simon to the post of director general of the National Museum included the following sentence: "Our plan is nothing less than to open a new, glorious era of the Hungarian National Museum, not forgetting the valuable work of our predecessors, nor the institutional endowments, and especially bearing in mind the government's objectives in the field of memory policy".²⁵³ The new director-general's main objective, however, is not to reform the museum system, but to reorganise archaeology, a field that has been under continuous legislative reorganisation for more than a decade.

As regards collections, the government's objectives are not clear. From a museological point of view, the decision, timed for Christmas 2020, in which the government transferred one of the most precious treasures of the Hungarian National Museum, the children's armour of King Sigismund August II, to the Republic of Poland free of charge, seems particularly worrying. In this case, too, there was no prior professional consultation or subsequent explanation of the decision. Equally problematic for art museums seems to be the large-scale purchase programme of the Hungarian National Bank, which has spent a huge amount of money on artworks, among which a great number of contemporary and 20th century Hungarian pieces, compared to the past or present budgetary possibilities of Hungarian public collections. Many of the pieces in the collection, which is now owned by MNB Real Estate Ltd. and can therefore be sold freely, cannot be included in the state maintained public collections, which are run in a professional manner from a museological point of view.

Ordeals of Hungarian Natural History Museum to continue

The case of the Hungarian Natural History Museum (MTM) was highlighted on page 69 of our former report, Hungary turns its back on Europe report: the events were summarized until October 2019 there. The main point was that a government decree had been passed in order to relocate the MTM from Budapest to Debrecen, in spite of the fact that both professional circles and the organizations of museum friends had raised very serious counterarguments against the plan. Since then two years have passed, and the museum has not been moved. However, the ordeals of the museum have not ended: the MTM has drifted into such a hopeless situation which is unprecedented in the more than 200 years of history of the institution, and might only be compared to the damage caused by the war.

Seeing that the government clings to the plan at all costs²⁵⁴ and takes hasty steps,²⁵⁵ the Presidium of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) unanimously rejected²⁵⁶ the plan of museum relocation in January 2020. Thus, the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the scientific sections were raised to the highest level possible. The Presidium emphasized that the moving of the museum would cause serious damage, the research conditions for the experts handling the collections would significantly deteriorate, and the number of visitors

253 http://www.lsimonlaszlo.hu/docs/MNM_foigazgatoi_palyazat_2021_07%2002.pdf, last seen 30. 10. 2021.

254 Molnár, Csaba: A kormány titokban döntötte el, még az idén elköltöztetik a Természettudományi Múzeumot [Secret resolution of the government – Hungarian National History Museum to move this year]. Index, 22 January 2020. https://index.hu/techtud/2020/01/22/a_kormany_titokban_eldontotte_hogy_a_termeszettudomanyi_muzeumnak_iden_ki_kell_koltoznie_a_ludovikarol/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

255 At the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 news spread that the MTM was obliged to move at once, so that the building could be handed over to the National University of Public Service. However, the plan was dropped. hvg.hu, Mégsem kell a Természettudományi Múzeumnak ideiglenes helyre költözni [Plans cancelled to move Hungarian National History Museum to temporary place]. HVG, 12 February 2020. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200212_Index_Megsem_kell_a_Termeszettudomanyi_Muzeumnak_ideiglenes_helyre_koltoznie, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

256 Súlyos aggályát fejezte ki a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Elnöksége a Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum tervezett elköltöztetésével kapcsolatban [Presidium of Hungarian Academy of Sciences voices severe concerns about plans to move Hungarian Natural History Museum]. MTA, 29 January 2020. https://mta.hu/mta_hirei/sulyos-aggalyat-fejezte-ki-a-magyar-tudomanyos-akademia-elnoksege-a-magyar-termeszettudomanyi-muzeum-tervezett-elkoltoztetesevel-kapcsolatban-110301, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

would plummet. At the same time, the Presidium supported the idea of establishing a subsidiary natural history museum in Debrecen in order to facilitate the popularization of natural science. Meanwhile, the leading journal of the field, *Nature*²⁵⁷ also alerted the international scientific community to the acute crisis threatening the existence of the museum, and several scientific organizations voiced their concerns (e.g. in Canada)²⁵⁸. No substantive reaction was given to these worries by the government, although a minister did throw a few casual sentences about the government sticking to their original plans.²⁵⁹

Being fed up, thirty researchers and university professors published an open letter²⁶⁰ addressed directly to the scientific community in Debrecen. They inquired about how the locals, who were to be trusted with the museum, see the situation. *"Is it a real development and an improvement if a plan is carried out by ignoring the public opinion, by risking the intactness of an irreplaceable national treasure, by interfering with the country's interests? Do you really agree that MTM should be cut off its roots, displaced from its operational environment, and should be forced to relocate to another city at very high (and redundant) expenses? Would this step harmonize with the proverbially progressive thinking of the citizens of the city? Would all locals really be proud at the opening ceremony of the stolen museum, however modern its new building is to be?"* As an answer to this letter, a group of researchers in Debrecen issued a petition²⁶¹ confirming that they did not support the relocation of the Budapest museum and they stood up for the establishment of a new museum subsidiary unit in Debrecen. Then, at the beginning of September 2020, more than 80 experts dedicated to science including teachers, researchers and museologists both from Debrecen and from elsewhere published an open letter addressed to the Hungarian government (sent also as a registered letter):²⁶² *"We jointly ask you to modify your decision along the following lines. The MTM should stay in Budapest. A new museum called Natural History Museum of Debrecen should be established in the main city of Hajdúság, the exhibition and the collection of which should satisfy all contemporary needs."* Maybe not surprisingly, there was no official reaction to the open letter, unless we regard a resolution as a reply: it concerned a further functional change of the Ludovika Campus,²⁶³ – the former Ludovika Military Academy, the buildings of which are occupied by the National University of Public Service (NKE), founded by Viktor Orbán in 2012 – namely clearing the way for the relocation of the museum departments that are still within its walls.

These years of uncertainty have deteriorated the community of employees as well. The team has gradually fallen apart,²⁶⁴ dozens of experts left the museum, including the leaders of certain collections. The tender by the previous director general was rejected. The position was given to Zsolt Bernert in the summer of 2019. This

257 Abbot, Alison: Outcry over plan to move Hungarian natural-history museum to remote town. *Nature*, 24 February 2020. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00490-x>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

258 Timothy A. Dickinson, CBA/ABC response to the move of the Hungarian Natural History Museum from Budapest to Debrecen, Hungary. <https://www.cba-abc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ABC-CBAresponsetomoveofHungarianMuseumofNaturalHistory-Approved.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

259 "Well, about that the objects stored there might be damaged. They should not be damaged. There are techniques to transport them..." 24.hu, Már biztos, hogy Debrecenbe költözik a Természettudományi Múzeum [Hungarian Natural History Museum sure to move to Debrecen]. 24.hu, 10 June 2020. <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/06/10/debrecen-koltozes-termeszettudomanyi-muzeum/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

260 Debreciner, Elkerülhetetlenek lesznek a károk! Nélkülözhetetlen a debreceni tudósok tisztázó felelőssége! [Damage is unavoidable. Debrecen scholars must clarify responsibilities]. *Debreciner*, 17 June 2020. https://www.debreciner.hu/cikk/2904_elkerulhetetlenek_lesznek_a_karok_nelkulozhetetlen_a, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

261 https://www.debreciner.hu/cikk/3006_debreceni_kutatok_nem_tamogatjuk_a_termeszettudomanyi, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

262 Nyílt levél Magyarország Kormányához a Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum érdekében [Open letter to the Hungarian Government in the interest of the Hungarian Natural History Museum]. https://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/egyeb_dokumentumok/2020/MTM-nyilt-level-20200901.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021. Sarkadi, Péter: Újabb nyílt levél a Magyar Természettudományi Múzeum orbáni tönkretétele ellen [Another open letter against the ruining of Hungarian Natural History Museum by Orbán]. *Greenfo*, 1 September 2020. <https://greenfo.hu/hir/ujabb-nyilt-level-a-magyar-termeszettudomanyi-muzeum-orbani-tonkretetele-ellen/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

263 1600/2020 (IX. 23.) A Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem hadtudományi és honvédtisztképzésének elhelyezéséről, a Ludovika Campus állami beruházása további elemeinek, valamint további kapcsolódó feladatok megvalósításáról [Government Decree on the location of military science courses and the officer training of the National University of Public Service, the realization of further phases and other connected tasks of the Ludovika Campus state investment]. <http://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/index.php?menuindex=200&pageindex=kozltart&ev=2020&szam=211>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

264 Bányai, Géza: Bizonytalan helyzetben a Természettudományi Múzeum [Hungarian Natural History Museum in an uncertain position] <https://jozsefvaros.hu/hir/75558/bizonytalan-helyzetben-a-termeszettudomanyi-muzeum>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

anthropologist,²⁶⁵ who has no PhD degree and is best known for his activity in the field of ultra-right esotericism and not for his scientific achievements, started his work as a director by suppressing scientific activity and initiating a stocktaking campaign.²⁶⁶

Bernert's activities and dictatorial methods had an extremely negative effect on the community of the museum employees. Many of them only dared to report on the situation and the atmosphere at the museum anonymously.²⁶⁷ Several colleagues described the situation as horrific, undoubtedly stemming from the dictatorial inclinations of the director general. The resulting mental destruction within the museum was considered even worse than the nightmare of the possible relocation. Owing to Bernert's activities, the level of the professional community reached a historic low, the recovery from which would be very difficult even if the museum escapes relocation. The responsibility, however, is not only the director's – in spite of all warning messages the ministry in charge still keeps the director in his position. The list of those responsible is naturally longer:²⁶⁸ the Prime Minister is responsible for the original idea of forcefully moving the museum out of the Ludovika building; the local government of Debrecen accepted the suggestion in a servile manner; the beneficiary, the National University of Public Service, did not declare that it regarded it as a meaningful and justified idea to occupy the whole building, which is much more suitable for being a museum.

In the summer of 2021, an important step was taken. László L. Simon, poet, wine grower and MP, was at first appointed to be the ministerial commissioner to contract the Hungarian National Museum and MTM,²⁶⁹ then he also became the director general of the Hungarian National Museum. It is no secret that his program includes the integration of MTM into the Hungarian National Museum. This idea is not necessarily harmful, especially if it entails the dismissal of the present director general of MTM. Promising traces can be discovered in the statement of L. Simon, according to which not everything should be moved to Debrecen. However, he only mentioned the several thousands of human skeletons in the Department of Anthropology as exceptions.²⁷⁰ In another statement,²⁷¹ he also mentioned that "it is not realistic" to move each and every expert colleague and each and every element of the collections to Debrecen.

Whatever will happen, even if the relocation of the museum is not carried out (by some extraordinary miracle), it does not exempt the decision makers from their responsibility. The results of the harmful effects on MTM will be visible for long decades, even if each and every dragonfly and bug, remains in Budapest. The team of expert colleagues, who could handle the collections professionally, who were enthusiastic and sacrificed everything for their work, cannot be recreated again. Additionally, the backlog caused by canceled research projects cannot be cleared easily either.

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After the conclusion of our manuscript, it was announced that the major of Debrecen concluded an agreement with the government at the end of the year. This disposes of the move of the Museum to Debrecen, the new

265 Let us mention that all previous director generals and several of the leaders of the specific collections were academicians or doctors of science, or at least held an old style PhD degree.

266 Eszeveszett tempóban leltároznak a Természettudományi Múzeumban [Hasty stocktaking in the Hungarian Natural History Museum]. HVG, 24 February 2020. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200224_Eszeveszett_tempoban_leltaroznak_a_Termeszettudomanyi_Muzeumban, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

267 Molnár, Csaba: "Teljes horror, ami a Ludovikán megy. Elképesztő. Kibírhatatlan" ["Absolutely horrific things going on in the Ludovika. Mind-blowing. Unbearable."]. Magyar Hang, 12 February 2021. <https://hang.hu/tudomany/2021/02/12/termeszettudomanyi-muzeum-fluktuacio-menekules-bernert-zsolt/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

268 Podani, János: Túl a köntörfalon – ők felelősek a Természettudományi Trianonjáért [Beyond beating about the bush – they are responsible for the Trianon of the Hungarian Natural History Museum]. Válasz Online, 4 January 2021. <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2021/01/04/tul-a-kontorfalon-ok-felelosek-a-termeszettudomanyi-trianonjaert/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

269 A kormány összevonja a Nemzeti Múzeumot és a Természettudományi Múzeumot [Government to merge Hungarian Natural History Museum and Hungarian National Museum]. Magyar Hang, 10 April 2021. <https://hang.hu/kultura/a-kormany-osszevonja-a-nemzeti-muzeumot-es-a-termeszettudomanyi-muzeumot-125455>

270 L. Simon László: át kell gondolni, mi kerül Debrecenbe a Természettudományi Múzeumból [László L. Simon: it must be considered what to carry to Debrecen from the Hungarian Natural History Museum]. ATV, 6 May 2021. <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20210506-l-simon-laszlo-at-kell-gondolni-mi-kerul-le-debrecenbe-a-termeszettudomanyi-muzeumbol>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

271 Polgár Tóth, Tamás: A Természettudományi Múzeumnak csak egy része költözik Debrecenbe – mondta L. Simon László az ATV-n [László L. Simon on ATV claims only a part of the Hungarian Natural History Museum moves to Debrecen]. Debreciner, 17 May 2021. https://www.debreciner.hu/cikk/5704_debrecen_termeszettudomanyi_muzeum_debreciner, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

building of which will be constructed on a football playground – and will resemble more to a the park than to a traditional museum –, and its "storage" will be built in the outskirts of the town on the land of a shooting-range.²⁷²

ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT PROTECTION, WORLD HERITAGE

In 2012, the only central institution for the protection of architectural monuments in Hungary, which had existed continuously since 1872, ceased to exist. In the course of mostly ad hoc, ill-considered and unconceived, often chaotic decisions and reorganisations, state heritage protection in Hungary was discredited and finally abolished by a sudden government decision. The organisation and professionalism of heritage protection has completely disintegrated, and professional decisions contrary to political will cannot be taken.

Nothing has changed in this area in the two years since the last report, although the relevant legislation is regularly rewritten. However, heritage professionals, who are scattered throughout the atomised system, and some NGOs, who are committed to preserving traditions, have at least received intellectual support with the publication in 2020 of the call for action by the deputy ombudsman for the protection of the interests of future generations to preserve monuments.²⁷³ The call highlighted that "recent public attention to investments and lifting the historical and local protection of architectural monuments" is a fundamental issue of the constitutional requirements and the constitutional responsibility and obligations of the state. The report, referring to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, stressed that the State has an obligation to "establish an effective system of organisation for the protection of cultural heritage", in order to enforce substantive and procedural rules.

However unexpected and welcome it may be that these two documents have been published, it is already clear that they will not have any positive impact on the practice followed.

Another grain of sand was unexpectedly thrown into the cogs of unfavourable government measures in 2021, when the Parliament voted for a law on the compulsory sale of municipal rental apartments in buildings of monumental architecture in the Buda Castle District and Andrásy Avenue, both World Heritage sites, which the President of the Republic refused to sign, because in his view the unconditional transfer of state and municipal monuments that are part of cultural heritage to private ownership is against the Basic Law. The Constitutional Court shared this opinion, stating that "the recipient of the authority to protect monuments must not subordinate the interests of monument protection to other considerations in his decision-making"²⁷⁴, and sent the law back for revision.

At least one of the – unspoken – aims of the Rental Housing Act was to replace the population of the Buda Castle district in line with the government's programme. This governmental plan, named the Hauszmann Programme after Alajos Hauszmann, who planned the rebuilding/expansion of the Castle Palace at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, aimed to transform the Castle Palace and the Castle District into a centre of state administration. From 1920, the Castle Palace was the residence of Governor Miklós Horthy, and until the first half of the 20th century, several ministries were based in the castle, in addition to the Royal Palace. In order to provide the necessary office capacity for the Ministries of Interior, War, Foreign Affairs, Finance and the Defence Headquarters, the public buildings and, to a lesser extent, the residential buildings in (of) the Castle Palace, built in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, set a completely new scale for both the castle quarter and the surroundings of the Castle Palace by including huge buildings in the district. Compared with the simpler Baroque and neoclassical facades of the bourgeois town, the monasteries, the palaces of high aristocracy (noble palaces) and the former royal palace, their over-decorated facade ornamentation and roof structures were combined with large extensions and over-dimensioned height that no longer took into account the earlier plot allocation. These buildings suffered considerable damage during the siege of Budapest at the end of World War II. The "abandonment" of the ministry buildings and the rejection of the governmental use of the castle district was the result of a

²⁷² <https://civishir.hu/helyben-jaro/2022/01/debrecen-az-egykori-futballkatlan-helyen-epitene-fel-a-termeszettudomanyi-muzeumot>, last seen 12. 01. 2022.

²⁷³ A call to action by the advocate of future generations to protect monuments that are part of the nation's common heritage. AJB-7304/2020. <https://www.ajbh.hu/documents/10180/2926454/figyelemfelh%C3%ADv%C3%A1s+m%C5%B1eml%C3%A9kv%C3%A9delem/7735b7cc-e135-305f-fb47-7ddec6b8fea5>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁷⁴ Decision No. 25/2021 (VIII. 11.), <http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/3E62AACF6296A56CC125870A002AB977?OpenDocument&english>, last seen 12. 30. 2021.

quick decision – dating back to the coalition era of 1945-1948 – to move the busy ministries out of the Castle District, which was defined as a quiet residential area. In time, the plans for the political use of the Palace were replaced by plans to transform it into a cultural centre, which was essentially democratic and did not detract from its role as a residential area. Some of the ruined buildings were demolished, while others were restored to a height that would fit in with the surroundings, softening the appearance of the over-decorated historicist facades.

Planning for the redevelopment of the area started in 2012 and plans are being implemented at an accelerating pace. The new buildings that mimic the ruined old – the Castle Palace's cavalry stables and the anachronistic guardhouse, (already an anachronistic building when it was built), the mediaeval Treasury block, which is as tall and prominent as the Matthias Church, and which was heavily restored at the end of the 19th century and is once again intended to be a ministry – and the government's backstage construction are destroying the nation's historical consciousness with the false promise of reversing and re-enacting history. The first institution to move to the castle was the Prime Minister's Office, and to meet its increased need for space, the reconstruction of the destroyed former Foreign Ministry building began. In 2021, the reconstruction of the richly decorated but completely destroyed St Stephen's Hall, which symbolised state ideology around 1900, was completed, necessitating the demolition of part of the Castle Royal Palace. More and more sections of the promenade along the castle walls are being closed to the public. The Hungarian National Gallery and the National Széchenyi Library in the maintenance-stressed Castle Palace are to be relocated, while the Budapest History Museum has already been downsized, with the demolition of valuable interior design (architecture) from the 1960s and 1970s.

Transferring the ministries to the castle would mean transporting thousands of officials to the walled castle district, which since mediaeval times has been accessible only through three gates and only by low-capacity buses because of the system of cellars and caves below the rock face. This would make it impossible for the local population to move around and would severely degrade the quality of life in the area. Additional underground car parks are planned on the outside of the castle walls, in addition to the existing ones, which is also an environmental concern. Government construction projects in Budapest – and other similar public or private projects declared to be of high priority throughout the country – can be exempted by simple legislation from any kind of professional control by the licensing procedure of the authorities, such as the monument and nature conservation authorities, in order to speed up the expected work.

In the core area of the Budapest World Heritage site, the Buda Castle and the City Park, which are part of the protection zone, the provisions and aspects of national monument protection, which are a prerequisite underlined in the World Heritage Convention, are less and less enforced, and the government is systematically dismantling them at the level of legislation, in fundamental violation of the Convention. The large-scale investments in the City Park, which have a negative impact on the overall historic natural and built ensemble, and the 143-metre-high MOL Campus, which intrudes to an astonishing extent into the Danube panorama, have been strongly criticised by the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) inspectors. While Budapest has not yet been placed on the World Heritage List, all major interventions in the area have urgently been reported in preparation for the 2022 World Heritage session.²⁷⁵

Unfavourable large-scale investments have not spared the Austrian-Hungarian joint site of Lake Fertő, a cultural heritage site, where the Hungarian state has embarked on a massive tourism development on the southern shore of the lake, where the resort, which was well adapted to the landscape in terms of size and use of materials, has been brutally demolished, endangering the natural values. This has been objected to by the Austrian partner and is being investigated by UNESCO and the European Commission.

This is not the only negative international aspect of Hungary's World Heritage programmes. The application for the Roman Limes to be declared as a world heritage site was based on serious archaeological work over a decade and a half. The World Heritage evaluation of the entire Limes line, covering more than 6,000 km over three continents, including the nomination of the Danube Limes section as a World Heritage Site, was a positive Hungarian initiative. The application for the Hungarian section was accompanied by a reticent attitude, to say the least, on the part of the local governments in some of the municipalities concerned. The joint German-Austrian-Slovak-Hungarian application submitted in 2018, which was positively evaluated by ICOMOS, was blocked in 2019 by the unexpected move of the Hungarian government to remove the Aquincum Viceregal Palace, which stands out for its uniqueness among Hungarian sites, from the nomination. No official

²⁷⁵ Decisions adopted during the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou (China) / Online meeting, 2021), <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2021/whc-21-44com-18-en.pdf>.

reason was given, but the decision was certainly influenced by the fear of international scrutiny and the professional opinions of the historic-archaeological profession, which were against the later complete reconstruction and the unfavourable utilisation plans of the site. Shortly before the decision in 2021, the Hungarian state withdrew from the amended application – which no longer included the Shipyard Island – and the nomination was finally accepted by UNESCO, with the Hungarian sites being omitted. This time also, fear of restrictions on investment and of professional and international control may have played a role in the move, which has caused incomprehension in all the countries along the Danube and a serious loss of international prestige.

The Fidesz–KDNP coalition having won the 2018 elections, Viktor Orbán set the aim of obtaining cultural hegemony. As he articulated the new policy: "We must embed the political system in a cultural era".²⁷⁶ The objectives of the measures taken along this guideline did not fundamentally differ from those of previous steps in the educational field. The story of the National Core Curriculum (NAT), which aims to regulate the content taught at schools, perfectly reflects this policy. Already during the 2012 NAT modification, the rightist government circles tried to reformulate the literary canon, which they considered leftist and liberal. Mihály Takaró, extreme right wing literary historian, played a leading role in this process: he initiated the inclusion of writers who had been connected to the extreme right wing or who had expressed antisemitic thoughts in some of their works in the optional NAT list of authors that could be taught at Hungarian literature classes.

NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM AND COURSEBOOKS SERVING INDOCTRINATION

As a result of the teachers' protest movements in 2016, the government allowed the elaboration of a novel NAT version. While several experts welcomed the new child-centred solutions and modern pedagogical approaches appearing in this new draft, from the autumn of 2018, various government-friendly figures bashed the proposal claiming that the curricula for subjects crucial for identity formation (Hungarian language and literature, history, music) did not highlight national patriotic values enough.²⁷⁷ Consequently, the new NAT chapters on humanities were revised by a team headed by the above-mentioned Mihály Takaró in the second half of 2019, while the professional NGOs were excluded from the process. At the beginning of 2020, the modified core curriculum was published, and it received disastrously negative criticism.

As the Association of Teachers of Hungarian Language and Literature pointed out, although the original objective had been to significantly reduce the amount of material to be taught, the number of authors and pieces had actually been increased. As a result, not enough time would remain for "active studying, competence development, differentiation and motivating students to read". They also highlighted that the curriculum had put some central figures of the literary canon of the political right wing into the focus, authors whose publications cannot be considered as esthetically significant according to several experts.

The Association of History Teachers also expressed its criticism. Firstly, they denounced that the document had been created "with the exclusion of the public, the names of the authors were not published". Secondly, they refused the perspectives offered by the draft curriculum, for example that according to "the NAT the primary objective of teaching history is to create 'a fact-based, realistic and *positive awareness of national identity*'²⁷⁸: it does not allow that in some cases the fact-based, realistic study of history could result in critical assessment". They also remarked that owing to this ideological aim of creating a positive awareness of national identity, the curriculum reflected a distorted view of some eras: "The topic areas for primary schools only include '*Victorious fights and battles in the Árpád Era*', and thus the Mongol invasion of Hungary might be left out." Concerning the Horthy era, NAT only includes the "*recovery after Trianon*".²⁷⁹

Literature professors working at universities, some of whom teach at church-run institutions, the teaching staffs of numerous schools, two teachers' trade unions, and the Civil Platform for Public Education (CKP), which comprises over fifty educational NGOs, requested the government to delay the introduction of the new NAT and the general curricula created in a similar vein by one year. The protesters, whose actions were declared to be politically motivated by the representatives of

²⁷⁶ Viktor Orbán's speech at the Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, 28 July 2018. Official English version: <https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/>. In Hungarian: <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-beszede-a-xxix-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban/>, last seen 30.12. 2021.

²⁷⁷ hvg.hu, "Az egészben volt valami idealisztikus" – Az új NAT készítői is érezték, hogy elhasal a tervezet ["The whole process was somewhat idealistic" – Even the compilers of the new NAT felt that their proposal would fail]. HVG, 24 September 2018. https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180924_kormany_nat_tervezet_kozoktatás_csepe_valeria_i_simon_laszlo_fidesz_kdnp, last seen 30. 12. 2021. See the interview with Miklós Kásler, head of the ministry responsible for education. Haiman, Éva; Kis, Ferenc: Szétválk a magán- és az állami egészségügy [Private and state owned health care system to separate]. Magyar idők, 11 October 2018. <https://www.magyaridok.hu/belfold/szetvalk-a-magan-es-az-allami-egeszsegugy-3564611/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁷⁸ Emphasis in the original document.

²⁷⁹ A Történelemtanárok Egylete állásfoglalása az új Nemzeti Alaptanterv 2020. január 31-én megjelent szövegéről [Resolution of the Association of History Teachers on the text of the new National Core Curriculum published on 31 January 2020]. <https://tte.hu/a-tortenelemtanarok-egylete-allasfoglalasa-az-uj-nemzeti-alaptanterv-2020-január-31-en-megjelent-szovegerol/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

the government, presented professional and pedagogical arguments, and they propose a delay to involve teachers' organisations in the shaping of the document. Perspectives connected to the pandemic were added to the original arguments after the epidemic had unfolded. They stated that the extremely burdensome difficulties of teachers arising due to the coronavirus should not be capped by extra tasks emerging from the hasty introduction of the new NAT. Although the official title of the political regime constructed by Fidesz-KDNP is the System of National Cooperation (NER), the government totally neglected the above suggestions concerning the contribution to the development of the NAT and the delay of its introduction.

As a consequence of the above facts, it did not come as a surprise that the state published textbooks, compiled after the revision of the National Core Curriculum and the general curricula without public discussion, also received harsh criticism from teachers' associations. It was highlighted that although theoretically the core curriculum and the textbooks created based on it should have facilitated the reduction of overload, the number of works to be studied and the required amount of factual knowledge had increased in reality. Objections were also raised concerning the aims of competence development: these were hardly reflected in the new textbooks. At the same time, as the focus had been shifted to patriotic perspectives, during the discussion of the origin of Hungarians in a history book for Grade 5, scientifically unproven thoughts about the relationship of Huns and Magyars were put forward.²⁸⁰ The so-called smart textbook published for the Hungarian Language subject for 11-graders stereotypically presented the differences of gender roles.²⁸¹

MEASURES THAT LOWER THE STANDARD OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHING

The lack of teachers is causing increasingly severe problems in the Hungarian educational system. As the number of applicants for teacher training has been on decline while the number of career changers among teachers has increased, the proportion of elderly teachers and retired professionals is constantly growing. As a result of the lack of employees, head teachers must replace missing teachers with colleagues unqualified for the given subject. One of the reasons for the increasing lack of teachers stems from the fact that ever since the new nationalisation of schools, the working conditions for teachers have significantly deteriorated. This is manifested among other things by the fact that teachers are required to work overtime without being paid. The increasing lack of teachers is also related to the fact that the transition to the teacher career model was not actually accompanied by a significant rise in incomes: "In 2014, the government decided that the income of teachers will be tied to the minimum wage of 2014 (HUF 101,500) instead of the current minimum wage. Today the minimum wage is HUF 167,000 (ca. 450 EUR), and it will be HUF 200,000 next year; thus if teachers' wages had kept up with the development of the minimum wage, by now their income should be multiplied by 1.67, while by next year it should be doubled."²⁸² Another cause of the lack of teachers is that extreme differences are witnessed in incomes for various intellectual professions. According to Education at a Glance 2020 by the OECD, depending on school type, an average teacher earns 30–40% less than an average graduate, thus the income gap in Hungary is among the largest ones in the world.²⁸³

Various measures introduced after 2010, such as the lowering of the minimum school leaving age, the lowering of quotas for higher education, or the limitation of general education in vocational schools, all indicated that Fidesz-led governments did not consider it important that the widest possible ranges of the public could participate in high level educational activities and could have access to knowledge that facilitates individual thinking and activity. This tendency is also reflected in the decree passed just before the start of the new educational year in September 2020, which – in an answer to the labour shortage in kindergartens – allowed that in the afternoon, shift workers with only a certificate of secondary education (e.g. educational

²⁸⁰ Avítt, lapos, történelmet hamisít – Kiakadtak a magyar- és történelemtanárok az új NAT-hoz készült tankönyveken [Obsolete, flat, falsifies history – teachers of history and Hungarian language and literature upset by textbooks based on new NAT]. HVG, 25 June 2020.

https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200625_Gyerek_nyelv_es_21szazad_ellenes_kiakadtak_a_magyar_es_tortenelemtanarok_az_uj_NAThoz_keszult_tankonyveken, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Joó, Hajnalka: „Rettenetes, sírni való”: lehúzták az új tankönyveket a szakértők [“Tragic, makes you cry” – new textbooks slated by experts]. HVG, 28 August 2021.

https://hvg.hu/360/202134_a_nat_uj_tankonyvei_patetikus_latszatalternativa_haza_igen_haladas_nem, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸¹ Rétvári: Azért írják a tankönyvben, hogy a férfi politizál, a nő érzelmi életet él, mert ezek a jellemzők [Rétvári: Textbooks write that men discuss politics and women have an emotional life, because this is characteristic]. HVG, 19 January 2021.

https://hvg.hu/elet/20210119_retvari_tankonyv_ungar_nemek_ferfiak_nok, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸² Brückner, Gergely: Aki keveset keres, annyit is ér: Magyarország egyre arcpírítóbb fizetésekkel alázta meg a tanárait [Those who earn little are worth little: Hungary humiliates teachers with increasingly shameful wages]. Telex, 7 October 2021.

<https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2021/10/07/aki-keveset-keres-az-annyit-is-er-magyarorszag-egyre-arcpiritobb-fizetesekkel-alazza-meg-a-tanarait>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸³ Borzasztóan keveset keresnek a tanárok Magyarországon [Teachers earn extremely little in Hungary]. 168.hu, 11 September 2020. <https://168.hu/itthon/tanarok-fizetes-osszehasonlitas-oecd-190955>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

assistants) could look after the children although in previous decades only qualified kindergarten teachers with a degree in higher education who also carried out individual development of children could work in either shift.²⁸⁴

From the summer of 2021, steps threatening to dumb teacher training down brought leading university lecturers and professional associations of educators to protest. Critics raised their voice against the implementation of measures by the above mentioned Mihály Takaró, which aimed to shorten the 6-year-long academic education of teachers and to reduce the amount of training requirements, supposing that these measures would reduce the number of career-changing teachers. Despite all sorts of criticism, the decree became effective in September 2021. Accordingly, the compulsory core knowledge and skills taught in teacher training should be matched to the new NAT, the length of the training should be reduced to 5 years, and several courses should be eliminated or made optional.²⁸⁵ István Nahalka, educational researcher, commented on the plans that had been leaked out two months before publishing: "There is no place in the world where the teacher should know only as much as their students should."²⁸⁶

EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

The greatest challenge for Hungarian public education in the past few years was posed by the coronavirus pandemic, which made it extremely difficult or sometimes impossible to apply traditional educational routines.

Although a huge number of problems specific to education arose during the pandemic, despite these difficulties the educational management refused to include representatives of teachers, especially the representatives of the teachers' trade unions, in the decision making process for crisis management measures. Furthermore, as in 2012 schools were re-nationalized and local governments lost their rights of school management, although they could have identified and attenuated several problems locally.

The lack of cooperative intentions was manifested in the systematic retention and concealment of epidemiological data, which was often accompanied by the ambitions of decision makers to paint the situation in schools in bright colours; consequently, the suggestions of trade unions were completely ignored or were considered unjustified. The quotation below was published on an online news portal when the second wave of the pandemic was soaring, and it clearly illustrates the practice of retaining information. "No official information is provided for schools about the current epidemiological situation affecting the institution, even if there is a student who has proven to be infected by coronavirus."²⁸⁷ Hardly a week had passed after this, when Zoltán Maruzsa, undersecretary of public education, "declared that the pandemic defence in public education was successful."²⁸⁸

When this statement was published, the Parents' Voice (Szülői Hang) NGO conducted a questionnaire-based survey about the school-level difficulties and general problems of pandemic management. Although the survey, which analysed the answers of over 10 000 respondents submitted online, cannot be regarded as representative, it has several instructive results. Let us cite some examples. "According to the responses, the 1.5 m physical distance is not given or is sometimes not given in 77% of cases. If physical distance cannot be kept, masks should be worn to diminish risks, but according to respondents in 80% of cases all students or the majority of them refrain from wearing a mask during classes. If most of the students do not wear a mask and they cannot keep the 1.5 m distance in classes either, they run the risk of getting infected [...] in 71% of cases."²⁸⁹

Partnerships were difficult to form, as figures close to the government repeatedly made statements matching their own political strategies and publicity aims. For example, Viktor Orbán, who regards migration as a central question ever since

²⁸⁴ Neuberger, Eszter: Törvénytelen állapotot okozott az óvodapedagógusok hiánya, de aztán megoldották: rendeletet hoztak, hogy ne kelljen annyi [Lack of kindergarten teachers leads to illegal situation, solved by decree to lower the required number]. 444.hu, 9 September 2020. <https://444.hu/2020/09/09/torvenytelen-allapotot-okozott-az-ovodapedagogusok-hiany-a-de-aztan-megoldottak-rendeletet-hoztak-hogy-ne-kelljen-annyi>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸⁵ Szalai, Bálint: Lerövidítették a tanárképzést, túl kevés a jelentkező, és hiányoznak a tanárok [Teacher training shortened, applicant numbers low, teachers lacking]. Szabad Európa, 16 September 2021. <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/tanarkepzes-szakma-pedagogus-hiany/31463369.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸⁶ Keller-Alánt, Ákos: „A világon sehol nincs olyan, hogy egy tanárnak csak annyit kelljen tudnia, mint a diákjainak” [“There is no place in the world where the teacher should know only as much as their students should”]. Szabad Európa, 23 July 2021. <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/nahalka-istvan-oktatas-tanarkepzes-pedagogus/31373397>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸⁷ Grád-Kovács, Márta: Orosz rulettként várom, hogy mikor kerülök sorra megbetegedésként, Mi tanárok lettünk a feláldozhatók [I am expecting my turn to fall ill as if playing Russian roulette. Us, teachers can be sacrificed]. 24.hu, 1 October 2020. <https://24.hu/belfold/2020/10/01/koronavirus-oktatas-iskola-tesztes-karanten-fertozottek/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸⁸ Eredményes a védekezés a köznevelésben [Defence is successful in public education]. MTI, 8 October 2020. <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/oktatasert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/eredmenyes-a-vedekeses-a-koznevelesben>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁸⁹ Járványkezelés az iskolákban: aggódnak a szülők, változtatni kell [Pandemic management in schools: parents are anxious, change required]. Szülői Hang, 2020. <https://szuloihang.hu/jarvanykezeles-valtoztatni-kell/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

2015, claimed in the state radio some days after the emergence of coronavirus in Hungary that "there is a straightforward connection between illegal migration and the coronavirus pandemic, as several migrants arrive from Iran or via Iran, which is one of the hot spots of the epidemic."²⁹⁰ Although it is true that there were Iranian citizens among the first identified people diagnosed with coronavirus in Hungary who were expelled from the country in unlawful procedures later, they were not illegal immigrants in reality, but rather were university students who had studied in the country for a long time with valid residence permits.

In spring 2021, the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office accused the teachers' trade unions of influencing public opinion when the teachers protested against the reopening date of schools. The scheduled date was so close that the immunity levels of teachers, who had just received their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, could have hardly reached 80%.²⁹¹ Some days later, Zoltán Maruzsa, undersecretary of public education, adopted a similarly denunciatory tone in his article published in a pro-government newspaper, when he discussed the organisations critical of certain epidemiological measures of the education management: "We should not believe at all costs what grumblers, people paid to discredit us and commandos camouflaged as professional associations say."²⁹²

Several deficiencies of the educational system became visible as a result of pandemic measures, especially due to the transition to digital education. For instance, in the lack of appropriate digital knowledge and practice, it was difficult for a considerable proportion of teachers to change to online education. The deficiencies in digital competencies partly stem from the fact that until the outbreak of the pandemic,²⁹³ very little was implemented from the highly subsidised Digital Educational Strategy (DOS) approved by the government in 2016. (It is worth noting that the State Audit Office (SAO) of Hungary has recently published an analysis about the correlations between the DOS and the coronavirus pandemic which reveals that the national strategy did not discuss the relevant target values in different fields and completion dates were also missing.)²⁹⁴

Researchers' deeper analyses based on empirical studies and the above described survey by the Parents' Voice proved that extreme differences had been present between teachers concerning the use of ICT. While certain teachers were able to apply and create novel methods appropriate for the unexpected situation, which actually activated students and built on their creativity, other teachers could apply only very basic methods (delivering lectures in front of the camera, sending tasks to the students, etc.). Educational researcher István Nahalka claims these differences reveal that the reform of pedagogical culture has only been carried out partially: "From 2005 on, promising development processes relying on EU funds started out and resulted in partial success. It was an important achievement that competence developing program packages were created, the National Educational Integration Network (OOIH) and the Integrational Pedagogical System (IPR) were operating, horizontal networks were formed in order to spread local initiatives and best practises. [...] All initiatives offering the promise of modernization before 2010 faded away very quickly after 2010. From 2013 on, the state totally centralised the maintenance and management of educational institutions, schools have lost most elements of their economic, organisational and professional independence. A fully centralised and prescriptive National Core Curriculum was published, together with general curricula (2001, 2012 and 2020). Content regulation thus turned into an obstacle for individual development of students, for real differentiation in the classrooms, and for the realisation of local innovations. The overwhelming majority of funds available for educational development was spent on central organisational tasks (especially on setting up the new management structure), and local innovations ceased in essence."²⁹⁵

While joining online education might be hindered by the lack of digital competences both of the students and the teachers, a study points out that "transferring to online teaching also encountered structural and infrastructural obstacles: on the one hand, a part of students (approximately one third of them) could not join the new educational environment introduced at the

²⁹⁰ Kolozi, Ádám: Újra itt vannak az egy éve kiutasított iráni diákok [Iranian students expelled a year ago return]. Telex, 9 March 2021. <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/03/09/ujra-itt-vannak-az-egy-eve-kiutasitott-irani-diakok-a-helsinki-szerint-konstrualt-eljaras-volt>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹¹ Korompay, Csilla: Hecckampányt folytatnak a pedagógus-szakszervezetek [Teachers' trade unions produce a storm of hype]. Magyar Hírlap, 1 April 2021. <https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/belfold/20210401-hecckampanyt-folytatnak-a-pedagogus-szakszervezetek>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹² Maruzsa, Zoltán: Hírgyártás a tanügy frontján [News manufacturing at the education front]. Magyar Nemzet, 5 June 2021. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemeney/2021/06/hirgyartas-a-tanugy-frontjan>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹³ Czifra, Béla; Nagy, Zsolt; Tegzesné Czigler, Erika Györgyi: A digitális oktatás tapasztalatainak értékelése 2021. [Evaluation of the experiences of digital education 2021]. Állami Számvevőszék, 2021. <https://www.asz.hu/storage/files/files/elemzesek/2021/E2114.pdf?ctid=1307>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹⁴ "The DOS strategy determined hardly any target values. The DOS objectives are broken down along general aims, development targets, and specific aims set to reach the former targets. Exact target values and measurement values connected to target states were determined only for some specific targets, which are mostly connected to the development of digital infrastructure." Czifra et alii, op. cit. p. 13.

²⁹⁵ Nahalka, István: Koronavírus és oktatáspolitikai [Coronavirus and educational policy]. *Educatio* 2021, 30(1), 22–35. pp. 29–30.

middle of March at all, or could only partially join owing to the lack of devices; on the other hand, parents could provide digital support for only half of the students."²⁹⁶ The document compiled by the deputy commissioner responsible for minority rights based on press releases and expert analyses unequivocally reveals that the problems of the digital transition cumulated for underprivileged groups, primarily for the members of the Roma minority: "1. Destitute families often have no ICT devices and they often lack access to the Internet as well. 2. Flats are overcrowded, children are unable to separate themselves to be able to study, as the conditions for separation are not given. 3. Parents are undereducated and cannot help their children. 4. In some schools it was not acknowledged, not even during the emergency situation, that underprivileged and severely underprivileged students are totally unable to proceed with the others in the group. The families reported that teachers had assigned too many tasks that were difficult to understand, which the students were unable to solve alone. [...] 6. Parents who had some sort of work could fall out of the labour market, and this situation of the parents affects their children negatively. 7. Owing to the special legislation valid until summer, it was possible that several students were to be obliged to repeat the school year, because their extreme backlog could not be worked off."²⁹⁷

During the lockdown of schools for the first and third waves of the coronavirus pandemic, a number of students did not receive substantive education due to the lack of devices required for online education. Although the Fundamental Law of Hungary of 2012 guarantees the right to education, during the upheaval of the pandemic, the lack of devices and Internet access prevented many students from exercising this right, which in the case of some families was also exacerbated by the lack of access to the electricity supply. As a March 2021 study of the SAO claims: "Conditions for online education were present in 9 out of 10 respondent families. [...] The majority of the children whose parents did not own the necessary devices had no (44%) or only partial help (28%) from their school, while for over a quarter of students the schools provided all necessary conditions. All in all, for 8% of the surveyed children not all conditions of online learning were present (for 3% of them, the school could only provide partial conditions)."²⁹⁸ The above cited study by István Nahalka reviews the results of various analyses and concludes that "15–20% of students in the public education system could not take part in online education or could only participate to a minimal degree. The (severely estimated) national data represents significant areal differences: in disadvantaged regions the data is much worse, underprivileged groups had to face much more severe problems."²⁹⁹

Different sources confirm that certain children and families in need did receive some help, e.g. certain mobile providers made Internet access free for a certain period of time, and companies, institutions and local governments donated or lent devices to families. The cited report by the deputy commissioner for minority issues states that special schools that develop underprivileged children took substantial steps for the provision of children with ICT devices, with the funding of the Deputy State Secretariat for Inclusion.³⁰⁰ However, it can also be stated that despite the recurring waves of the pandemic, which pose a stable challenge for education, no subsidised program has been established to provide the needy students with devices required for online learning.

Government-boostered advance of church-run schools

Major Christian churches in Hungary have been allied with conservative rightist parties, primarily with the Fidesz–KDNP alliance, since 1998. Starting from 2010, the so-called "historical churches" have been among the most important bases for the legitimacy of the autocratic system established by the ruling alliance of Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party. The price of this political alliance is the abundant financial support allocated to Christian churches, which is chiefly achieved by increasing the share and weight of church-run institutions – at first in

²⁹⁶ Osváth, Andrea; Papp Z., Attila: Digitális fordulat az oktatásban? A digitális távoktatás tapasztalatai, lehetséges következményei [A digital turn in education? Experiences of online teaching and its possible consequences] Szellem és tudomány, 2020. 11(2). 179–204. p. 187. https://matarka.hu/koz/ISSN_2062-204X/11_evf_2_sz_2020/ISSN_2062-204X_11_evf_2_sz_2020_179-204.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹⁷ A Magyarországon élő nemzetiségek jogainak védelmét ellátó biztoshelyettes 4/2020. számú elvi állásfoglalása a világhátrány nemzetiségi közösségekre gyakorolt hatásairól [4/2020 resolution of the deputy commissioner responsible for the defence of the rights of Hungarian minorities on the effects of the pandemic on minority communities]. Budapest, 11 November 2020. p. 36. https://nemzetisegijogok.hu/documents/2657648/3223677/4_2020.+sz%c3%a1m%c3%ba+elvi+%c3%a1ll%c3%a1sfoglal%c3%a1s+-+A+vill%c3%a1gj%c3%a1rv%c3%a1ny+nemzetis%c3%a9gi+k%c3%b6z%c3%b6ss%c3%a9gekre+gyakorolt+hat%c3%a1sair%c3%b3l.pdf/84bdbadf-8da8-3477-43ac-6481db4b83cd?version=1.0, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

²⁹⁸ Cifra et alii, 2021, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁹⁹ Nahalka, 2021, op. cit., pp. 32–33.

³⁰⁰ Op. cit. p. 39.

the educational sector, and later extending in the sector of social, child welfare and other services. Consequently, the shift in the ownership structure in public education after 2010 was not at all a spontaneous process triggered by the increasing need for church-run schools, but rather the result of conscious and targeted interventions by the government.

The Orbán regime's policy to promote the expansion of church-run schools is based on the combination of three principles:

1. Special rules were established to weaken social control over schools owned or managed by churches.
2. The rule system for the extreme centralization of the educational system management was loosened for church-run institutions. This primarily affected rules concerning the autonomy of schools, the curriculum, available coursebooks, and restrictions on admittance procedures.
3. The allocation of resources favoured church-run schools, and positive and negative material incentives were both applied. Positive financial incentives serving the extension of the church-run educational system include advantages encoded in the financing mechanism as well as an increased amount of subsidies.

As a result of the above measures, the share of church-run private schools within the primary educational sector (ISCED 1-2) almost doubled, while the number of secondary-schools managed by churches (ISCED 3) multiplied by 2.5 between 2010 and 2018. Consequently, every fifth settlement has at least one church-run school in Hungary. In 2015, there were already 137 settlements which had schools maintained exclusively by the church. Although the expansion of churches was more modest in the vocational sector, non-church-based private institutions were forcefully pushed out of the system.

The share of church-owned private schools within the system of primary and secondary schools in Hungary

YEAR	PRIMARY EDUCATION		SECONDARY EDUCATION	
	SCHOOLS (%)	PUPILS (%)	SCHOOLS (%)	PUPILS (%)
2010	9.4	7.4	10.4	6.7
2018	16.4	15.6	24.5	16.4

Source: Júlia Varga (ed.), A közoktatás indikátorrendszere 2019 [The indicator system of public education, 2019]. KRTK-KTI, Budapest. 2019. 169–175.

The government-facilitated expansion of the church-run educational system has passed a threshold over which the influence of this network on the whole of the primary and secondary educational system is significant. This effect is twofold: on the one hand, the already existing problems of the Hungarian educational system have been exacerbated; and on the other hand, new problems have arisen.

The most crucial negative effect of the privatisation that led to the expansion of the church-run education system was the further enhancement of grave inequities characteristic of the Hungarian public education system. Firstly, church-run institutions are less controlled professionally and their financial support is higher, which leads to better equipment and a relatively higher number of teachers in them. Thus, the image of the school is better, which made these institutions attractive for middle-class families. Secondly, the high and ever growing proportion of pupils from poor and Roma families in state-run schools projects the image that the educational standard is low there. As a consequence, church-run schools can afford to exercise a selective admittance policy, made possible by the legislation tailored to their needs, which in turn generates a selectional spiral. This, in fact, makes such schools even more attractive in the eyes of families of higher social status. In practice, in all settlements where the church took over formerly state-owned schools or established a new institution, the proportion of underprivileged students in state-run schools has increased significantly. In sum, the extension of churches in the educational field further enhanced social selection in schools, in turn further strengthening the effect of social status on learning outcomes.

The Roma minority is already severely marginalised, and changes in school control led to a further segregation of Roma students, thus increasing the number and proportion of ghetto schools. This was facilitated by the fact that the government did not take any anti-segregation measures in the past decade. What is more, in some particular cases, the government even encouraged segregation.

Another formerly existing problem of the educational system was also aggravated by the advances of churches in the school system: efficiencies were further reduced. The student to teacher ratio ranked in 2010 among the lowest in Europe (9,7 children for one teacher in primary schools). As the overall number of pupils declined, and the church-run educational system expanded, the school system was further broken into pieces, which led to a further decrease in efficiency. An important factor in this process was that in the state-run sector, the state ousted local governments from the educational arena and also changed the financing scheme: the decentralised, normative financial structure was replaced by a centralised wage-financing scheme. Thus, existing mechanisms to ensure the balance between the number of students and the number of teachers were eliminated. The different sectors were not hit equally by the reduction in efficiency: as the church-run schools attracted the students from state-run schools, the efficiency of the state educational sector has plummeted. Although the teacher to student ratio has improved lately between the various sectors due to the extension of church-run schools, this did not significantly improve the low efficiency of the whole educational sector. As a result, every new efficiency-enhancing measure in the public school system only serves to increase the proportion of church-run institutions, further strengthening their selection advantages.

Church-run schools provide religious education to their students, depending on their denomination. Therefore, the expansion of the church in the field of education gave rise to a problem that had not been present in Hungary earlier. In settlements where only church-run schools operate, the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions (Paragraph 3 of Article 14, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) is infringed. While the parents of children going to state-run schools can freely choose between the subjects "Religious Education" and "Ethics", in church-run schools no such option is available.³⁰¹

INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010–2021³⁰²

The mistakes and wrongdoing that characterise the whole of public education have been present in the initial vocational education and training (IVET): frequent unprofessional changes introduced without any preparation or consultation;³⁰³ the introduction of conservative educational solutions that do not reflect on the needs of our modern era; protectionism and social indifference.

FREQUENT UNPROFESSIONAL CHANGES WITHOUT ANY PREPARATION OR CONSULTATION

Both frequent and often fundamental changes and the short period of time between the publication of the decrees and their introduction put huge burdens on the teachers, the pupils and the parents as well. A given change or reform could not even be worked through the system by the time the next transformation was ordered.

Schools generally faced the changes required from above without the opportunity to prepare effectively, and no professional support was provided to them either. The recurrent changes were accompanied by significant losses in knowledge and experience. Neither personal changes, nor institution closures or transformations were accompanied by an exchange of experiences, and no deeper professional analysis was given to the previous periods of time. Changes affected the organisational structure, the curriculum and the concept system of vocational training.

The management system of state-owned vocational schools changed at a very high speed. Between 2011 and 2015, these institutions had four different types of maintainers.³⁰⁴ Driven by communicative and statistical objectives, school types were given new names over and over (see Table 1 below). With the aim of increasing prestige, secondary vocational schools (*sakközépiskola*) giving a "matura" certificate (*érettség*)³⁰⁵ as well as a professional qualification were named

³⁰¹ This chapter is based on the following articles:

Ercse, Kriszta; Radó, Péter: A magyar közoktatásban zajló privatizáció és annak hatásai [Privatization in the Hungarian educational system and its effects]. *Iskolakultúra*, 2019, 29(7), 8–49.

Radó, Péter: Market reforms in the Hungarian school system: impact of changes in the ownership structure, NESET Ad hoc report no. 2/2019.

Radó, Péter: Social Selection in Education: the Wider Context of the Segregation of Roma Pupils in Hungary. CEU Center for Policy Studies, Budapest. Working Paper Series 2020/4.

³⁰² As the first volume of Hungary Turns its Back on Europe did not discuss IVET, this chapter reviews the whole Fidesz-era from 2010.

³⁰³ For details, see: Juhász, Ágnes: Szabályozás, felelősség, autonómia az oktatásban [Regulation, responsibility and autonomy in education]. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2020, 70(5–6).

³⁰⁴ At first, schools were maintained by the local governments of the county or the capital; then by the county-level school maintainer; then by the school district, which was also responsible for public education; finally by the VET centres managed by the relevant ministries.

³⁰⁵ The "matura" certificate (*érettség*) is a secondary school leaving examination, which is the prerequisite for admission to higher education.

szakgimnázium (vocational general secondary school)³⁰⁶ in 2016, while from 2020 they are called *technikum* (technicum) in *szakgimnázium* name was kept for certain fields (art, education, community culture). The three-year vocational schools (*szakiskola*) – in which the "matura" certificate could only be obtained by a fraction of pupils who attended extra courses – were named *szakközépiskola*³⁰⁷ in 2016, disregarding the fact that up to that year this name was reserved for the 4+1-year-long secondary vocational schools, in which the training was concluded by a "matura" exam for everybody. In 2020, when the chaos caused by the name changes was perceived, the former *szakiskola* then *szakközépiskola* got a third name: *szakképző iskola* (vocational training school), which earlier was a collective term for all the three types of schools offering vocational education (Rows 2–4 in Table 1). As the *szakközépiskola* term was given to the three-year-long technical schools, the training there was counted as "secondary education" (giving a "matura" certificate) from then on – so the number of pupils in schools giving a "matura" certificate was raised by 20% in a split second (shaded cells in Table 1).³⁰⁸ The recurrent changes were so swift that in the school year 2020/2021 in vocational schools providing a "matura" certificate (Row 2 in Table 1), the pupils in different years had to be taught according to three different general curricula. The pupils graduating in 2021 went to a school with three different names, although they stayed in the same institution from enrollment to receipt of their professional certificate.³⁰⁹

Table 1. Name changes of schools in secondary education between 2016 and 2020 in Hungary. Based on KSH, Education on secondary level 2020/2021. Figure 1. <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xftp/stattukor/okt/secondary-level2021/index.html>, last seen 16. 12. 2021

	– 2016 / 2017	2016 / 2017 – 2019 / 2020	2020 / 2021 –
1	Secondary general school gimnázium	Secondary general school gimnázium	Secondary general school gimnázium
2	Secondary vocational school szakközépiskola	Vocational grammar school szakgimnázium	Technicum technikum
			Vocational grammar school szakgimnázium
3	Vocational school szakiskola	Secondary vocational school szakközépiskola	Vocational training school szakképző iskola
4	Special vocational school speciális szakiskola	Vocational school szakiskola	Vocational school szakiskola

Shaded – regarded as "középiskola"; bold – gives a "matura" (érettségi) certificate (traditionally regarded as "secondary school"); thick border – vocational education, up to 2020 "vocational training school" (szakképző iskola), now "vocational institution" (szakképző intézmény).

In 2016, new obligatory general curricula, which contained significant modifications, were published only two days before the first day of the school year, although, as a consequence, the required number of teachers for some subjects was also modified. The needs of pupils entering secondary education were not taken into consideration either. It was regular practice that it was revealed only a few days before the deadline for application to secondary education which courses were permitted to launch for a given secondary school. Moreover, during the major reform of vocational education in 2020, pupils applying for places in secondary schools did not have information about the different new types of training.

Despite major protests, the introduction of the obligatory professional subject at the "matura" exam for all those sitting for the general "matura exam" in vocational grammar schools in 2017 was not delayed. The general requirements for the new subjects included in the May 2017 "matura" exams were only made public in the previous October, while the detailed requirements were only published on 28 December 2016. There was one easement, though: contrary to the original plans, intermediate level exams could also be taken from the professional subjects. But this was only announced at the end of the school year in 2016. Later, the ombudsman declared that the introduction of the new exam breached the Fundamental Law of Hungary, and also the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ In Hungary, gimnázium "secondary general school" offers general training, and prepares pupils for higher education. This school type is considered to be the most prestigious one in secondary education. [Note by Translator.]

³⁰⁷ In Hungary, only schools that give a "matura" certificate (érettségi) are considered to be "középiskola" (secondary school) traditionally.

³⁰⁸ Main, long time series data of education. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/en/okt0001.html, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁰⁹ The rapid changes could not be followed by the nameplates of schools: in many places, the plates at the entrance show the official name valid before 2020, or even the one valid before 2016.

³¹⁰ Az Alapvető Jogok Biztosának jelentése az AJB-2018 számú ügyben [Report on case no. AJB-2018 by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary]. <https://bit.ly/2WWRrNX>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

OBSOLETE, DOWNGRADED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Besides that education in IVET uses obsolete perspectives and methods similarly to general education, being out-of-date in this sector also means that the long-term realistic requirements of the labour market are also ignored.

Until 2018, the government communicated that a certificate earned in vocational education (even certificates issued without a "matura" certificate) was superior to the general "matura" certificate; what is more, it was superior to a university degree. It was also declared that teaching non-vocational subjects in vocational schools was just a waste of time. In order to accelerate the process of earning a certificate in vocational education, in 2013 secondary vocational training without a "matura" certificate was transformed. Programme length was shortened from 4 years to 3 years, and the sectoral foundation course was cancelled. In the new system, a professional qualification route had to be chosen at the age of 14, and the training matched the special requirements of the given profession. The number of lessons dedicated to non-professional subjects (general education) (without PE) was reduced to 7 hours/week, i.e. a reduction from 2200 to 750 hours was carried out for the whole training. However, profession-independent competence development did not appear in the curriculum for vocational education in exchange. Thus, for most courses no IT skills were taught, the development of digital competences was totally lacking. The absence of basic competence development is quite problematic, as pupils entering this type of vocational education generally lack key competences significantly. As a consequence of the above factors, the average results of pupils in Year 10 of vocational training schools is worse than the average performance of pupils in Year 6 of primary school on the national competence test.³¹¹ With reference to German and Austrian examples, the expansion of dual education was forced, ignoring the fact that the participants of this training are older in Germany, and the entrepreneurs' attitudes and possibilities are different in Hungary and Germany.

Contrary to the government's expectations, the reduction of the number of lessons dedicated to general subjects did not diminish dropout rates, as this step was not accompanied by the application of personalised, motivating teaching methods, and individual development was not tracked either. The market actors were not satisfied with the "single-use, disposable professionals" either, as pupils had acquired only the currently required professional knowledge; although this change was induced by the arguments of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Foreign chambers of commerce working in Hungary,³¹² and the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (Business Hungary)³¹³ continuously expressed their concerns about such a type of vocational training.

By 2016, the reduction of general knowledge and skills in favour of professional knowledge in the curriculum and the aim of urging pupils to enter the labour market early reached another segment of vocational education, i.e. vocational schools that provide a "matura" certificate. Up until the school year 2016/2017, in these schools, the first four years of vocational training consisted of occupational foundation subjects. Special skills and content for each occupation were only taught in the 5th year, after the "matura" exam. In 2016, 430 hours were taken away from general education in the curriculum (primarily from natural sciences). These classes had to be dedicated to obtaining a professional qualification at the time of the "matura" exam, which qualification generally had no market value. However, the possibility of obtaining a qualification one year earlier did not make the given school type more popular.³¹⁴

The optionality of the fifth subject at the "matura" exam was abolished, so it became mandatory to take a "matura" exam from a professional subject. This further decreased the chances of those pupils who wished to continue their studies in a field different from the field they had opted for at the age of 14.

³¹¹ Szabó, Lívia Dóra; Szepesi, Ildikó; Takácsné Kárász, Judit; Vadász, Csaba: Országos kompetenciamérés 2017, Országos jelentés [National competence test 2017, National report]. Oktatási Hivatal, Budapest. https://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kozoktatas/meresek/orszmer2018/Orszagos_jelentes_2017.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³¹² AmCham Hungary, Policy Agenda 2015–2017. For a More Competitive Hungary. AmCham Hungary, Budapest. 2015. 10–11. http://archive.amcham.hu/download/011/587/AmCham_Policy_Agenda.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³¹³ A Munkaadók és Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége javaslata: A tudás alapú, innovatív társadalom szakképzésének stratégiája [Suggestion of the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (Business Hungary): Strategy for vocational training in a knowledge-based, innovative society]. MGYOSZ (Business Hungary) 2019. https://mgyosz.hu/hirlevel/20190530_szakkepzes_strategia.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³¹⁴ Oktatási Hivatal, Prezentációk, tanulmányok, statisztikák [Presentations, studies, statistics]. https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevels/kozepfoku_felveteli_eljaras/prezentaciok_tanulmanyok. Oktatási Hivatal, Budapest. Last seen, 30. 12. 2021.

The overloading of both pupils and teachers and also the lack of teachers, which are all characteristic of the whole Hungarian educational system, are higher in vocational education. Owing to the lack of vocational teachers and instructors, several special classes could not be delivered, and certain courses could not be launched at all.

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, EARLY DROP-OUT, SCHOOL SYSTEM WITH DEAD ENDS

Due to the peculiarities of the Hungarian educational system, it has always been vocational training where the handicaps caused by social status emerged the most. At the age of 14, a school type must be chosen (see *Table 1* above): pupils can study at a secondary general school (gimnázium), can opt for a school where they get both a "matura" and a professional certificate (at the moment, the school type is called technikum "technicum"), or can go to a school where they only get a professional certificate, but cannot take the "matura" exam (now called szakképző iskola "vocational training school").³¹⁵ Due to the different prestige of school types and the strong effect of social background on results achieved in primary schools, the proportions of underprivileged pupils in various school types significantly differ: in vocational training schools, it is 6% (before the regulation strictly narrowing down the definition of underprivileged status in 2013, it was 30%); in technicums it is 2% (16% before 2013),³¹⁶ in secondary general schools, it is 1% (10% before 2013). Similar differences can be observed in the case of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) or pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties.

As a result, dropout rates have always been significantly higher in vocational training without a "matura" certificate. In addition, the lowering of the minimum school leaving age from 18 to 16 years by the Fidesz administration had significant consequences in this school type, due to the low motivation of students to study and the pressure to earn income. While approximately 7% of 17-year-olds dropped out of public education without completing their studies, this proportion was 12% in the three-year-long vocational training, 2.5% in vocational grammar schools, while negligible in secondary general schools.³¹⁷ When the minimum school leaving age was lowered, the number of public workers under 18 soared.³¹⁸

Owing to the changes in the system of vocational education and the lowering of the number of available places in higher education, mobility within the Hungarian educational system reduced significantly. Vocational training, which in general educates pupils from lower social classes, became a dead end. Mobility across school types and professions and the modification of a decision made at the age of 14 were rendered impossible, because a high number of lessons are dedicated to highly professional subjects from the beginning of this type of education; while stepping up to more prestigious school types became impossible due to the reduction of the number of lessons in general subjects. In theory, it is possible to earn a general "matura" certificate in two years after obtaining a professional certificate. However, this became a theoretical possibility after the introduction of 3-year-long vocational training due to the low number of lessons in general subjects. From 2021 on, the special training for the "matura" exam after vocational training schools is not available in day programs.

From 2013 on, the number of pupils from vocational education applying for and entering higher education, and thus their proportion in higher education dropped significantly, as the number of state-financed students in higher education was reduced, and the minimum level on the point scale for entering higher education was raised.³¹⁹ While until 2012, half of applicants took their "matura" exam in secondary general schools, in 2016 their share was as high as 75%.³²⁰ In 2012, the number of secondary school students admitted into the higher education system was equal for pupils in general education and vocational education. However, in 2016, the chance of a pupil from a secondary general school was 1.5 times as much as that of a pupil coming from vocational training. Moreover, from 2018 on, pupils in vocational grammar schools faced an extra challenge: often, they had to take a "matura" exam from 6 subjects if they wanted to enter higher education, as besides the 4 compulsory subjects (Mathematics, Hungarian Language and Literature, History, Foreign Language) 1 professional subject was made mandatory. If the targeted university required an exam e.g. from Physics, the students had extra load.

³¹⁵ Approximately 20% of pupils step over to secondary general schools in Year 5 or Year 7 (for an 8- or 6-year-long course). Some pupils with special educational needs (SEN) (less than 2% of all pupils) study in vocational training schools that provide a professional certificate or in skills development schools.

³¹⁶ Main, long time series data of education. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/en/okt0001.html, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³¹⁷ Official data are not published on the distribution according to school type of pupils who drop out. The data cited were calculated through the analysis of administrative databases. Varga, Júlia (ed.): A közoktatás indikátorrendszere 2019 [Indicator system of public education 2019]. KRTK KTI, Budapest, 2019.

³¹⁸ In Hungary, local governments provide opportunities to work for those who cannot find a job as public workers (köz munkás). Public work is financed by the state. The income of public workers is 50–80% of the current minimum wage in Hungary.

³¹⁹ Juhász, Ágnes: Szakgimnazisták továbbtanulási esélyei [Chances for pupils in vocational grammar schools to enter higher education]. CKP, 28. 10. 2017. <http://ckpinfo.hu/2017/10/28/szakgimnazistak-tovabbtanulasi-eselyei/>, last seen 02. 10. 2021.

³²⁰ If we consider the number of pupils taking the "matura" exam in vocational education or general education, this means that the probability for pupils from general education to apply for higher education is 2.5 times more than that for pupils from vocational education.

Although it could facilitate taking a step forward that studying a profession in schools is free of charge even for those already having a professional certificate, not enough attention is paid to the publicity of this opportunity. The effectiveness of free professional training programs available for those graduating from a secondary general school is reduced by the fact that the number of these programs plummeted, as they were typically operated by foundation-run schools, the number of which was minimised. Since 2020, it is not even possible to establish schools offering only vocational training after the "matura" exam owing to a change in legislation.

SUPPRESSING INTENTIONS OF AUTONOMY

The general decrease in the level of autonomy for schools also affected vocational education; consequently, several former, promising initiatives were impossible to continue. This tendency could be seen concerning the decisions affecting schools managed by foundations.

After the change of regime in 1989, foundation and also private schools played a crucial role in vocational training in Hungary. These institutions had a decisive role in the 2-year-long vocational training available after a "matura" exam in a secondary general school, in formal adult training and also in teaching the so-called "modernization" professions. After 2016, the operation of both foundation schools and private schools was gradually and systematically made impossible. They only received subsidies for their programs teaching professions that were high in demand or that were not taught by state-run schools.³²¹ Consequently, most of the schools in question had to choose from three alternatives: (i) they gave the maintainer's rights to a church; (ii) they stepped into the state-owned system; (iii) they ceased. The volume of destruction is indicated by the fact that out of 300 schools, less than 50 could survive as private or foundation schools. As a result of this process, with the exception of some schools now run by the church, the flexibility, innovativeness, and experience in adult training, which were characteristic of this school type, was lost.

Another process against the autonomy of institutions was that state-owned schools were at first managed by school maintainer centres, later by regional integrated VET centres, which in practice totally eliminated the rights of head teachers.

THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, THE 2020 CHANGES

The latest transformation of vocational education took place in 2020. Contrary to previous changes, a certain amount of conceptual planning and discussion did precede this change,³²² although no impact analysis was carried out, and previous experiences were not analysed either.

Due to this transformation, the system of vocational and general education was legally separated, and organisational structures were also separated at all levels. Technicums and vocational training schools are headed by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology (ITM), while secondary general schools, vocational grammar schools (education, community culture, art) and vocational schools for SEN are headed by the Ministry of Human Resources (EMMI). This legal separation resulted in several problems, some of which have not been resolved in the past almost 2 years, despite a series of legislative amendments. Owing to this duality, the whole system is chaotic.

As vocational education was separated from general education, the teachers working in vocational schools ceased to be public servants, ignoring the protests of trade unions, and without any prior consultation with them.

After the change, huge sums of money were pumped into vocational education: partly for infrastructural development, partly for paying students (scholarships, wages), and to a small extent to the wages of the workers in vocational education. Infrastructural developments, similarly to other improvements, were also driven by lobby interests, and were realised as money distributed by the central institutions. The budget of institutions was not raised, which could have solved the problem of the sometimes catastrophic state of buildings and infrastructure. Concerning the future, it gives cause for concern that amounts paid by employers for vocational training (called *szakképzési hozzájárulás*, i.e. training levy) will not be a separated sum in the budget, which broadens the possibilities for the government to use these arbitrarily.

³²¹ Juhász, Ágnes: Lehet-e jó egy szakmaszerkezeti döntés? [Can a decision on professional qualification structure be good?]. *Munkaügyi Szemle*, 2018, 61(4). 5–13. <https://www.munkaugyiszemle.hu/lehet-e-jo-egy-szakmaszerkezeti-dontes>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³²² Government Decision nr. 1168/2019 (III. 28.) on the strategy „Vocational Education and Training (VET) 4.0 – mid-term policy strategy for the renewal of VET and Adult Education (AE), the answer of the VET system for the challenges of the 4th Industrial Revolution”.

This transformation partly corrected the unacceptable changes introduced earlier. The earlier proportions of lessons dedicated to general and professional subjects were restored in technicums, and in three-year courses sectoral basic training was reinstated. These changes enhance mobility across schools, in theory. Measures were taken to decrease dropout rates: the number of special developing lessons was increased; the possibility of an extra orientation year before the training was created to facilitate competence development and career orientation; the novel concept of "workshop school" (*műhelyiskola*) was established to help those threatened by dropout, with the mainly theoretical condition that the parents are obliged to keep their underage child in the training until at least a sub-qualification is acquired by the child.

The length of the vocational training school remains 3 years, except for those scarce programs where the orientation year was introduced. On average, the number of lessons on general subjects (without PE) is still 7/week in this school type. Although several steps were taken to facilitate the launch of higher educational courses that correspond to training in technicums, it is difficult to correct the career choice made at an immature age (14 years). Contrary to previous rules, in technicums it is impossible to pass the "matura" exam at the end of Year 12, i.e. the last, 5th year that provides only professional training must be completed before the exam. It is also impossible to prepare for the "matura" exam after the 3-year vocational training in regular education, only evening or correspondence courses are available.

Positive changes were also introduced to modernise both the training and the professional exam, to include market actors in a novel way, and to loosen the rules that hinder the recognition of local peculiarities and the change in the professional content. New legislation makes it possible to organise vocational education in a way that considers the needs of the given area and the given profession, and also the local resources. However, the lack of professional and financial autonomy is a serious obstacle for innovation and the professional activity of schools. The original rights of head teachers have not been granted. The management of the relevant VET centre and how much the centre is embedded in governmental circles largely determine the degree to which head teachers can act within the framework set up by legislation. Expectations and incentives promote the dual training system. Although in some areas and in certain professional fields dual training centres for high quality training have emerged, the majority of enterprises cannot offer satisfactory training to students contracted with them.

The above described fundamental changes only concern the training for professions "with market relevance" and the training of the workforce regarded as "marketable". The new legislation does not concern the areas of education, community culture and art. In these areas, vocational grammar schools do not provide a qualification, and pupils studying there are not entitled to scholarships. The possibilities for schools training students with special educational needs (vocational schools) are also restricted.

LIFELONG GUIDANCE (LLG)

This section discusses lifelong (career) guidance, although this does not only concern pupils in vocational education.

Lifelong guidance should typically be carried out by the cooperation of several sectors. At the moment, no such cooperation exists. The National Council for Lifelong Guidance (Nemzeti Pályaorientációs Tanács), which used to coordinate activities and could be consulted, was closed down in 2012, and no other institution took over its tasks.

In Hungary, vocational guidance has never been treated in a way that would match its significance; however, the situation has further deteriorated owing to the changes in primary and secondary education, higher education and employment policy.

Considerable EU funds have been allocated to the development of vocational guidance systems. Several developments were carried out in parallel, without any coordination in the field of primary and secondary education, higher education, vocational education, employment policy and economic development. The usage of funds for development was often made impossible or only temporary, because the power of ministries, secretariats of state and background institutions changed. However, there is no possibility to implement knowledge and achieve guidance work in schools, which would be more important than the development itself.

The new National Core Curriculum, and the connected general curricula do not include career education. There are no classes dedicated to career guidance, which could allow pedagogical development to help the pupils

acquire skills to form their career. In the lack of freely usable lessons, such development cannot be offered to pupils even at schools which would be inclined to do that. The number of experts of vocational guidance at pedagogical services is much lower than needed and required by legislation, and as pedagogical services were subordinated to school districts, the cooperation of experts was made impossible.

Similar consequences arose due to the destruction of employment service (PES): experts were dismissed or were transferred to county-level government offices. As certain programs in higher education were cancelled by the government, no bachelor training (BA) is available for career counsellors. Since the separation of vocational and general education in 2020, career counsellors working at pedagogical services have no longer been responsible for pupils in vocational education; and the task of advisers working in vocational education has been the attraction of primary school pupils into vocational education. This is the aim of the vocational guidance "test" for all pupils in Year 8 as well, although the results are not mandatory to be taken into consideration, fortunately.

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In conclusion, in the past 12 years, no step forward has been taken in order to modernise the Hungarian educational system that includes vocational education. Contrary to international trends, the length of general training has not been changed. What is more, in vocational training schools, which educate 20% of pupils, there was a severe reduction in total teaching time, and the time dedicated to general competence training was also significantly reduced. Similarly to the whole of the education system, vocational education is obsolete and does not match the characteristics of the generation. As vocational training is preferred from the age of 14, without the realistic possibility of career change, possible career paths are narrowed down; the situation is further aggravated by the weakness of lifelong guidance and the lack of the development of career development skills. Frequent "reforms" are often introduced without preparation and prior consultation, and sometimes restore previous conditions. Contradictory legislation, as well as an increased workload stemming from the general lack of teachers and the increase in central requirements and a lack of esteem have all exacerbated teacher burnout. Although the 2020 reform of vocational education makes certain modern solutions possible, their completion can most generously be evaluated as ad hoc.

ADULT EDUCATION 2010–2021

LANDSCAPE³²³

Participation in adult education and adult learning in Hungary was significantly below the EU average even before 2010. In particular, the participation of enterprises, especially Hungarian-owned SMEs, in training and the involvement of people with low educational qualifications is critical.³²⁴

The government's management of adult education does not reflect the strategic role of the field; there is a lack of monitoring and systematisation of the implementation of the ideas, results-based quality assurance of programmes, coordination and cooperation between and within the related fields.³²⁵

Participation in adult learning has been boosted by a number of EU-funded programmes in recent years to develop basic skills, and by the fact that the acquisition of two vocational qualifications in regular school-based vocational education has been made available free of charge for adults. However, the effectiveness of the training is questionable.

For project-based training, it is the number of targets to be met rather than who really needs training or what training outcomes the economy expects that determines involvement, and the cost-free nature of school-based formal vocational

³²³ Using Borbély-Pecze, Tibor Bors: *Felnőttképzés, felnőttkori tanulás, társadalom és munkapiac a 21. század elején* [Adult education, adult learning, society, and labour market at the start of the 21st century]. *Munkaügyi Szemle*, 2021/3. 2-11.

³²⁴ Hungary's Digital Education Strategy. Budapest, 30 June 2016.

³²⁵ Bakó, Tamás; Borbély-Pecze, Tibor Bors; Juhász, Ágnes; Kovács, Tibor; Sum, István; Koltai, Vera; Simon, Dávid: *A magyar digitális munkaerőpiac helyzetelemzésének, valamint a digitális és hagyományos munkaerőpiac nyomon követésére és előrejelzésére szolgáló rendszer koncepciójának kidolgozása*. *Digitális Jólét Program*, 2018. *Összefoglalás és javaslatok* [Elaborating the situational analysis of the digital labour market and the concept of the system for monitoring and forecasting digital and traditional labor market in Hungary. Digital Success Programme 2018. Summary and proposals]. <https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/files/0f/9b/0f9b9b13a62d7eda0c8ab2b198a35cf1.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

training takes resources away from more effective forms and areas of training for adults. In addition, the effectiveness and efficiency of training is undermined by protectionism in the selection of trainers and by the lack of services and funding to help individuals and companies make their own training choices.³²⁶

Training is difficult to access for people living and working in disadvantaged areas – this is also true for mandatory professional further training. The potential of ICT and digital learning in the area of adult learning is very low. Although the national gap in basic digital skills is 9 percentage points below the EU average, neither the population nor trainers receive sufficient support (methodologies, services, tools, content) for digital training and services, and insufficient attention is paid to providing conditions for online self-education.³²⁷

There is a lack of information on the opportunities provided by training and training courses, and on the quality of trainers and training courses. Initiatives launched earlier to build up an information system have been stopped, and funding for information and promotion has been discontinued. The already previously inadequate system of career guidance for all has been dismantled, and with the exception of a few projects, mentoring is no longer possible. Important services such as competence assessment, crediting of prior knowledge, recognition and recording (validation) of competences acquired in non-formal or informal training are lacking; there are no methods, institutional framework or regulations for these.

The system of compulsory further education courses for employees in areas of public services (education, health, courts, social services, public culture, etc.) is inflexible, with regulations mainly encouraging participation, without measuring effectiveness and efficiency, and availability is often determined by the needs of preferentially treated training institutions and projects rather than by the needs of participants. This is also the case with subsidised training in general.

The proportion of financial incentives allocated for adult vocational training in schools is excessive. There is no non-project-based instrument through which the State can make a non-repayable contribution to the training of individuals through their own choice and responsibility.³²⁸ The State has increasingly withdrawn from the financing and organisation of training performed outside the regular school system: the role of training in employment policy is diminishing. From 2020, companies are considered to be the main providers and customers of adult education, which will limit the scope for individuals and the economy to benefit from changes in specialisation and structure, and the development of generic skills.³²⁹

For vocational qualifications and subsidised training, the state also has a large say in the content and methods, although state regulation has been somewhat relaxed since 2020 with the amendment of the Adult Education Act. However, the strict and lengthy regulatory (public) control of institutions providing such training is mainly formal, is not based on transparent standards, does not ensure transparency, and does not cover the assessment of the efficiency of the institutions and the effectiveness of their training. The Sectoral Skills Councils, which were created not long ago, and which are made up of representatives of enterprises, represent a positive step in that they were given a key role in the development of vocational qualifications, but the adoption of qualifications to meet specific needs remains difficult even if there is demand for them by enterprises, or even if they are internationally recognised.

Research into adult education has been stopped for years, the institutional backing for research has disappeared, and no calls for proposals have been launched. The results of previous research and project developments are not being exploited.

Despite the EU obligation, the list of competencies linked to occupations and qualifications has not been fully mapped to the ESCO³³⁰ occupations, and there is no effort to link ESCO competencies to qualifications as proposed. Therefore, ESCO is not used in practice.

While previously the problem was that the new Adult Education Act³³¹ did not apply to the majority of training courses, leaving the adult education register very incomplete, the current data provision arrangements,³³² justified by the introduction of career tracking, require in many cases excessive administration and raise concerns relating to data

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Hungary's Digital Education Strategy. Budapest, 30 June 2016.

³²⁸ One such tool could be the individual learning account, which exists in several countries.

³²⁹ At the closing of the manuscript, a major programme is being launched to give companies extended freedom in the area of training their employees, according to the announcement. However, the steps needed for monitoring the usefulness of training have not been taken.

³³⁰ ESCO: European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations.

³³¹ Act LXXVII of 2013 on Adult Education. Hungarian Gazette, 2013/96.

³³² Renewing adult education 2020. ITM 2020.

<https://cdn.kormany.hu/uploads/document/7/76/76f/76f2e4bacc5ec1af888c7216127a904b67f8e20a.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

protection. Personal and business data, which are mandatory for a wide range of training courses, are stored in a database run by a private company, from which the data of trainees cannot be deleted for 60 years.

INSTITUTIONAL AND SERVICE BACKGROUND

There is an unprecedented fragmentation in the way adult learning is managed in public administration and located in public institutions. Vocational education and training, non-formal adult education, employment policy (including subsidised labour market training), the digital aspects of training, community culture,³³³ which is responsible for a large part of adult education, and public education, which provides non-vocational formal adult education, are under the control of eight state secretariats of four ministries, which lack any kind of cooperation or coordination, even within a single ministry.³³⁴ Adult education itself is a weak field within the State Secretariat for Economic Strategy, lacking the necessary expert administration.

Contrary to international practice, there is no central strategy to counteract fragmentation, no institution to coordinate cooperation between areas, services and support, and no legal obligation for coordination. The former institutions for professional supervision, development and research and, to some extent, coordination – the Public Employment Service and the National Institute for Vocational and Adult Education – have ceased to exist or have been transformed and have lost their relevance. The development of individual learning pathways, the provision of complex support and cross-sectoral information – previously sought and possible under the Public Employment Service – is impossible in a fragmented system; nor is there any apparent need from the government side to provide it.

Of these areas, formal vocational education and training has the strongest position, currently. The employment policy area, which used to play an important role in adult education and related services, is weak and declining. The network of employment training access points (Labour Offices, Employment Information Centres, Job Seekers' Clubs) has been virtually dismantled. In the field of employment training and related services, professional cooperation, sectoral coordination, development and transparency have become impossible with the abolition of the Employment Service and the atomisation of the branches into county and district government offices.

The lack of coordination and conceptualisation also implies the absence of an integrated system for labour market and training situation analysis, forecasting and information, necessary for the definition of individual and social goals of adult education and for effective training participation. Important elements³³⁵ of this system were set up with EU funding, but soon quietly died out.

On the institutional side, protectionism is strong, alongside the frequent reorganisations common also in other areas. This means, on the one hand, the prioritisation of state- and church-run vocational training schools and certain preferred higher educational institutions over adult education enterprises, and, on the other, the non-transparent allocation of EU and state funds.

After the change of regime in Hungary, a diverse system of adult education institutions has emerged. In addition to the regular school system, which was supplemented by foundation and private schools, the community cultural network maintained by the municipalities and the significantly reduced number of corporate training institutions, a large system of for- and non-profit private adult educational institutions entered the scene, partly as a result of the transformation of the former state training institutions, and also a regional network of state training centres was established in the early 1990s.

After 2010, there was a forced restructuring process, which is still ongoing today, but its direction and emphasis have changed several times.

In 2011, state-run regional training centres with an excellent infrastructure and a wealth of experience, particularly in employment training and services, were dismantled by the "order" of market operators.³³⁶ The centres were placed under

³³³ Community culture is a special Hungarian system of institutions belonging to municipalities and comprising local sites ensuring adult education possibilities with the possible participation of experts – in the best occasions.

³³⁴ The first four areas fall under four rival state secretariats of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, while community culture – including adult education – and public education fall under the Ministry of Human Resources. Adult education has been further fragmented by the transfer of so-called training supporting social inclusion to the Ministry of the Interior, while the operational tasks of adult education and employment policy are largely under the Prime Minister's Office.

³³⁵ Such elements were the Labour Force Forecasting and Career Guidance web-based information system, created by the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the first version of the National Career Guidance Portal.

³³⁶ These were first transferred from the competence of the employment policy sector to the so-called social inclusion sector, which later merged with the social sector, and later the training centres' torsos ended up in the so-called social opportunity sector of the Ministry of the Interior, by which time they had lost almost all of their professional, methodological and material resources.

a large institution, the István Türr Training Centre, which, however, provided training on a declining scale but played an increasing role in spending EU funds. Usually EU-funded, the programmes run by the institution until 2016, were artificial and suspectful of corruption.³³⁷

The school system was favoured by making free of charge the first and then the second vocational qualification in formal adult education in the regular school system, and then the acquisition of a vocational qualification in non-formal education too, but under the auspices of schools³³⁸ while the normative support for these courses in the framework of non-formal adult education was abolished. However, even with the protectionism of public resources and administrative interventions, the vocational training school system cannot fully replace the state-run adult education centres and the market-based trainers, which are embedded as active instruments of the labour market, especially as the existence of foundation schools for adult VET have already been made impossible.³³⁹ Adult education requires knowledge of andragogical methodology, specific training organisation practises and a greater adaptability than what is sufficient in regular schools.

Diversity has been reduced by the fact that professional further training for public sector employees has been assigned to certain higher education institutions, allowing for-profit and non-profit institutions to continue their previous training only in special cases.

The elimination of autonomy – the reduction or elimination of diversity, creativity and individuality – is in itself a factor of quality deterioration. One of the essential characteristics of adult education is its flexibility, its capacity to respond to specific needs, driven by the interest and motivation of the service providers. These criteria are less or not at all met in centralised, overly large organisations.

The quality of licensed training is further deteriorated by the fact that while previously the accreditation body operated as a professional entity and consisted of experts, and the system of experts was open and operated on the basis of a professional and methodological background, this situation gradually changed. In 2020-21, the market for adult education experts and examiners was redistributed.³⁴⁰ In addition to the reallocation of training resources, the driving force may have been the exclusion of activities and actors that were independent of the course to any degree.

Although the extensive institutional system of community culture education, unlike schools, could be retained by the municipalities and their services, including support for cultural communities, as they are among the mandatory tasks of the municipalities, the state budget allocated for this purpose, first of all for maintaining infrastructure and human resources, is very low, and the termination of the civil servant status of the teaching staff in community culture system makes it easier to dismiss professionals. Another factor contributing to the deterioration in standards is the fact that the National Institute for Community Cultures, which provides the professional background for community culture, has been relocated from Budapest to Lakitelek, a small, poorly connected village, and transferred to the pro-government Lakitelek Folk High School Foundation.

FUNDING

At present, the amount of public spending on adult education cannot be estimated. Unlike in the past, there is no specific budget line for adult education,³⁴¹ and due to fragmentation, programmes are financed as part of different appropriations. The proportion of project-based funding is too high, making long-term programmes impossible. The capacities created by projects are quickly amortised, often disappearing after the mandatory maintenance period.

While the international trend is to involve adult education stakeholders in training decisions and to transfer part of the state resources to individuals and enterprises, in Hungary, since 2011, both the financing of adult education and the retrieval of EU co-financing have been essentially handled within the framework of the central budgetary policy.

Although the state's collection and redistribution of funds for adult education in the form of contributions linked to wages played a key role in the past, there have also been initiatives to finance adult education through the participants' own choice and responsibility. For a few years, tax relief was available on the amount spent on adult education, and part of the training

337 The most blatant example is the so-called winter training for public workers in 2015, in which public workers were obliged to participate. Most of the public workers were enrolled in basic skills training – including some with tertiary education. The training itself was provided by primary and secondary schools not prepared to train adults, for little extra money and without any usable curricula. The core curriculum did not include IT, job-search, labour law or career-building elements.

338 Act LXXX of 2019 on Vocational Education and Training.

339 For more information, see the chapter on vocational training.

340 Doros, Judit: Felnőttképzés: megvan az előre megfontolt szakmaiatlanság eredménye [Adult education: The results of the deliberate unprofessionalism]. Népszava, 13. 09. 2021.

341 In the second half of the 2000s, adult education was financed to the tune of around HUF 30-35 billion a year.

contribution of employers was waived to finance the training needs of enterprises. It was also possible for enterprises to transfer part of the training levy directly to the training institutions, thus influencing the offer and content of training. A tripartite body of a municipal nature, the Labour Market Fund Management Board (MAT), was responsible for allocating the funds collected as employer contributions. By now, these possibilities are gone.

From 2021, it will be widely possible to take out a training loan and businesses will have easier access to support, but apart from adult vocational training in regular schools, which is completely free of charge and therefore does not require individual responsibility, there is still no non-repayable source of money for adult education that can be used freely. A further step for centralisation is the fact that budget resources earmarked for vocational training have been abolished.³⁴²

HIGHER EDUCATION

Compared to 2019, the main direction of higher education policy, i.e. the reduction of the volume of higher education, has not changed. Its most crucial consequences also remained the same: (i) Hungary is going against the development witnessed in the world; (ii) the victims of this reduction are primarily the members of underprivileged social strata. By 2020, the number of students applying for higher education has plummeted. The two main causes of this change are the requirement of at least one advanced level secondary school leaving exam and of a language exam to enter higher education, although the latter requirement was suspended at the last moment. The number of applicants to undergraduate or undivided courses fell from 90 thousand in 2019 to 71 thousand in 2020; and the number of those admitted to such courses (i.e. of those entering higher education for the first time) declined from 66 thousand in 2019 to 55 thousand in 2020. In 2021, the numbers rose slightly: 60 thousand students were admitted to higher education out of 77 thousand applicants. This means that the number of applicants was still 14 % lower than in 2019, while the number of those admitted was lower by 9 %.³⁴³

MODEL CHANGE AND PSEUDO-PRIVATIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

The most important new feature of higher education policy is the privatisation or “fundization” of state universities, for which model change is the official term. What actually happened is, on the one hand, privatisation, as the universities in question formally became recast as private universities. Their relationship with the state became governed by civil law, as they are no longer budgetary institutions. On the other hand, private capital was not invested. The boards of trustees appointed by the government to operate the universities have not only the rights of a maintainer but according to a later voted modification of the law (December 2021) the rights of the proprietor were also given to them as a present by the government having appointed them.³⁴⁴

The first step in this process was taken when the government assigned the maintainer rights of the Corvinus University Budapest (BCE) to a foundation established by the government as of 1 July 2019. The capital stock of the foundation was provided by the Hungarian state by transferring a significant block of shares from the national wealth. The income realised from these shares and the operating income of the university itself should cover the expenses of the institution.³⁴⁵ The board of trustees of the foundation was appointed by the government, the founder's rights were also assigned to the board; consequently, the government renounced the right to recall the members of the board.

The next step in the process was to announce the restructuring of six further universities into foundations in spring 2020. In these cases, no capital stock could be offered for the operation of the universities, thus the majority of resources must be provided through contracts between the foundations and the government. Unexpectedly, a seventh institution joined the originally six-strong group; although, not at all of their own accord: the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE). The new management model came into force at the beginning of the academic year 2020/21 for all these universities.

From the end of 2020, a third phase of this government-led process was launched. Foundations took over the operation of the Universities of Szeged, Debrecen and Pécs, (i.e. the largest universities in the country with several faculties, which are

³⁴² Employee contribution to cover training for employment has been merged into social security contribution, and vocational training contribution has also been abolished.

³⁴³ Felvi.hu (2021), *Elmúlt évek statisztikái (2001/Á–2021/Á)* [Statistics of the past years (2001/Á–2021/Á)]. https://www.felvi.hu/felveteli/ponthatarok_statistikak/elmult_evek/!ElmultEvek/index.php/elmult_evek_statistikai/kepzesi-szintenket; last seen 30. 12. 2021. Students applying for the first time were counted, those applying in the clearing season were not taken into consideration. Applicants for the cross-semester courses were regarded as first applicants.

³⁴⁴ Paragraph 51 of Act CXLVII of 2021.

³⁴⁵ The establishment of the Maecenas Universitatis Corvini Foundation and the wealth transfer were ordered by Act XXX of 2019.

the central hubs for training the future intellectuals of the given region); although, a short time earlier the government had claimed that no such plans existed. In this phase, in addition to these three major universities, seven other universities were included in model change. Acts on the establishment of the relevant foundations assign the rights, including the founder's rights to the boards of trustees from 1 January 2022, similarly to the case of Corvinus University. As a consequence, future governments will be unable to influence the composition of the boards of trustees. Contrary to all international examples given below, the universities themselves cannot influence the choice of members into the board of trustees. Furthermore, the Organisational and Operational Rules of the foundations are not public either. The selection of the members of the Board of Trustees was explicitly politically motivated: Viktor Orbán wanted to entrust the task to "national-minded" (i.e. Fidesz-loyal) people. One university and several teacher training faculties were passed over to the Catholic Church. Additionally, a new university was founded from the state budget with a viticultural profile, but in practice, it is the property of the board of trustees appointed by the government.

As a result, only three significant state-owned universities remained in Hungary: Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; Budapest University of Technology and Economics; and also the National University of Public Service, Budapest, which has individual rights, enjoys the special support of the government and is regarded as its basis. Besides these major universities, two minor art universities and a college are the only institutions of higher education maintained by the Hungarian state in 2021. Consequently, in September 2021, almost 70% of university students started the academic year in a private university, while this number had been below 15% three years before.

The process, which fundamentally changed the operating conditions of higher education, was not preceded by any social debate. The government only communicated a few resolutions on the justification and the aim of the transformation, which can be reduced to some simple clichés. The main motif in these statements was the well-known criticism of higher education in Hungary, which had already been analysed in the first volume of *Hungary Turns Its Back on Europe* and had mainly been proven to be unsubstantiated. Neither was any objective assessment of the experiences gained in the transformation process published, although the first step had been openly declared to be a pilot project. However, the government used all forces to hasten the process, fully exploiting the possibilities arising from the pandemic situation: legislation was simplified, and the possibilities for protest were considerably narrowed.

Uniform resistance was only built up at SZFE, which initiated a wide-range protest movement, discussed in detail in the sidebar. Most universities passively accepted the changes, which was facilitated by the promise of a pay-rise. However, especially the third phase of the transformation sparked off intense debates at some universities, as in this phase, the universities themselves had to apply for the transformation. In some places, resistance and protests were suppressed by manipulations which clearly broke university protocols. At other places, there were some debates, but some prominent actors were influenced behind the scenes in order to ensure the necessary majority of votes for the transformation initiative.

The promise of a large-scale development program also played a significant role in the acceptance of the plan. The program was based on a loan from the European Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF); and the government called for university tenders for more than HUF 1000 billion to achieve the goals (an absolutely unprecedented amount for development in the history of higher education in Hungary). In the end, the Hungarian government backed out of the loan agreement, though at the moment (end of 2021) they promise to provide the necessary amounts from other resources. More specific, though much smaller scale promises could have played a more significant role in influencing the decision makers of universities, i.e. the promises concerning the intolerable wages, the raising of which was connected to the acceptance of the model change.

Legislation was modified several times in order to achieve the objectives of the model change. As the form of foundations present in civil rights had not ensured the required legal background for the operation of these new foundations, a new organisational form, "public trust foundation" was created by Act XIII of 2019 for the sake of Corvinus University. Later, Act IX of 2021 created the form of "public trust foundation with a public function" (KEKVA) for the sake of the other institutions with different conditions.³⁴⁶ Extra rights were assigned to private maintainers (as opposed to the state as a maintainer) in two phases for the sake of the new "private" universities.³⁴⁷ In each case, the extension of rights curtailed the university senates' sphere of authority by empowering the private maintainer to curtail certain rights of the senate. All boards of trustees took advantage of this power, and curtailed almost all the rights allowed to their senate. This process clearly

³⁴⁶ See more in detail in the chapter entitled New types of foundations for the preservation of power.

³⁴⁷ Amendments of 2019 and 2020 to Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/09920/09920.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

In one of the legal cases against the board of trustees of SZFE, the judge turned to the Constitutional Court of Hungary (AB) in order to resolve the contradiction. In the case of applications put forward by judges, the AB must reply within a given period of time, as opposed to the case of other applications (several requests were submitted). The AB exceeded the deadline only minimally. In the meantime, the Parliament passed the above-mentioned Act IX of 2021, which overrode the above amendments concerning universities maintained by KEKVAs: in questions in which the senate has been deprived of the right to decide and the right to agree, at least their right to express their opinion was guaranteed. The AB declared this modification sufficient to meet the requirements of the Fundamental Law. Thus, the application supposing that the act is against the Fundamental Law was refused, highlighting that the opinion of the senate "should be taken into consideration".³⁴⁸

The most debated consequence of the model change concerns the autonomy of universities. According to the government, the autonomy of institutions has increased owing to the model change, as from then on, universities are not subordinated to the state, but they are contracted partners. The state orders the courses which it wishes to finance from the university and pays for them. In contrast to this simplified view, the autonomy of universities should not only mean being independent of the state, but also that the university community should manage itself by managing bodies and representatives elected by the community.

At the universities maintained by a KEKVA, the members of the board of trustees of the foundation are not elected while several fundamental rights that serve as the bases of university autonomy are shifted from the senates to the board of trustees. (The most important such rights include the right to create the Organisational and Operational Rules of the institution and the right to elect the rector candidate.) The foundation can really be regarded as autonomous as it is responsible for all decisions concerning the foundation itself and the university managed by it, with minimal legal restrictions. However, the university cannot be regarded as autonomous at all, as its self-governing body can only decide in cases of no importance. The foundation is legally independent of the present and the future governments, but informally it is dependent on the political force that had put the organisation in this position. The model change of universities fits into the line of efforts that aim to outsource state functions and to keep them under the informal and immovable control of the currently ruling political force. The great majority of the board of trustee members are active or resigned pro-government politicians and government-friendly businessmen. Moreover, although a minority of members were assigned from the academic sphere, the political perspectives in their selection are quite straightforward even in their case.

The most important, already visible practical consequence of this privatisation is that the budgets of the universities concerned were taken out of the state budget. Thus, only the subsidies for these institutions are present in the budget. Accordingly, there is absolutely no public control on how the universities spend the subsidies and other incomes, as they are regarded as "private institutions". As the example of SZFE illustrates, the legal status and the member selection of the boards of trustees allows them to influence the activity and the image of the university they maintain politically and ideologically, conforming to the preferences of the government.³⁴⁹

Several universities maintained by foundations operate successfully in the world. The leading universities of the world, e.g. Harvard or Princeton Universities, have this organisational structure. In several Northern European countries, state-run universities are transformed in a similar way – the favourite example of the Hungarian government is the Finnish Aalto University. The problems described above stem from those peculiarities of the formally similar Hungarian system which are strikingly different from all these examples. However, it is a general problem in the academic world that perspectives of finance and profitability are prioritised over academic aspects and social responsibilities. This trend is stronger in organisations resembling enterprises than in state-maintained ones. Partly due to significant underfunding, the long-term practice that certain courses or fields provide for or cross-finance those courses or fields at a given institution that are unable to provide for themselves (due to their characteristics) has been a cause of severe conflicts. The model change clearly strengthens these tendencies. Several foundation leaders emphasise "company-like" operation of universities, stigmatising those who think that a university is not a profit-oriented market player. At those institutions where debates took place about the model change, it was clear that the stakeholders' interests and standpoints differ due to their position: those whose activities are profitable hope to see more of their profits, while those whose activities cannot make a profit – e.g. the participants of teacher training – fear that they would get into an even more unfavourable position within the university.

³⁴⁸ Resolution 21/2021 (VI. 22.) of the Constitutional Court of Hungary.

³⁴⁹ "The present government [...] declared that it is to support all research projects and courses that serve to build our nation" – said András Láncki, rector of Corvinus during the model shift. Csekő, Imre: Az egyetem eszméje a tét [The concept of university is at stake]. Magyar Nemzet, 21 September 2021. <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2021/09/az-egyetem-eszmeje-a-tet>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Another step to promote "company-like" operation is that due to the model change, university teachers lose their public employee status, and from then on, fall under the general rules of the Labour Code. This makes staff reduction much easier for the institutions, while lecturers become severely vulnerable. No solutions were introduced officially to ensure the stability and continuity of scientific and educational sites, such as the availability of tenure for leading professors in some countries.

The Art of Resistance: the story of SZFE (University of Theatre and Film Arts)

In 2020, the SZFE community was elected "man of the year" in several elections organised by various media, because this community stood up resolutely and spectacularly against the government's measures to force model change in higher education. The image of youngsters with a determined look, wearing a yellow mask with a stop hand symbol became iconic, and was even the cover photo of the January 2021 Hungarian issue of National Geographic.³⁵⁰

In the past half decade, the System of National Cooperation (NER) did not experience any resistance comparable in volume and driving force to the SZFE movement. Similar to fairy tales, unexpectedly, the greatest upheaval was initiated by the smallest player in the field, even if the clearly heroic efforts did not lead to the expected results, however hard they tried despite the limited size and possibilities of the institution. Legislation was completed; the occupation of the university by the students had to be terminated by the pandemic measures. As the new maintainer took possession of the university, they formed the institution according to their own requirements. The FreeSZFE community, composed of students, employees and teachers, retreated from the physical and symbolic space of the battle, and today they fight for their existence as a new actor in the Hungarian civilian sphere.³⁵¹

The whole drama took almost one and a half years, which roughly coincided with the first three waves of the COVID-pandemic. In retrospect, although the events escalated extremely fast, it is possible to analyse the story that can clearly be divided into phases. This is facilitated by the fact that those concerned documented everything exceptionally thoroughly, and high media coverage was given to each step. At the same time, coincidences as well as improvisation played a decisive role in the unfolding of the drama, on both the government and the university side. While the government regarded SZFE as a laboratory to test its initiatives to extend its own power, the gradually forming community of students, professors and colleagues collectively experienced the unprecedented praxis of basic democracy, which experience was passed on to the susceptible circles of society.

In the case of SZFE, the Orbán regime's two, normally parallel transformational ambitions coincided for a moment; this showed even for the wide public which generally watches these transformations with indifference, the true face of the changes depicted in the media close to the government to be professional "policies". As the outsourcing of universities to foundations on the one hand, and the governmental Kulturkampf urging the change of the elite on the other, merged into a single space, the rising noise was so strong that it far exceeded the fate of the smallest university in Hungary. In theory, the board of trustees appointed by the state should have taken over only the maintenance tasks, without interfering with the educational and scientific activities of the university. Contrary to this, the members of the board of trustees continuously spoke and acted rudely and openly against the traditions, values, members and rules of the artistic educational workshop of the institution. In addition to taking verbal revenge occasionally in the form of hate speech for personal offences, this occupation of the institution by the servants of the state aimed to eliminate one of the last think tanks regarded as liberal.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ National Geographic, January 2021. https://ng.24.hu/magazin/2021_januar/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁵¹ FreeSZFE Society. https://www.freeszfe.hu/about_us/, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁵² SZFE: liberális klub helyett egyetem [SZFE: university in the place of liberal club]. Boon, 4 October 2021. <https://boon.hu/hazai-kultura/szfe-liberalis-klub-helyett-egyetem-5871710/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

The superficial promise of more stable financing was communicated in spring 2020 as the cause of the model change, which in reality aimed to eliminate the autonomy of universities. In the case of SZFE, this meant the overthrowing of a several-decade-old method of creation and education and the pushing out of the artistic establishment.³⁵³ As in the case of all the universities concerned, the government deluded SZFE by promising that owing to privatisation, they would be freed from the administratively rigid state governance, which equals political vulnerability. In reality, however, subordination to a government displaceable at an election was replaced by the total subordination to an eternally irreplaceable board of trustees, which rather openly serves to realise the political and ideological aims of the current government: primarily the replacement of the cultural elite, the planned indoctrination of future generations and a shift in the cultural canon.³⁵⁴ In the case of SZFE, the people selected for the board themselves serve as a long-term guarantee for being faithful to these trends even after a possible change in government, as their personal ambitions and offences lead them in the same direction. Their activity is generously honoured by the government, which had been rather tightfisted with the former SZFE leadership. The board of trustees can make use of the public wealth entrusted to them, including subsidies and assets (such as real estates) without any professional control or responsibility.³⁵⁵

In the spring of 2020, after the plans for model change were published, the university management fought with the government to reach that the fate of the university should be decided with the inclusion of its representatives and respecting the current legislation. When all efforts had failed by the beginning of summer, the Parliament accepted the act on the model change of SZFE. Then the students gradually started to shape the events, and the protest took the form of varied performative acts. In the realisation of these, students clearly relied on their theatrical and film studies; but the use of symbols, the organisation of events stirring the wide public, the arrangement of solidarity networks, the documentation of the process and the regular informing of the public each proved to be such innovations that significantly surpassed traditional school projects.

The basis for this unprecedented achievement was the Forum created as the platform for democratic negotiations and decision-making. Each and every university citizen was an equal member of the Forum, which had meetings almost every day. They gradually took over the management of the university, as the university leadership had resigned to protest against the anti-autonomy measures taken by the board of trustees appointed in the meantime, and the majority of teachers had gone on strike.

The students occupied the university on the eve of the first day of the academic year (1 September) spontaneously, which determined the events of the autumn. As a unique adaptation of the occupy movement, the students moved into certain university buildings in order to block the members of the new management regarded as illegitimate from entering the building and starting their work. Naturally, this extraordinary situation turned the traditional timetable upside down. The academic year started with the proclamation of the Educational Republic, and continued with collective workshops, forums and creative performances in public places, organised as bottom-up movements. The peak of the 71-day-long barricade was the demonstration arranged for the national holiday on 23 October, which became the unofficial movement of the opposition, and called ten thousand people to the streets.³⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the new owner tried to wear the occupiers' endurance down by ultimatums, restrictions and administrative blackmail.³⁵⁷ The students started a high number of legal

353 Sarkadi, Zsolt: Több oktató is felmondott, miután a kormány Vidnyánszkyknak adta a Szín- és Filmművészeti Egyetemet [Several professors resigned after the government passed the University of Theatre and Film Arts to Vidnyánszky]. 444.hu, 2 August 2021. <https://444.hu/2020/08/02/tobb-oktato-is-felmondott-miutan-a-kormany-vidnyanszkyknak-adta-a-szin-es-filmmuveszeti-egyetemet>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

354 See Chapter on New features of the Orbán regime 2020–2021.

355 It must be noted that the board of trustees – both at SZFE and at the other “privatised” universities – are financially responsible for their activities. However, there is no control over their scientific and educational policies and practises as well as their financial decisions.

356 Harangozó, Olívia; Ács, Gábor: SZFE-tüntetés: „Forradalmat csinálni márpedig lehetséges!” [SZFE demonstration: “But it is still possible to make a revolution!”]. Euronews, 23 October 2020. <https://hu.euronews.com/2020/10/23/oktober-23-an-is-tuntetnek-az-szfe-s-diakok>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

357 A Vidnyánszky-féle kuratórium érvényteleníti az SZFE őszi félévét [The board of trustees headed by Vidnyánszky annuls the autumn semester at SZFE]. Magyar Narancs, 6 November 2020. <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/a-vidnyanszky-fele-kuratorium-ervenyteleniti-az-szfe-oszi-felevet-134716>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

procedures against the openly unlawful measures, some of which they won. The news about the trench warfare reached even Strasbourg, where the representatives of the two parties could express their points of view at a public hearing in front of a committee.³⁵⁸

Eventually, the blockade was terminated by the worsening pandemic situation. In November, all universities were ordered to shift to online education, and the university buildings were closed down. Although several initiatives of online protest were put forward by the FreeSZFE movement, which transformed into an association in the meantime, in order to maintain the supportive interest of the public, the long quarantine period shook the network apart.

In 2021, the Emergency Exit Program got into the focus of attention, which is a degree-saving construction for those classes that boycotted the new management and left the official framework of studies behind. In an unprecedented solidarity movement, 6-8 European universities declared that they recognize the studies of these classes and issue a degree for them even if their last semesters are completed outside of the institution, but following the original curriculum. Almost half of active students left SZFE, and one third of the professors also resigned in spring. Ever since, education has continued on a voluntary basis. The first graduation ceremonies within this collaboration took place in October 2021 in Austria and Germany.³⁵⁹ The FreeSZFE Association, partly in the building of the expelled Central European University (CEU), launched adult education courses and offers popular science lectures to continue the 155-year-old tradition.

The Fudan Project

The planned establishment of a Hungarian campus for the Chinese Fudan University fits into the context of the transformation of the Hungarian higher education system. On 6 April 2021, Szabolcs Panyi, investigative journalists of Direkt36 revealed the secret plans of the government,³⁶⁰ while on 14 May, the financial plans were also disclosed. In the meantime, the government signed a strategic contract with Fudan University.³⁶¹ The emerging construction can be regarded as extremely unfavourable for Hungary.

Using a Chinese loan of HUF 450 billion, and HUF 100 billion (ca. 1.27 billion and 0.27 billion EUR, respectively) from the state budget, Hungary is to contract with a Chinese construction company to build a university campus of 520,000 m² (in comparison, the campus of the Budapest University of Technology is 315,000 m²). Hungary is to provide the site at the Danube in Budapest for the construction free of charge, on the site which had been reserved for a Student Town to provide affordable accommodation for 8,000–12,000 Hungarian students from the countryside. According to the plans, the new university is to be managed and owned by a public trust foundation, i.e. a Chinese private university is to be built at the Hungarian taxpayers' expense. Four faculties are to be established (Humanities and Social Studies, Medicine, Natural Sciences and Engineering, Foreign Affairs and Business), for 5,000 students and approximately 330 professors. The strategic contract does not determine the number of Hungarian students at the new university. The annual tuition fee would be HUF 2.5–3 million for

358 Galavits, Patrik: Így beszéltek Így beszéltek el egymás mellett a felek az SZFE ügyében [This is how parties talked past each other in the case of the SZFE]. *Azonnali*, 27 October 2020. https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20201027_igy-beszelttek-el-egymas-mellett-a-felek-az-szfe-ugyeben, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

359 Szász, Zsófi: Jövő héten Jövő héten kapnak diplomát az első Freeszfe-s végzősök [First graduation ceremonies for FreeSZFE students scheduled for next week]. *444.hu*, 5 October 2021. <https://444.hu/2021/10/05/jovo-heten-kapnak-diplomat-az-első-freeszfe-s-vegzo-sok>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

360 Panyi, Szabolcs: Huge Chinese Huge Chinese loan to cover the construction of Fudan University in Budapest. *Direkt36*, 6 April 2021. <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/kinai-hitelbol-keszul-a-magyar-felsooktatasi-orientalazas-kezso-szerepe-a-kormany-mar-oda-is-igerte-egy-kinai-cegnek/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

361 Panyi, Szabolcs: Huge Chinese To please China, Orbán's government shifted plans to favour Fudan's campus over Student City. *Direkt36*, 14 May 2021. <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/kina-megmondta-hogy-nagyon-fontos-neki-a-budapesti-fudan-az-orban-kormany-most-mindent-felboritott-a-kedveert/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021. – Szabolcs Panyi is one of those who had been targeted with the Pegasus spyware. – Szabolcs Panyi, András Pethő, Hungarian journalists and critics of Orbán were targeted with Pegasus, a powerful Israeli cyberweapon. *Direkt36*, 19 July 2021. <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/teleplezodott-egy-durva-izraeli-kemfegyver-az-orban-kormany-kritikusait-es-magyar-ujsgagirokat-is-celba-vettek-vele/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

undergraduate students, while master's courses would cost HUF 3.7–4.4 million per year. The planned average wage for lecturers is HUF 3.5 million, while full professors are to earn HUF 6.25 million. According to the financial perspective, the expected income of the university is around HUF 20.5 billion, while operational costs are planned to be around HUF 50.8 billion. Consequently, approximately HUF 30 billion should be covered annually from other resources. However, the Chinese partner did not even guarantee this in the strategic contract.

According to the government's reports, Hungarian higher education will profit from the competition. The concept of "competition" is rather uniquely understood in this project. There was no competition or call for tender for the HUF 550 billion state subsidy.³⁶² For such a sum of money, it is conceivable that other excellent foreign universities would have wanted to build a Budapest campus. No competition is taking place for the construction process either, as the campus is to be built by the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) from Chinese materials and by a Chinese workforce. The Hungarian state will not have a majority in the board of trustees either, because otherwise public procurement procedures should be initiated for the operation.

The competition will be run for lecturers, research resources and students. The planned wages for lecturers equal ten times the present average wages of Hungarian lecturers. Consequently, it will not be difficult to attract the best Hungarian teachers and scholars from the Hungarian universities and research institutes. Relying also on excellent foreign lecturers relocating here, the Fudan University is expected to win Hungarian and international tenders for research. The race for students is a bit more complicated. The expected tuition fees at Fudan are the multiples of current Hungarian tuition fees. It is difficult to guess how many Hungarian students will be excellent enough to be admitted, who can also pay the tuition fee and can tolerate package deals, such as courses on artificial intelligence and Marxism-Leninism. Foreign students, however, can be easily lured away from Hungarian universities. Hungarian medical courses can especially be threatened, which heavily rely on foreign students in their financial schemes. In sum, Hungarian higher education is to be forced into a rather unequal competition. This situation is capped by the fact that the capacity of the Student Town is to be reduced considerably owing to the Fudan project, i.e. for Hungarian students from the country, affordable accommodation is to remain a severe challenge.

The expulsion of CEU, built from private resources and having a US accreditation, and the construction of the Hungarian campus of the Chinese Fudan University from Hungarian taxpayers' money indicate a change in geopolitics. As a university always has a mental impact, the most important result of this project might be in the long run that western civilisational traditions are to be weakened, and a cultural restructuring might take place.

All this is strongly refused by the majority of the society, even by half of pro-government voters. Due to protests, the government promised to hold a referendum on this issue, and the election commission approved of the question. However, the preparation of the project was not halted. Based on Act LXXXI of 2021, the Fudan Foundation was established, and the work site, valuing HUF 14 billion, was allocated to it. The board of trustees was also set up, its director general was appointed. Based on the strategic contract, the parties try to hasten the project in order to reach a phase in which it cannot be stopped even if the government is changed. As the project still may not be in that phase, the abandonment of the extremely disadvantageous Fudan project by Hungary is at stake in the 2022 Hungarian elections.

³⁶² In comparison, in 2019, the total subsidy for the whole of Hungarian higher education was HUF 288 billion. (Source of data: The EUA Public Funding Observatory, <http://efficiency.eua.eu/public-funding-observatory>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.)

FINANCING SCIENCE

In the past two years, several major changes have been witnessed in research and development (R&D) financing in Hungary. In the chapter on Research, Development and Innovation, this topic is discussed in great detail; therefore, here only the most important elements are highlighted. Hungary spends less on R&D than the other four countries in Central Europe (with the exception of Slovenia). Although Hungarian market actors' expenditures spent on R&D have typically increased since 2010, their value remains 6 % lower than the EU average. Furthermore, the government tends to rely more and more on the investments of the private sector instead of its own resources, in order to catch up with the international financing trends of R&D. As the share of private investments is becoming more and more significant, a split may arise between the various fields: research on humanities and social studies is probably less attractive for investors than those fields where the results can be applied in the economy, especially in the fields of engineering and life sciences.

The government has not published a call for major basic research projects, with the exception of the long-standing OTKA Program (Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, see details below), which is supervised by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology (ITM). Today, the majority of resources available for funding science are actually not distributed in grant schemes aimed at basic research, and it is not typical either that independent expert committees would assess the applications. Several independent cases are known from the past few years when significant resources – reaching billions of HUF – were given to research groups based on an ad hoc decision of an influential person in science policy, despite fierce and well-founded professional criticism. Universities and other research institutes (occasionally GONGOs, i.e. government-organized non-governmental organizations) were capitalized from public money in the order of HUF 1000 billion, according to parliamentary decisions.³⁶⁴

THE FORMER RESEARCH NETWORK OF THE HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (MTA)

The largest basic research network in Hungary is the former research network of MTA. On 1 September 2019, the research network was separated from MTA and transferred to the newly established Loránd Eötvös Research Network (ELKH). From 1 January 2021, researchers and all other employees of the network are no longer public employees. The former promotion system of scientific classifications also ceased and the Labour Code³⁶⁵ does not cover this issue. From 2021 on, no laws apply to the promotion system; thus scientific posts earned by years or decades of work and the research career model are threatened. No research career model was introduced in the research network,³⁶⁶ the Young Researcher Program run by MTA earlier also ceased. As a consequence, the network is becoming more and more fragmented, in its internal operation, wages and promotion systems as well. Minor changes have occurred within the system – for example, some research institutes have separated from their former research center–,³⁶⁷ but the ELKH Secretariat's ambition to transfer one of the institutes of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies (KRTK) in spring 2021 to the Ministry of Interior (BM)³⁶⁸ has not yet succeeded.

On the foundation of ELKH, the financing scheme changed: in addition to the basic funding,³⁶⁹ extra resources are allocated to the research centers and independent institutes based on the number of researchers with a PhD or doctor of MTA

³⁶³ Let us express our gratitude to the Hungarian Academy Staff Forum for their contribution to this chapter.

³⁶⁴ See the chapter on Higher education in the present volume.

³⁶⁵ Act I of 2012, Labour Code. https://www.1x1forditoidora.hu/Act_I_of_2012_on_the_Labor_Code.pdf, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁶⁶ TDDSZ, ADF, A kutatói életpályamodell halála [Death of the researcher career model]. Hungarian Academy Staff Forum, 26 November 2020. <https://adf2019.com/2020/11/26/a-kutato-i-eletpalyamodell-halala/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁶⁷ Newsroom, Three institutes in the Loránd Eötvös Research Network (ELKH) continue their activities as part of the network, but as independent research sites. ELKH, 25 November 2020. <https://elkh.org/en/newsroom/three-institutes-in-the-eotvos-lorand-research-network-elkh-to-continue-their-activities-as-part-of-the-network-but-as-independent-research-sites-2/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁶⁸ Teczár, Szilárd: Bekerítve [Surrounded]. Magyar Narancs, 19 May 2021. <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/bekeritve-238593>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁶⁹ In 2019, the aim was to stop all basic funding of the MTA research network: ITM suggested that the research network has to apply for each and every Forint (HUF) to the state. Finally, this plan, however, failed due to the resistance of the MTA leadership and the research network.

degree, the number of international grants won, further scientometric parameters, and some ad hoc factors. These extra resources were distributed by the leaders of the various research centers and institutes based on extremely different principles: the money was spent partly on science funding, partly on wage supplements and efficiency wages, awarded either in a totally transparent way, or in a basically chaotic manner.

Each research center and independent institute within the research network must get the ELKH's permission for all major research topics on a yearly basis, and each and every publication and researcher must be assigned to a pre-approved major research topic. The Scientific Council of ELKH also takes part in the permission process. This procedure is not always without conflicts for the research centers or independent institutes: in several cases, certain research topics or research designs raised concerns for those issuing the permits, so the topics had to be changed.³⁷⁰ Several anonymous researchers reported that the permission process is simply an administrative burden, as this process has no real impact on the research topics, the future publications or the actual work of the researchers. If the topic is not accepted, the researchers simply reformulate the description, but the research itself does not change. Moreover, it is sometimes questionable whether the decisions are well-founded: the Scientific Council raised objections to topics that were researched from outer sources, i.e. from successful grants.

It is also a question where this procedure may lead, as it can also be interpreted as part of a battle for positions in the field of science policy: most of the members of the Scientific Council are lecturers at Hungarian universities.³⁷¹ However, the permission procedure itself or the fear of possible problems might ignite self-censoring processes if the given research center or independent research institute wishes to look "problem-free" or "good". The ELKH Secretariat manages extra material resources, which are distributed on their own authority, based on criteria set up by themselves. These extra sums are awarded in various ways: sometimes with a call for tender, sometimes without it, while occasionally the suggestions of the network members are also respected.

HUNGARIAN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FUND (OTKA)

OTKA is the primary source for the financing of basic research. Before 2015, applications were managed by the MTA Secretariat, which worked independently within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; in 2015, the program was transferred to the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI Office, in Hungarian: NKFIH). The NRDI Office is managed and controlled by ITM. Previously, the jury members were nominated by the scientific community, while from then on, the applications were judged by boards whose members were invited by the president of the NRDI Office. We have not been informed of any cases before 2020 in which political decision makers would have overridden the resolutions suggested by the jury and approved by the professional colleges. In 2020, however, the NRDI Office and the ITM overruled a number of decisions of the colleges concerning applications. This sparked widespread outrage within the scientific community, and received wide publicity. Owing to the overruling of the professional decisions and the promotion of applications which had been ranked low by the professional board caused several jury members to resign or protest. With the professional support of the Hungarian Academy Staff Forum, a sample letter for appeal was completed for OTKA applicants. Furthermore, due to reranking of the applicants, hundreds of researchers signed a petition demanding ITM to investigate the case.

As Zoltán Birkner, president of the NRDI Office, claimed,³⁷² in nine cases the decision of the jury was overridden because of the number and quality of the lead researcher's publications, while in seven other cases they supported applications instead of others that received high points from the jury, because the former were regarded "promising from a policy perspective", although ranked lower by the professional board. The criterion "promising from a policy perspective" seems to be rather subjective: some lead researchers' names were revealed who had received support owing to the ITM's supervision. Some of them have a very good relationship with the government and were appointed to important positions in science politics. After the scandals following the announcement of the results, some research groups that had not been awarded the grant finally received the funds requested from the NRDI Office budget.

³⁷⁰ The permission process for 2022 is in progress when this manuscript is finalized.

³⁷¹ <https://elkh.org/en/scientific-council/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁷² Kamarás, Katalin; Makara, Gábor; Soós, Sándor: A "tudomanymetria.com" módszerének alkalmazhatósága pályázatok értékelésére [Applicability of the method by tudomanymetria.com to the evaluation of applications]. *Magyar Tudomány* 182 (2021), 437–448.; Teczár, Szilárd: Belepiskáltak [They have fiddled with it]. *Magyar Narancs*, 10 October 2020. <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/belepiskaltak-133019>; and <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/nem-eresztik-238195>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

One of the major critical remarks concerning the overriding of the decisions on OTKA applications by the government in 2020 was that some applications supported by the professional jury were excluded with reference to a metric that had not been named in the call for applications (todomanymetria.com). This new device, which could not be seen and thus discussed by the scientific community beforehand, has been openly criticized.³⁷³

EXTRA RESEARCH TENDERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The budget of state-run universities used to depend primarily on the number of students. The underfunding of universities has become so extreme by now that the succession of researchers, secondary school teachers and university lecturers is an enormous challenge. Since 2018, the government has allocated extra financial resources for tenders to universities. In theory, these are tied to research activity, but in reality they serve temporarily to supplement the basic budget to a certain extent. Unfortunately, these unique capital injections cannot ensure a long-term solution, i.e. a stable researcher career with a competitive salary, nor can they compensate for the lack of funds in the structure. From 2019 on, these tenders have been open for others as well, but the majority of winners have still been universities. In 2021, the blanket sum for these tenders was HUF 77 billion, compared to HUF 44 billion in 2020. These tenders are typically short schemes for comprehensive, often very general topics (e.g. "space research", "insulin resistance", "community building: family and nation, tradition and innovation").

NATIONAL LABORATORIES

In 2020, the government launched the National Laboratories Program with a budget of HUF 14 billion. This is a special financing scheme, as no open call for tenders is published, thus the criteria for evaluation are not public either. In some cases, the legislator declared that a laboratory must be established; in other cases, those – mainly researchers' – communities applied for the funds that had some information about the possibility (not all applicants were supported). According to those concerned, some-minute-long presentations had to be delivered for the minister of ITM, and the minister himself plays a key role in the distribution of this high sum dedicated to research. It is a crucial characteristic of the program that the maintainer repeatedly reviews the projects in several rounds, even while the project is running. This financing model, which requires results in the short term, is not really suitable to fund basic research; nevertheless, significant amounts are allocated to several research groups.

OTHER STATE-FUNDED RESEARCH INSTITUTES

In the past years, the state has funded several research institutes with significant sums of money and assets, and founded some new institutes as well. Mathias Corvinus Collegium, Századvég, the Institute of Hungarianness (sic!) Research, Veritas Research Institute for History and Archives, and Nézőpont Institute are among the largest institutes with a partial or full research profile that are largely funded by the state. In addition to research activity, these institutes have other obligations: e.g. they must carry out tasks related to politics of memory,³⁷⁴ they train young cadres, conduct polls, give political advice, or support political decision-making with studies. Occasionally, these institutes also work on social research projects (supposedly, surveys on samples of several thousand people are conducted from resources that amount to multiples of the resources of an OTKA project). Some of their results appear in their own publications, but their research data are generally inaccessible for the researcher community. Moreover, no calls for tender are published for the required research tasks.

CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Unfortunately, scientific works pay dearly for the untransparent funding decisions often based on personal preferences and for the fact that these decisions solely depend on a few science politicians: it might lead to censorship or self-censorship. Let us present some anonymized real cases below.³⁷⁵

373 Bodnár, Zsolt: Hobbiból fejlesztett algoritmussal fenyegeti a tudomány szabadságát Palkovics László minisztériuma [Freedom of science is threatened by the László Palkovics's ministry using an algorithm developed as just a hobby]. Qubit, 23 September 2020. <https://qubit.hu/2020/09/23/hobbibol-fejlesztett-algoritmussal-fenyegeti-a-tudomany-szabadsagat-palkovics-laszlo-miniszteriuma>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

374 See the chapter on Historiography and politics of memory.

375 For further cases, see the following publication in Hungarian. Körtvélyesi, Zsolt: Az akadémiai szabadság kérdése mint a magyar (jog)tudomány közege [The problem of academic freedom as the environment of (legal) science in Hungary]. *Fundamentum*, 2021(2–3), 5–27. The cases are versatile: a conference that was prohibited, blackmailing with the hindrance of professional advancement, prohibition of an MA course that was politically stigmatized, attacks against researchers or research topics in the media. <http://fundamentum.hu/?fbclid=IwAR29V3xpeYnt8K035BnGOi3xDZVJ8FoLEyh6BwqrHdq1TCJIC2h6RCWE5bc>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

1. A politician calls the director of a research institute to tell him that due to a study published by a researcher (without giving their affiliation) on a currently sensitive topic, the funding of the whole institute is threatened. The director summons the relevant researcher and informs him about this situation.
2. The leader of a state-funded institution prohibits a researcher from criticizing a research project with substantial extra funds from the state in front of the professional community.
3. Research groups in the same scientific field do not join in tenders for outer resources with a certain state-run institute in the social scientific field, because they suppose that such a cooperation would worsen their odds.
4. A researcher working on a topic sensitive for the government is asked by the employer to publish the results without providing the affiliation.

GOVERNMENT RHETORIC CONCERNING SCIENCE

Finally, it is worth mentioning some values that can be felt behind the narratives on Hungarian science and behind science policy. These sometimes lead to rather different actions and results.

International excellence

International publications are sometimes awarded with wage supplements both in the former research network of MTA and at universities. Publishing in the international field is one of the criteria for promotion for researchers, and the number of such publications in the former MTA research network significantly influenced the budget allocated to the research site. In the case of a published article, the IF and Q values, which are internationally regarded as the best indicators of the quality of a journal, are considered important in the OTKA and other, government-funded projects (e.g. the National Laboratories Program), and also for the evaluation of individual research achievements. (It must also be noted that well-founded criticism was also expressed by experts concerning the evaluation measures.)

Innovation

The policy, namely that those research projects are to be supported which have a predictable economic gain, appears in frequently repeated and highly stressed government statements, and also in the narrative of calls for tenders. For example, the number of patents, industrial uses or joint projects with market actors, and social utility are becoming crucial criteria in the evaluation of tender applications.³⁷⁶

Conservative values

There are a number of research institutes that were neither established nor managed on the basis of international scientific excellence, innovation or cooperation with market players. Several of these institutes received significant state funding to research the origins of Hungarians, the figures and events crucial for Hungarian people and national identity, or the crimes of communism. It is characteristic of such research projects that the topics are chosen based on conservative values, and the mere topic choice legitimates the state support invested. However, topics which seemingly do not conform to conservative values (e.g. gender) are often openly attacked by the media, naming specific researchers.

SUMMARY

Large scale transformations have taken place in higher education and the research sector. Besides traditional sites for basic research (universities, former MTA research network), several other institutes have received significant subsidies to promote research. The largest Hungarian research network was transferred to a new maintainer, the public employee status of researchers was terminated: the past years have been characterized by uncertainty and constant change.

The share of open tenders assessed independently by researchers has dropped. The government funds domestic scientific research opaquely, based on subjective decisions, as a result of which dependency on an institution or a person arises, and it also causes censorship and self-censorship. The minister in charge took into consideration criteria outside the scope of science during the evaluation of applications. It is a general tendency that in addition to scientific excellence, political, business and ideological criteria also play a crucial role in science funding.

³⁷⁶ See the chapter on Research Development and Innovation.

The government has tried to influence the structure of basic research from several perspectives: universities were transferred to foundations,³⁷⁷ national laboratories were established, the MTA research network was "nationalized" – where research topics must obtain preliminary permission; these measures all point in the direction of control.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION (RDI) 2010–2020

1. FUNDING

In Hungary, *gross expenditures* on R&D (GERD) have grown significantly, by 31%, between 2010 and 2019: an increase from 1.13% to 1.48% of the GDP was recorded. In the same period, Poland has seen a more substantial, 83% increase in the GERD (though the 2010 level was lower than in Hungary). Growth in the Czech Republic was also faster (46%), although there the GERD/GDP value was 1.33% in 2010, which increased to 1.94% by 2019. Thus, two Central European countries in the same global and EU economic environment with a historical legacy similar to that of Hungary devoted considerably more resources to fund R&D activities. Moreover, the GDP in the Czech Republic is higher than in Hungary, thus the R&D investment per capita (€ 408.3) exceeded the Hungarian value (€ 220.9) by 85% in 2019.

The GERD amounted to HUF 310.2 bn in 2010 and reached HUF 771.5 bn (in current prices) by 2020, i.e. it grew by 149%. However, if 2005 comparative prices are considered, the increase was much more moderate, only 70%, measured in purchasing power parities. The bulk of the increase came from businesses (52.1%) and foreign sources (19.5%), Hungarian government funding accounted only for 27.9% of the increase. From a different angle, the share of business sources in funding the Hungarian GERD rose from 39.3% in 2010 to 50.2% in 2020. The share of foreign sources grew from 12.4% in 2010 to 16.6% in 2020. The majority of foreign funding comes from the business sector (85.3% in 2020), and thus is channelled to business R&D units. Conversely, the share of government funds dropped from 39.3% in 2010 to 32.5% in 2020. 0.72% of the central budget was allocated to R&D in 2010, while this share was only 0.54% in 2020 (*Table 1*). Consequently, these figures do not support the government's high-sounding claims that R&D are treated as central issues.

TABLE 1. FUNDING OF R&D IN HUNGARY BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019	2020
GERD/GDP (%)	1.13	1.18	1.26	1.39	1.35	1.34	1.18	1.32	1.51	1.48	1.61
GERD (bn HUF)	310.2	336.5	363.7	420.1	441.1	468.4	427.2	517.3	654.2	702.2	771.5
GERD (m PPS, at 2005 prices)	1646.1	1752.0	1840.1	2067.2	2093.9	2062.3	1945.9	2265.7	2733.7	2799.6	---
Business sources/ GERD (%)	47.4	47.5	46.9	46.8	48.3	49.7	56.4	52.7	52.4	52.9	50.2
State sources/ GERD (%)	39.3	38.1	36.9	35.9	33.5	34.6	26.2	31.9	32.3	33.3	32.5
Foreign sources/ GERD (%)	12.4	13.5	15.4	16.6	17.5	15.0	16.6	14.9	14.8	13.1	16.6
R&D expenditure/ budget (%)	0.72	0.59	0.69	1.29	0.55	0.55	0.83	0.75	0.65	0.59	0.54

Sources: Eurostat, KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office)

* Due to the change in methodology, data cannot be fully compared to previous data.

In line with the increasing share of business sources in the R&D sector, the funding of experimental technological development activities also grew, which is responsible for 63.7% of the GERD increase. While in 2010, 21.9% of the GERD was spent on basic research, this share was 20.9% in 2020 – although between 2014 and 2016 figures were even lower, i.e. 18.3–18.5%.

The increase in current expenditures (wages, energy, consumables, and similar items) accounted for 78.2% of the increase in GERD between 2010 and 2020, while the growth in investments accounted for 21.8%. The share of investments in GERD climbed from 11.4% in 2010 to 17.6% in 2020 (Table 2).

TABLE 2. FUNDING OF R&D IN HUNGARY ACCORDING TO ACTIVITIES AND TYPES OF EXPENDITURES BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020, %

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019	2020
Basic research	21.9	20.9	19.7	19.5	18.5	18.5	18.3	19.0	18.6	20.6	20.9
Applied research	31.7	33.6	35.3	30.7	29.3	26.1	28.2	22.5	22.7	18.2	22.4
Experimental development	44.7	43.9	43.5	48.5	51.0	54.3	52.2	57.5	57.9	60.6	56.1
R&D expenditures	86.8	87.1	82.9	81.1	84.4	86.1	87.2	84.3	81.9	83.4	81.7
R&D investment	11.4	11.3	15.6	17.6	14.4	12.7	11.5	14.6	17.2	15.9	17.6

Source: KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office)

* Due to the change in methodology, data cannot be fully compared to previous data.

2. RESEARCHERS AND R&D SECTORS

Significant R&D activities are performed in three sectors in Hungary, as the share of the private non-profit sector is negligible, i.e. no data are available from this latter sector concerning R&D. The number of *business R&D units* rose from 1,384 in 2010 to 2,231 in 2020, while that of *higher education (HE) R&D units* shrunk from 1409 to 1287, thus the business and the HE sector swapped places. The number of publicly financed R&D institutes and other R&D units – called *government sector* in R&D statistics – dropped from 190 to 144, mainly because of the merger of formerly independent MTA institutes in 2012.

The number of researchers (full-time equivalent, FTE) grew by 65.7%, from 21,432 in 2010 to 35,379 in 2020. The growth rates differed by a magnitude in the business sector and the other two sectors: 124.2% (business), 18.9% (higher education), and 2.6% (government sector). Concerning the number of researchers, it is also the business sector that outperforms the other sectors: its share in employing researchers rose from 48.1% to 65.1%, while that of the HE sector dropped from 28.3% to 20.3%, and the share of the government sector plummeted from 23.6% to 14.6% between 2010 and 2020.

Business expenditures on R&D (BERD) more than tripled in this period, higher education expenditures on R&D (HERD) rose by 61.8%, while in the government sector (GOVERD) expenditures grew by 33.2%.

3. INNOVATION

The share of businesses engaged in innovation activities was low compared to Central European countries already in 2008–2010 (31.1%), and it further decreased by 2016–2018 (28.7%) (Table 3). This ratio is particularly low for small firms, and it significantly dropped for other companies as well. This is a striking tendency in the light of the sharply increasing business spending on R&D activities, especially on experimental technological development activities (see funding data above).

TABLE 3. THE SHARE OF HUNGARIAN BUSINESSES ENGAGED IN INNOVATION ACTIVITIES BY SIZE CATEGORIES, 2008–2018, %

No. of employees	2008–2010	2010–2012	2012–2014	2014–2016	2016–2018*
10–49	25.9	28.4	21.7	25.3	25.8
50–249	45.9	42.8	35.9	39.0	36.5
250+	69.6	67.2	55.1	56.2	52.3
Total	31.1	32.5	25.6	29.0	28.7

Source: KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office) * Due to the change in methodology, data cannot be fully compared to previous data.

The share of sales stemming from new products in the total sales is also shrinking overall, except for the small and medium-sized companies (*Table 4*).

TABLE 4. THE SHARE OF SALES STEMMING FROM NEW PRODUCTS IN THE TOTAL SALES BY SIZE CATEGORIES, 2012–2018, %

No. of employees	2012	2014	2016	2018*
10–49	16.6	25.2	21.8	26.2
50–249	15.3	19.8	17.0	19.4
250+ employees	24.0	30.2	21.3	19.1
Total	22.7	29.1	20.7	19.7

Source: KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office)

* Due to the change in methodology, data cannot be fully compared to previous data.

This poor innovation performance is one of the key explanatory factors of the deteriorating performance of the Hungarian economy in international comparison. For several years, the government frequently used a slogan: "Hungary performs better" – without specifying the basis for comparison. Carefully selected economic indicators can, indeed, be used to demonstrate that Hungarian economic performance is better than in previous years. Yet, the most important socio-economic indicators clearly show that quite a few Central and Eastern European countries develop significantly faster than Hungary, especially the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, and Slovakia.

4. SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (STI) POLICY

The name, composition, responsibilities and rights of the organisation that prepares and coordinates STI policy governance have been changed three times by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán since 2010. This fact is thought provoking itself in a field of policy in which predictability and stability are of primary importance due to the long-term fundamental effects on the competitiveness of the economy, employment rates, life quality, and the built and natural environment. The National Research, Innovation and Science Policy Council established in 2011 worked for 2.5 years. However, no signs are available for even a single meeting of the Nemzeti Tudománypolitikai és Innovációs Testület ('National Body for Science Policy and Innovation'), founded in 2013.

A new ministry was set up in 2018, called the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM). It supervises the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI Office), which used to be overseen by the Prime Minister's Office. Consequently, the NRDI Office's political weight and independence concerning decisions has diminished substantially. The ITM is responsible for higher education policy as well. László Palkovics, Minister of ITM, has a leading role in severely restricting the autonomy of research at universities and in the academic sphere.³⁷⁸

In February 2020, the National Science Policy Council (NTT) was founded; the two co-chairs are the minister of the ITM and Günther Oettinger.³⁷⁹ The NTT held at least two meetings, one on 5 March 2020 and another on 6 December 2021, but only short press releases were published.³⁸⁰

The STI policy documents in force are not underpinned by comprehensive, widely discussed analyses. There is no strategic thinking, which is signalled by the fact that the central R&D budget changes extremely (*Table 1*). No modern strategy-setting

³⁷⁸ Brückner, Gergely; Joób, Sándor: Egy elégedett terminátor – Palkovics László portréja [A content terminator – portray of László Palkovics]. Telex, 9 June 2021.

<https://telex.hu/komplex/2021/06/09/palkovics-laszlo-portre-miniszter-fudan-egyetem-itm-ceu-mta-1>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Ónody-Molnár, Dóra: Palkovics László a felsőoktatásról és az MTA-ról [What does László Palkovics say about higher education and the MTA?]. Jelen, 16 July 2020.

<https://jelen.media/interju/palkovics-laszlo-a-felsooktatassrol-es-az-mta-rol-288>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁷⁹ Korábbi német EU-s biztost nevezett ki Orbán a Nemzeti Tudománypolitikai Tanács társelnökének [Orbán appointed a former German commissioner as co-chair of the National Science Policy Council]. HVG, 19 February 2020.

https://hvg.hu/itthon/20200219_Korabbi_nemet_EUs_biztost_nevezett_ki_Orban_a_Nemzeti_Tudomanypolitikai_Tanacs_tarselnokenek, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸⁰ NRDI Office, László Palkovics: the National Science Policy Council held its first meeting. NRDI Office, 26 October 2020. The National Science Policy Council, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

NRDI Office, Eredményesen zárult a Nemzeti Tudománypolitikai Tanács ülése [The National Science Policy Council had a successful meeting]. NRDI Office, 8 December 2021. <https://nkfih.gov.hu/hivatalrol/hivatal-hirei/eredmenyesen-zarult>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

methods – e.g. foresight, impact analysis of previous strategies, assessment of former policies – were applied when compiling STI documents, and all those concerned were not included in the process either. These documents serve two purposes: (i) to fulfil the European Commission's administrative requirements in a rather formal, superficial manner; and (ii) to echo the government's success propaganda even on this "wavelength". More generally speaking, there are no fora for meaningful STI policy discussions, for the joint thinking of theoretical and practical experts, analysts and policy makers. Actually, this is not an exception in Hungary; rather, this is the rule: the government has introduced this "practice" in all policy domains since 2010. Everything must be subordinated to political and ideological perspectives, even the word *szakpolitika* "policy" has been deleted from the governmental vocabulary. Each and every expert suggestion is stigmatised as political attacks.

Government officials tend to use the terms "innovation" and "innovation ecosystems" as buzzwords, although erroneously. It is professional misconduct to tie public research funding to innovative performance, i.e. to expect that each researcher should obtain a patent for their results. This way the line is blurred between research, obtaining patents and innovation, which is clearly a mistake. In several research fields, no results can be expected that are to be utilised in the economy. In other fields, research results may serve as the basis for business innovations, but not all research projects have such outcomes even in this category, although the latter projects can also create knowledge useful for the society. Naturally, the introduction of innovations is always the task of businesses, not of researchers. Besides research results, enterprises rely on other types of information from various sources in order to make the innovation procedure successful. Finally, decision makers must also see that seemingly failed research projects do contribute to the learning process: they have the very important result that their direction was a dead end, it is not worth going in that direction – at least if no other developments occur that would justify the reopening of an abandoned line of research.

An innovation ecosystem is a network of interconnected organisations the operation of which is harmonised by a central enterprise or platform. Ecosystems include both producers and users. These actors create new values through innovations and also have a share of the new values. Those Hungarian politicians and political leaders who use the fashionable expression *innovation ecosystem* very often, either do not know what this expression means, or they use the term in a different – misleading – way deliberately, in order to cover the essence of their obscure funding schemes, while "branding" their devices up-to-date. Prime examples include two new schemes, called "Territorial Innovation Platforms" (sic!) and "University Innovation Ecosystem". Both schemes wish to create "innovation ecosystems" centred around universities – whose mission is teaching and research, not acting as businesses; although businesses must be in the driving seat when it comes to innovation.

It is not only the task and obligation of researchers to use expressions properly and to understand processes, but also of policy makers. When strategies and policies are based on misconceptions and erroneous word use, they simply cannot be effective. In the worst case, public money is not only wasted, but state interventions designed in this manner can also be seriously harmful. Data on Hungarian innovation and economic performance suggest that this might be the case in Hungary.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND POLITICS OF MEMORY

In the past two years, Fidesz has continued the creation of the new historical canon, the politically induced reinterpretation of certain historical events. Their justification for their politics of memory including the distortion or even the falsification of past events is that there is a need for "nation construction". However, the real intention hidden behind this slogan is to keep their voters and to increase their numbers. The following new elements have emerged in the Fidesz-inspired historiography and politics of memory recently.

REINTERPRETATION OF HISTORY: NARRATIVES, DISCOURSES

- The scientific consensus on the prehistory of Hungarians and the origin of the Hungarian language is ignored, the state-owned media continuously communicates the relatedness of Huns and Magyars.
- The Hungarian victories in wars are enlarged, while excuses are given for lost battles, or they are even considered as "nearly victorious". Soldiers and commanders are idealized without criticism.
- Xenophobia is projected into the past. Fidesz is hammering into people's heads that Hungarians have always been fighting foreigners throughout history. In September 2021, Viktor Orbán published a so-called "samizdat" on his official

homepage which considered the defense of the Carpathian Basin to be the "mission" of Hungarians.³⁸¹

- The change of the regime in 1989 is conjoined with the coming into power of Fidesz in 2010. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary (1990–1991) is communicated as the personal achievement of Viktor Orbán. At the same time, the 20 years after this event are branded as the persistence of communism, which was terminated only in 2010 by the so-called "revolution at the ballot box" (*fülkeforradalom*), considered to be the "true change of the regime".
- Demonstrations in 2006 leading to the ravage of the television headquarters are mythicized and are also compared to the revolution of 1956. At the same time, these events regularly appear in the government publicity on the 2022 elections (in order to portray the present opposition as antidemocratic).

NEW INSTITUTION SYSTEM FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PAST

Several new institutions were established, old institutions were closed or occupied,³⁸² and the indoctrination of new narratives was ensured.³⁸³ Major events in this field include the following:

- The Institute of "Hungarianness" Research was established on 1 January 2019.
- On 30 May 2019, the 1956 Institute, which had criticized the government, was merged with the Veritas Research Institute for History and Archives founded by the government in 2013, as a parallel institute for researching history (beside the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).
- The political occupation of public collections, including the Hungarian National Museum, was launched by the appointment of party loyalists to leading positions.
- History coursebooks were repeatedly rewritten, the new narrative was introduced in education in autumn 2020.³⁸⁴
- Reconstruction of architectural heritage belonging to politics of memory. The Fidesz government demolishes certain listed historic buildings and reconstructs other buildings with doubtful architectural value that have partly or fully perished before.³⁸⁵

The rewriting of history was started during the first Orbán government, by the establishment of the Public Foundation for Research on Central and Eastern European History and Society (KKETTK, 1999) and the House of Terror Museum (2002). In the past two years, it has become evident that the institutes of historiography founded by the Fidesz government were not created to study history *sine ira et studio*. Rather, their aim is twofold: to interpret important historical events to suit the Fidesz's taste, and to present these to the widest possible public. Thus, they position the party as the sole representative of Hungarian national interests, an excellent example of which is the animated film on the Battle of Pozsony.

Animated film about the battle of Pozsony

In December 2020, one of the state-run Hungarian television companies presented the product of the Institute of Hungarianness Research, an animation film on the Battle of Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia) in 907 CE, when Hungarians were attacked by the Eastern Frankish army.³⁸⁶ This victory of the Franks concluded the Hungarian

³⁸¹ Orbán, Viktor: Samizdat no. 12. Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, September 2021. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/samizdat-no-12/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸² The directors appointed to head the Institute of Hungarianness Research and the Hungarian National Museum do not have the professional experience required for these positions. The declared aim of both directors is to propagate history reinterpreted by the Fidesz. According to the director general of the Institute of Hungarianness Research, a lawyer, the institute's mission is to "return our history to its place", as our history was "dislocated" by the 20th century. We must "take back our glorious past", and people must be informed that the history of Hungarians is "an awesome and astounding achievement, which – under the direction of our great princes and kings –, occasionally had a decisive impact on the development of Europe and Asia". In his application document, the director general of the Hungarian National Museum appointed in summer 2021, wrote: "work on identity strengthening with the focus on our national identity can go on in a natural alliance with the government's politics", which in his interpretation also means that they "mentally prepare the problems important for the government!". http://www.lisimonlaszlo.hu/docs/MNM_foigazgatoi_palyazat_2021_07%2002.pdf?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_202107; last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸³ "[T]he historical institutes established by the government [...] do not devote their financial resources (which are significantly higher than those of university departments and Academy research institutes) to the traditional efforts of historians (editing sources, writing monographs and articles, and working on research projects connected to the larger framework of international historical research), but to reach the general public." Humán Platform (ed.), *Hungary Turns Its Back on Europe*, Oktatói Hálózat, Budapest. 53. <http://oktatoihalozat.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/angol.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸⁴ See the chapter on Public Education.

³⁸⁵ See the chapter on Architectural monument protection and world heritage.

³⁸⁶ A pozsonyi csata [The Battle of Pozsony], Institute of Hungarianness Research, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiNmszXx_js&ab_channel=Magyars%C3%A1gkut%C3%B3int%C3%A9zet, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

Conquest and secured the power of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. The employees of the Institute of Hungarianness Research, which transforms the Fidesz politics into science, claimed that information on this battle had been purposefully withheld before the Fidesz got into power, it had not been taught at schools, as Hungarian history had been presented as a series of military defeats. The film was severely and rightfully criticized: besides underlining the outdated animation technology, critics pointed out that a certain historical source was deliberately misinterpreted and highlighted a long list of unscholarly factual and visual aspects, and factual and chronological mistakes. The Institute of Hungarianness Research interpreted professional criticism as a political attack and refused it, expressing that they have the right to build on historical myths. Two young employees of the Institute distanced themselves from the mistakes of this promotion film loaded with misconceptions and biases; consequently, they were dismissed at short notice.³⁸⁷

In order to write history according to Fidesz's political aims, these institutions tend to employ professionally unsuccessful researchers who are devoted to Fidesz, or young researchers seeking an opportunity to rise. Out of the alternative research institutes established by the Fidesz, the two most active ones are the Institute of Hungarianness Research and the Veritas Research Institute for History and Archives: they organize conferences, publish a scientific yearbook and also monographs. These conferences are not totally blocked from the outside scientific world, some renowned scholars are invited to deliver lectures. However, representatives of opposing views are not even invited as listeners so that there should be no comments on lectures that distort the facts.

The twisting of facts and unscholarly methods are characteristic of the Institute of Hungarianness Research in the first place. The "creator" and manager of this institution is Miklós Kásler, (doctor, oncologist!), Minister of Human Resources, who has proven several times that he is susceptible to esoteric and illusory theories.³⁸⁸ In the spirit of Hungarian cohesion, the institute discusses the cornerstones of Hungarian history in a simplified and didactic manner in the state-controlled media: the prehistory of Hungarians, the events of the Hungarian Conquest and the foundation of the Hungarian state, victories and defeats, and wars. These TV and radio shows and newspaper articles imply that "national" historiography ceased in 1945, and the historical science of the Academy and the universities has been serving anti-national objectives ever since.³⁸⁹

The historical narrative promoted by Fidesz significantly differs from historiography aiming at objectivity concerning two eras. One is the era from the ethnogenesis of Hungarians until the foundation of the Hungarian state; while the other is the 20th and 21st centuries. The essence of the "national" narrative concerning the prehistory of Hungarians is that the Hungarians are the descendants of the founders of a major empire, the Huns. This idea first emerged in chronicles written in the Middle Ages. The authenticity of chronicles has been the subject of scientific debates for 200 years. The national policy of the state interferes with this debate using devices outside the scope of science. The aims are clear-cut: as the Hunnic–Hungarian relationship is the cornerstone of national pride for a significant part of society, it is politically advantageous for the Fidesz to support this view.³⁹⁰

The prehistory of Hungarians is closely connected to the origin of the Hungarian language. The rejection of the Finno-Ugric origin of our language has been intertwined with xenophobia (i.e. anti-Habsburg or anti-Soviet sentiments) in the oeuvre of

³⁸⁷ The Hungarian Network of Academics issued a statement of protest against their dismissal: Az Oktatói Hálózat állásfoglalása a tudomány szabadságáról a Magyarságkutató Intézet elbocsátott munkatársai ürügyén [Resolution on the freedom of science by the Hungarian Network of Academics in reaction to the dismissal of employees of the Institute of Hungarian Research]. Hungarian Network of Academics, 20 January 2021. <http://oktatoihalozat.hu/az-oktatoi-halozat-allasfoglalasa-a-tudomany-szabadsagarol-a-magyarsagkutato-intezet-elbocsatott-munkatarsai-urugyen/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁸⁸ Several of Kásler's ministerial decisions have attracted wide attention. He supported a project which aimed to reconstruct the myths of a supposed "star faith", i.e. "belief in light"; and another initiative with the objective of establishing Hungarian "ethnofitness" (whatever it may mean). He awarded the knight's cross to the leader of an association which spreads groundless views on the origins of the Hungarian people and language, who claims that she "regularly cleanses the aura of the Holy Crown of Hungary mentally".

³⁸⁹ A leading Hungarian historiographer, Antal Molnár, claims that the most serious counterargument of the scientific community against the Institute of Hungarianness Research and the "alternative historiography" is that the starting point of alternative historiographers is this "blatant lie" (i.e. that Hungarian historiography is anti-national), and according to their views "history is not a science, but a collection of opinions". This is why Molnár says "Subsidizing the Institute of Hungarianness Research is as if we financed the virus deniers". Ablonczy, Bálint: "Mintha a vírustagadókát támogatná az állam" – csúcstörténevezés a Magyarságkutatóról és az alternatív tudományról ["As if the state financed the virus deniers" – Hungarian leading historiographer on the Institute of Hungarianness Research and alternative science]. Válasz Online, 3 March 2021. <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2021/03/03/molnar-antal-tortenevez-interju/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹⁰ The Hungarian state facilitates this process by accrediting a researcher of the Hunnic–Hungarian relationship to Mongolia as an ambassador, who is known in scientific circles for her pseudo-scientific views that can easily be refuted.

some thinkers – historians, politicians – ever since the beginning of the 19th century. In order to refute the claim that the Hungarian language is of Finno-Ugric origin, the Fidesz narrative regularly relies on genetic research, blurring the line between the concepts of linguistic and genetic relatedness.³⁹¹ Other naive or scientifically unprovable theories that match the national policy are also supported overtly, which concern the ancient nature of the Hungarian language, the presence of the Hungarian language in the Carpathian Basin in the Avar Era, or other similar ideas.

In order that the new National Core Curriculum (NAT) accepted in spring 2020 could be introduced in the following September, the history coursebooks for several years – both in primary and secondary education – had to be rewritten hastily.³⁹² The chapters on the prehistory of Hungarians in these new coursebooks reflect the views of György Szabados of the Institute of Hungarianness Research, who was responsible for the content of the various versions of the textbooks either as an author or as a special consultant. Szabados regards folkloric texts on the Hunnic–Hungarian relationship as authentic sources on Hungarian prehistory and tries to disprove the Finno-Ugric origin of the Hungarian language in history schoolbooks. Severe criticism was expressed concerning his conduct, the extraordinary way of the assessment and the accreditation of the coursebooks especially owing to the lack of professionalism, the hindrance of the study of source criticism, and the omission of quality assurance.³⁹³

It is a central issue in the "national" narrative of 20th century Hungarian history to keep the problem of Hungary's territory loss after World War I continuously on the agenda. Consequently, the politics of memory raises the false and extremely dangerous illusion in the radical groups of society that Fidesz is capable of regaining the lost territories. In 2020, the Institute of Hungarianness Research organized four conferences on the peace treaty concluding World War I and its consequences. However, no opinions were expressed either at the conferences or in the press conferences after the events which would have mentioned the responsibility of the Hungarian state and its faulty minority policy as one of the causes of the orders in the peace treaty, which were highly disadvantageous for Hungary. To commemorate the injustice of the peace treaty signed in the Grand Trianon Palace of Versailles on 4 June 1920, the Monument of National Solidarity was constructed in a street leading to the Parliament, where the names of all settlements in the Hungarian Kingdom in 1913 are engraved on the walls, while several other Trianon memorials were erected in Hungary.³⁹⁴ The names of settlements not inhabited by Hungarians within the boundaries of the historical Hungarian Kingdom are not engraved in their original form (i.e. in their Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, German etc. form), but in their forcefully Hungarianized version from the 1880s. This induces the false illusion that the former Hungarian state was monolingual.³⁹⁵

Accredited in-service trainings complemented with wellness weekends are organized for thousands of history teachers, where the latest narratives concerning the historical milestones of the 20th century, including the Trianon Treaty, are presented.³⁹⁶ The trainings are arranged by the Public Foundation for Research on Central and Eastern European History and Society (KKETTK) headed by Mária Schmidt, which has spent over 3 billion HUF on this project.

The Golden Bull exhibition

The latest scandal of the politicization of history in Hungary broke in December 2021, when the Institute of Hungarian Research took over the professional management of the exhibition *Kings and Saints – The Age of Arpads*,

³⁹¹ See, for example, the study of 25 May 2020 by Miklós Makoldi, leader of the Research Centre for Archaeology without a PhD degree. He argues that researchers of Hungarian prehistory were forced to direct their work towards the Finno-Ugric track by the Habsburgs' interests and under Soviet pressure, instead of focusing on our Hunnic and Scythian heritage. Also, Miklós Kásler stated in September 2020 that Hungarian does not belong to the Finno-Ugric language family. Makoldi, Miklós: Kitekintés az Uralon túlra [Glancing over the Urals]. Magyar Nemzet, 25 May 2020. https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemen/2020/08/kitekintes-az-uralon-tulra?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_202111, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹² See also the chapter on Public education.

³⁹³ See the resolution of the Association of Hungarian History Teachers (HTA): A Történelemtanárok (30.) Országos Konferenciája után... [After the (30th) National Conference of History Teachers...]. Board of the HTA, 19 October 2020. <https://tte.hu/a-tortenelemtanarok-30-orszagos-konferenciaja-utan/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021. See the resolution of TANOSZ (Tankönyvesek Országos Szakmai Egyesülete, National Professional Association of Coursebook Publishers): Tankönyvi eset(ek) [Textbook case(es)]. TANOSZ, March 2021. <https://www.tanosz.info/cikkek/tanulmányok--elemzesek/tankonyvi-eset-ek-.html>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹⁴ Act XLV of 2010 on the testimony for national cohesion declares the 4th of June the Day of National Cohesion. <http://melaproject.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Act%20no.%2045%20on%20the%20Testimony%20for%20National%20Cohesion%2C%202010.pdf>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹⁵ Szarka, László: Soknyelvű ország – egynyelvű álom és emlék(mű) [Multilingual country – monolingual dream and memori(al)]. Új Szó Online, 31 May 2020. <https://ujsoz.com/panorama/soknyelvu-orszag-egynyelvu-alom-es-emlekmu>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

³⁹⁶ Zsilák, Szilvia: Trianon: Schmidt Mária alapítványa félmilliárd forintért tart továbbképzést pedagógusoknak [Trianon: Mária Schmidt's foundation organizes trainings for teachers for half a billion HUF]. Átlátszó, 4 March 2021. <https://atlatsoz.hu/kozugy/2021/03/04/trianon-schmidt-maria-alapitvanya-felmilliard-forintert-tart-tovabbbkepzes-pedagogusoknak/>, last seen 30. 12. 2021.

organized for the 800th anniversary of the publication of the Golden Bull, i.e. one of the most important laws in Medieval Hungary. The events were revealed by the Válasz Online news portal on 11 January 2022: the editorial tasks of the almost ready exhibition catalogue were passed over to Miklós Makoldi, director of the Research Centre for Archeology, Institute of Hungarian Research. (Makoldi was the archeological expert for the film about the Pozsony Battle, which received severe professional criticism.) The new editor decided to take out the chapters on the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin before the formation of the Hungarian state, and on the foreign people taken in by the Hungarian state, which were completed based on historical facts.³⁹⁷ The curators and the majority of the highly qualified and professionally renowned authors refused to cooperate with the Institute of Hungarian Research and did not give their consent to publishing their articles.³⁹⁸ The pro-government press regarded the article in Válasz Online a "blatant lie", and tried to picture the situation as if the Institute of Hungarian Research and the Hungarian National Museum had jointly decided on the new conception of the exhibition and the catalogue.³⁹⁹ (As it is widely known, both institutions are headed by directors appointed due to their political loyalty rather than their professional background.) In addition to the scholars who left the project, the Stádium 28 Kör⁴⁰⁰ comprising the scholars of various fields and the Section of Philosophy and Historical Sciences of the Hungarian Academy⁴⁰¹ of Sciences also protested.

Using the national policy, the insinuating interpretation of history with a tendency for demagoguery, Fidesz wishes to reach and keep its voters, most of whom live in the country, typically in small villages. The simplified and distorted interpretation of Hungarian history is communicated towards these people through the media permeated by Fidesz, and also at events where false historical views are spread (e.g. Kurultáj tribal assembly of the Hun–Turkic nations, Day of Ancestors). They build on the anti-scientific views of less educated people, and purposefully set people against scientific centers, including the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

It is much more difficult to speak against science in intellectual circles. Therefore, Fidesz lets the intellectuals belonging to their camp exercise historiography that aims to be objective. What is more, they are also tolerant of views contrary to their narrative when published on platforms controlled by the party (e.g. mandiner.hu), typically on the topic of Hungarian prehistory. However, aside from the small circle of intellectuals, these opinions are not published in the state-controlled media and are excluded from state-run education.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Borbás, Barna: Szinte az összes tudós felállt, miután a Kásler-féle intézet „einstandolta” az év történelmi kiállítását [Almost all scholars left when the Kásler-backed institute “annexed” the historical exhibition of the year]. Válasz Online, 11 January 2022. <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2022/01/11/kiralyok-es-szentek-kiallitas-szekesfehervar-magyarsagkutato-nemzeti-muzeum-hatter/>, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

³⁹⁸ Huszonöt tudós közös közleménye a Királyok és szentek – Az Árpádok kora című kiállításról [Joint statement of twenty-five scholars on the exhibition Kings and saints – The Age of Arpads]. Válasz Online, 14 January 2022. <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2022/01/14/kiralyok-szentek-kiallitas-kozlemeny/>, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

³⁹⁹ Franka, Tibor: Ordas hazugságok a Királyok és szentek – Az Árpádok kora kiállításról [Blatant lies about exhibition Kingas and saints – The Age of Arpads]. Demokrata, 11 January 2022. <https://demokrata.hu/magyarorszag/ordas-hazugsagok-a-kiralyok-es-szentek-az-arpadok-kora-kiallitasrol-472635/>, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

⁴⁰⁰ Tiltakozik az Árpád-kori kiállítás einstandolása ellen az MTA tagjaiból létrejött civil kör is [The civilian circle formed by the members of the MTA also protests against the “annexation” of the exhibition on the Árpád Era]. HVG, 13 January 2022. https://hvg.hu/kultura/20220113_Az_MTA_tagjaibol_letrejott_civil_kor_is_tiltakozik_az_Arpadkori_einstandolasa_ellen, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

⁴⁰¹ A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai és Történettudományok Osztálya nyilatkozata [Statement by the Section of Philosophy and Historical Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences]. 17 January 2022. https://mta.hu/data/11_Osztaly/Dokumentumok/11_oszt%C3%A1ly/Nyilatkozat.pdf, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

⁴⁰² <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2022/01/11/kiralyok-es-szentek-kiallitas-szekesfehervar-magyarsagkutato-nemzeti-muzeum-hatter/>; <https://www.valaszonline.hu/2022/01/14/kiralyok-szentek-kiallitas-kozlemeny/>; <https://demokrata.hu/magyarorszag/ordas-hazugsagok-a-kiralyok-es-szentek-az-arpadok-kora-kiallitasrol-472635/>; last seen 18. 01. 2022. https://hvg.hu/kultura/20220113_Az_MTA_tagjaibol_letrejott_civil_kor_is_tiltakozik_az_Arpadkori_einstandolasa_ellen; https://mta.hu/data/11_Osztaly/Dokumentumok/11_oszt%C3%A1ly/.pdf, last seen 18. 01. 2022.

In the two years that have passed since the publication of our latest report, the Orbán regime has kept marching towards the extension of their 21st century autocracy, turning its back on Europe. The regime, which has drifted to the edge of the European Union, is heading towards the east more and more decisively, declining the democratic values of Europe, and distancing Hungary not only from the European community, but also from the western world.

The Fidesz-KDNP government, which has been in power since 2010, has systematically demolished the rule of law, swept away all institutions that hindered the personal, unrestricted and autocratic rule of the prime minister, and completed a power concentration unprecedented in European democratic states. The Covid pandemic has created a favourable environment for dictatorial tendencies, which was used as a pretext for introducing special legal order; also, ruling by decree was perpetuated. Due to the declaration of "a state of emergency", human rights could not be exercised fully. The Orbán regime's relationship to the opposition, the media and the NGOs has become autocratic: they are neither regarded as partners, nor as opponents, but as the "enemies of the nation" by the regime. Although no open physical aggression or arbitrary imprisonments are known of, there have been examples of unjustified actions by the police, of court decisions or tax audits that are suspected to have been initiated by political actors, and of threats of arrest. The ruling regime has an inclination to intimidate or blackmail people, to keep them under surveillance or tap them, to use methods of "kompromat" not only against individuals, but also against the NGOs, local governments and private enterprises.

It was already detectable after the third election won with a two-thirds majority in 2018 that power went to the Hungarian ruling elite's head: they have been exercising power in a more and more cynical and unrestricted manner and have been stealing public money more and more shamelessly ever since. Makework is practised in the democratic institutions: the government does not communicate with either the social or the professional organisations; the representatives of the government sabotage the work of parliamentary committees; they give arrogant, one-sentence, totally irrelevant replies to the interpellations by the opposition (e.g. "Merry Christmas!"), offices hold public data back etc. Legalised corruption arranged from above has extended unprecedentedly and has been built into the operation of the state.

The low achievement of the ruling elite, their conceitedness and their moral depravity which is becoming visible for the wide public could all contribute to the fact that the erosion of the system started in the past two years. The united opposition has gained strength and seriously threatens the Orbán regime.

As Fidesz sensed this threat, they started to take innovative steps to keep their power or outsource it, in case the opposition should win. The most important innovation is the establishment of KEKVAs (public interest asset management foundations performing public duty), which can ensure that the right wing could maintain its desired cultural hegemony, control higher education politically, keep the pro-government political elite in a favourable position and operate a "parallel state" alongside the legal administration on the long run, even if the government is changed.

Although the Orbán regime has borrowed several elements of the authoritarian regimes and dictatorships of the era between the two world wars, it still functions as a modern 21st century autocracy. This is proven by the modernity of the annexation of the media, i.e. the ruling party combined administrative and market strategies to occupy independent media platforms, only letting some of them exist in order to be able to demonstrate that the expression of opinion is ensured in Hungary. The Orbán regime is modern from another perspective as well: it creates propagandistic messages using the latest marketing procedures and utilises modern communication technologies to send these messages to the general public. The Fidesz's gigantic media empire creates parallel reality: it falsifies news, creates fake news, censors content and misinforms the public utilising old and new methods which confuse and immobilise people, restricting the free actions of citizens. The personal cult built around the prime minister plays a fundamental role in this parallel reality.

Fidesz has always applied "show business" in governing, but their catastrophic pandemic management revealed that the government's main objective is to manage communication and gain political and economic profits, instead of managing the situation in a responsible way. The members of the government do not promote their own policies, but as political celebrities subordinated to the Fidesz communication machinery, they rather communicate the central messages in social media platforms.

Modern populism has also served the Fidesz propaganda well: strong anti-elitist tendencies are present in their rhetoric, which is well paired up with authoritarian intentions. The Fidesz's ideological image can also be regarded as postmodern,

which is characterised by radical pragmatism, total unprincipledness and chaotic eclecticism. All narratives, symbols and traditions that may bring votes or allies for the ruling party are utilised.

At the same time, the political discourse depicting Hungary as a "Christian national" state is highly promoted. Their symbolic politics tend to question the modern principle of separating state and church, and heads towards the advancement of the church both in the political and the private sphere.

In the past years of their Kulturkampf, Fidesz has occupied all state-run institutions, ousted independent artists and workshops to the periphery, and promoted intellectuals devoted to the party. Their own political and aesthetic preferences have been enforced both in their representation of power and in funding the cultural sphere: they preferred popular and light genres, and low-standard but visually appealing solutions. Despite all voluntarist interventions, Fidesz has not succeeded in fundamentally reformulating the Hungarian cultural sphere, which has managed to preserve its autonomous value system to some extent, and has some potential to resist.

Previous harmful tendencies also continued in the educational field in the past two years: measures narrowed down the availability of knowledge, lowered the standards of education, and steps towards segregation were also taken. Inequalities in education have grown, partly due to the advancement of the church in the educational sector; social selection has become more pronounced; and the segregation of Roma children has increased. During the pandemic, children from underprivileged families, primarily from Roma families, were excluded from education because the government did not ensure the conditions for online education for them. In the past years, the government's rightist ideological influence has prevailed more radically in public education than before.

Two significant changes occurred in higher education: on the one hand, the number of applicants plummeted due to the government measures; on the other hand, four-fifths of the Hungarian state-run universities were transferred to private foundations. Consequently, 70% of universities are now managed by boards of trustees with unlimited power, composed of unrecalable pro-Fidesz members.

Scientific research has gradually been placed under government control in the past two years. The largest Hungarian research network for basic research, i.e. that of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) – was transferred to a maintainer that strongly depends on the government, and scholars are no longer public employees. The share of open and independent tenders evaluated by researchers has lowered, and the government often funds research in a chaotic manner based on subjective decisions, which facilitates dependency both of institutions and individuals, and causes censorship and self-censorship. In general, beside or instead of scientific excellence, political, business and ideological criteria play a crucial role in financing science.

Similar tendencies are witnessed in technological and innovation policies: decisions are determined based on current political interests instead of a consensus formed in professional debates. Opinions or criticism from professional circles are stigmatised as political attacks and are ignored by the government.

Populism is present in several places in the world, but it has achieved unprecedented success in Hungary: a populist party retained power within a democratic alliance and created an unrecalable, modern autocratic system by means of a 12-year-long reign.

The most significant novelty in the system, which justifies the amendment of our previous report, is that the prominent figures of the Orbán regime, motivated by their fear of losing power, started a kind of endgame to maintain their economic power and political influence in case they lose the upcoming elections. The most devoted cadres of the system are "cemented" into the most crucial controlling positions (the Constitutional Court of Hungary, the Chief Prosecutor, the Media Council, the Fiscal Council, the Curia). An enormous share of the national economy is managed by the vassals of the government, and significant state functions and the connected public wealth have been transferred to private foundations managed by Fidesz devotees.

The autocratic heritage of the Orbán regime is to stay with us for a long time, irrespective of the results of the 2022 elections. It is our common responsibility to demolish this heritage as soon as possible, and to restore democracy and the rule of law in Hungary.

IVÁN BAJOMI sociologist
 ANDRÁS BOZÓKI political scientist
 JUDIT CSÁKI theatre critic, editor
 FERENC CZINKI writer
 DÁNIEL DEÁK jurist
 ZSOLT ENYEDI political scientist
 ZOLTÁN FLECK jurist, sociologist
 ANNA GÁCS literary historian
 PÉTER GALICZA philosopher
 JUDIT GÁRDOS sociologist
 MÁTÉ GÁSPÁR cultural manager
 DÓRA GYÓRFFY economist, political scientist
 ATTILA HAVAS economist
 MÁRIA HELLER sociologist
 TAMÁS JÁSZAY theatre critic, editor
 ÁGNES JUHÁSZ educational expert
 GÁBOR KLANICZAY historian
 LÁSZLÓ KLIMA archaeologist, linguist
 ÁGNES KÖVÉR jurist, sociologist
 KATA KUBÍNYI Finno-Ugrist
 GABRIELLA LANTOS medical manager
 SÁNDOR LÉDERER staffer K-Monitor
 MIKLÓS LIGETI jurist
 PÁL LŐVEI art historian
 ANDRÁS MÁTÉ philosopher
 JÓZSEF MÉLYI art historian
 GERGELY NAGY journalist
 ESZTER NEUMANN sociologist
 GÁBOR PATAKI interpreter
 JÁNOS PODANI biologist
 GÁBOR POLYÁK jurist
 PÉTER RADÓ sociologist of education
 ANDRÁS RÉNYI art historian

ÁGNES RÉNYI sociologist
 GÁBOR SCHEIN writer, poet
 JUDIT TAKÁCS sociologist
 ÉVA TÓKEI Germanist
 JON VAN TIL sociologist
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HUNGARIAN ACADEMY STAFF FORUM
(AKADÉMIAI DOLGOZÓK FÓRUMA)
 CIVIL PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION
(CIVIL KÖZOKTATÁSI PLATFORM)
 EÖTVÖS KÁROLY POLICY INSTITUTE
(EÖTVÖS KÁROLY KÖZPOLITIKAI INTÉZET)
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(FREESZFE EGYESÜLET)
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(MÉRTÉK MÉDIAELEMZŐ MŰHELY)
 ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC BUILDING
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(RÉGI ÉPÜLETEK KUTATÓINAK EGYESÜLETE)
 STADIUM 28 CIRCLE
(STÁDIUM 28 KÖR)
 SOCIETY OF HUNGARIAN AUTHORS
(SZÉPÍRÓK TÁRSASÁGA)

GLOSSARY

- AB** Alkotmánybíróság; Constitutional Court
- ADF** Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma; Hungarian Academy Staff Forum
- BCE** Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem; Corvinus University, Budapest
- CEU** Central European University
- CKP** Civil Közoktatási Platform; Civil Platform for Public Education
- CSED** Csecsemőgondozási díj; Infant Care Fee
- CSOK** Családi Otthonteremtési Kedvezmény; Family Home Creation Discount
- ELKH** Eötvös Loránd Kutatási Hálózat; Eötvös Loránd Research Network
- ELTE** Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem; Eötvös Loránd University
- EMMI** Emberi Erőforrások Minisztériuma; Ministry of Human Resources
- FESZ** Független Előadó-művészeti Szövetség; The Alliance of Independent Performing Artists
- Fidesz–KDNP** Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség – Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt; Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance – Christian Democratic People's Party
- GYED** Gyermekgondozási díj; Child Care Fee
- GYES** Gyermekgondozási segély; Child Care Allowance
- ITM** Innovációs és Technológiai Minisztérium; Ministry of Innovation and Technology
- KDNP** Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt; Christian Democratic People's Party
- KEKVA** Közfeladatot Ellátó Közérdekű Vagyonkezelő Alapítvány; Public interest asset management foundation performing public duty (AMFPPT)
- KESMA** Közép-Európai Sajtó és Médiaalapítvány; Central European Media and Press Foundation
- KKETTK** Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Alapítvány; Public Foundation for Research on Central and Eastern European History and Society
- MAKI** Magyarságkutató Intézet; Institute of Hungarian Research
- MCC** Mathias Corvinus Collegium Alapítvány; Mathias Corvinus Collegium Foundation
- MMA** Magyar Művészeti Akadémia; Hungarian Academy of Arts
- MNB** Magyar Nemzeti Bank; Hungarian National Bank
- MTA** Magyar Tudományos Akadémia; Hungarian Academy of Sciences
- MTI** Magyar Távirati Iroda; Hungarian News Agency
- NAT** Nemzeti Alaptanterv; National Core Curriculum
- NER** Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere; System of National Cooperation
- NKA** Nemzeti Kulturális Alap; National Cultural Fund
- NKE** Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem; National University of Public Service
- OHA** Oktatói Hálózat; Hungarian Network of Academics
- OTKA** Országos Tudományos Kutatási Alapprogramok; Hungarian Scientific Research Fund
- PIM** Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum; Petőfi Museum of Literature
- SZFE** Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem; University of Theatre and Film Arts
- Tanítanék mozgalom** Tanítanék (teachers) movement
- TAO** Társasági osztalékadó; Corporate tax
- TDDSZ** Tudományos Dolgozók Demokratikus Szakszervezete; Democratic Union of Scientific Workers
- Történelemtanárok Egylete** Association of Hungarian History Teachers





HUNGARY TURNS ITS BACK ON EUROPE 2.

DISMANTLING
CULTURE, EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND THE MEDIA
IN HUNGARY
2020-2021

