

The Rise of Jobbik, Populism, and the Symbolic Politics of Illiberalism in Contemporary Hungary

“The West is doing it to us again,” a middle-aged man in the middle of a crowd told me. “It’s just the same as after the First World War; it’s just the same as after 1989. The West is trying to keep Hungary down.”

The man wanted to make sure that I understood, and so he showed me one of the maps he was selling. It was a map of the Kingdom of Hungary, as it was constituted before and during the First World War, all around were the crests of the 64 historic counties of Hungary, and at the bottom were the words from Ferenc Erkel’s 1861 aria *My Homeland, you mean everything to me* (*Hazám, Hazám, Te Mindenem!*).¹ “This is what we lost,” he said to me. In the same crowd, men wore t-shirts depicting the Kingdom of Hungary ripped apart by sinister, skeletal-like hands. The speaker on the stage began to speak of how the banks pay low taxes, but make big profits, and of “Bank terror” (*bank rémület*). Some in the crowd chanted: “Our home is not for sale!” (*A haza nem eladó*), meaning both their literal homes but also referring to the whole of the Hungary. The speaker said that her political party, Jobbik, would not let “the banks colonise Hungary,” to which the group of young skinheads next to me responded: “It’s the Jews! It’s the f*cking Jews! Stop the Jews!”²

Unfortunately, in contemporary Hungary, anti-Semitism remains a very public part of the political landscape. Likewise, anti-Roma sentiments, even violence, also characterise the current political climate; in both cases these expressions of antagonistic politics are tied to the widely held political belief

¹ The aria is from the 1861 Erkel opera *Bánk Bán*, in which the protagonist named Bánk has the title Bán, which is the equivalent of a viceroy or a duke.

² Author’s eyewitness report and interview at the Jobbik political rally in Vértanúk Tere, Budapest, 23 October 2013.

among the political right that Hungary is under assault from outside forces, whether expressed as international global capitalism, as Jews, or trans-local, “rootless” Roma painted as the perpetrators of *cigánybűnözés*, “gypsy crime.” Yet at least according to two of the leading politicians, heads of the two of the most popular political parties, another force appears to “threaten” Hungary. This is the European Union. Viktor Orbán, the prime minister and leader of the dominant political party Fidesz, frequently denounces Brussels, suggesting its bureaucrats engage in “imperialist” meddling in Hungarian affairs.³ Gabor Vona, the leader of the further right insurgent Jobbik party, which, since the 2014 local and municipal elections, has become Hungary’s second most popular party,⁴ likewise opposes Zionism, global capitalism, and its continental variant, European integration.⁵ This article will examine how both Fidesz and Jobbik cast the European Union as a dominating, even colonising force in order to justify their policies of nationalising certain industries and orienting their foreign policy objectives and potential partners and projects eastward. Nevertheless, the European Union is important to both Fidesz and to Jobbik. Fidesz and the Hungarian government remain reliant on the European Union for infrastructure funds, agricultural support, and access to markets. In the case of Jobbik, the European Parliament has been an important avenue through which their politicians obtained legitimacy, as well as a legitimate platform in the media from which to amplify their political message.

Far Right Politics Immediately after 1989

Since the end of communism there has been widespread support for the political far right in Hungary. Almost immediately the symbolic politics of “national revival” gripped the Hungarian polity, and have, in the past 25 years, evolved into a daily politics characterised by anti-Semitism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Roma expressions. It is beneficial to see the roots of these sentiments as being connected to the legitimising politics of the earliest moments of the transition away from communism, in the days when the rule of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSzMP) collapsed. The themes that emerged from that first 1990 campaign continue today. They include external persecution,

³ D. Kelemen, “A Union of Values?,” *Policy Network*, 2 June 2014, www.policy-network.net.

⁴ “Local elections: Jobbik is now Hungary’s second largest party,” *The New Observer*, 29 October 2014, <http://newobserveronline.com>.

⁵ F. Mazurczak, “Euroskepticism and the Emergence of East Central Europe’s Far Right: The End of the EU Honeymoon?,” *Visegrad Insight*, 27 May 2014, <http://visegradinsight.eu>.

especially by Western institutions (whether they be the International Monetary Fund or the European Union), the threat of foreign dominance (especially in the economy), and the presence of an enemy alien within, either Jews, Roma, or a liberal “fifth column,” set on “destroying Hungarian culture.”

Just as communism had always been different in Hungary—jokingly known as “the happiest barracks in the camp,” or at least known for its “gulya-socialist,” mixed economy, so too was Hungary’s transition after 1989. For while there had been round table negotiations in Hungary, just as in Poland, in Hungary there was not one opposition, but at least two, and in many regards there were matching factions within the Communist Party itself. This division within the opposition continues in the current forms and parties of contemporary Hungarian politics. On the one hand, there remain traces of the Democratic Opposition (Demokrata Ellenzék—DE) in the current Democratic Coalition (DK). But the current forms of both Fidesz and Jobbik can trace their roots back to the “popular-national” (*népi-nemzeti*) opposition, which articulated its political aspirations as commitments to the values of the “people and the nation.” Inside the Communist Party, formally known as the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSzMP), populist reformers and such as Imre Pozsgay and Károly Grósz looked to join forces with populist opposition leaders, such as István Csurka and Sándor Csoóri, allowing them to create their own political organisation, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum—MDF). The populist opposition support of Pozsgay and Grósz drove a wedge between the “democratic opposition” and the reformers within the MSzMP, as the populists attempted to wrestle the mantle of “speaking for the people” from the DE intellectuals. In doing so, the MDF located itself between the government and the opposition, and soon began to publically differentiate itself from the Democratic Opposition. They were so successful that the MDF won the first multi-party election, in 1990, with 42.49% of the vote, a margin of more than 18%⁶ over its nearest rival the Western oriented and social democratically inclined Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége—SzDSz).⁷ Thus, the first Hungarian post-communist government was not pro-Western and liberal in orientation, but rather populist and nationalist.

⁶ G. Schöpflin, “From Communism to Democracy in Hungary,” in: A. Bozóki *et al.* (eds.), *Post-Communist Transition: Emerging Pluralism in Hungary*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1992, p. 102.

⁷ SzDSz also contained very liberal, if not neo-liberal elements, including the Hungarian Marxian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who was going through a neo-liberal phase at the time.

An air of pre-modern conservatism soon began to permeate MDF policies. Property restitution, particular for rural landholdings and church property, became an important issue of the day. Similarly, religious issues themselves began to dominate political debate. The MDF government proposed optional religious instruction in public schools and reintroduced state subsidies for religious institutions. The new government, led by the then prime minister, József Antall, launched a programme of “National Revival,” which made clear the new government’s intention to assert firmer control as the owner of state-held assets. The programme specifically stated its goal “to modify the legal position of state enterprises that have been transformed into companies during the period of “spontaneous privatisation,” and bring them under the control of state administration.⁸ This concern that the socialists were “selling off the ‘family’ silver” would become one of the repeated themes in Hungarian politics over the next 25 years. Anti-Semitism was to become another.

As István Csurka stressed the need for a “Christian Course” he accused the SzDSz of being a “party of Jews,” and said the media was similarly populated with Jews who did not “defend the national interests.”⁹ Csurka and other members of the populist wing of the MDF also accused Jews of being the harbingers of “destructive modernism,” adding that the SzDSz and the socialists were engaged in a Jewish plot with capitalist organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to “ruin” Hungary.¹⁰ The then famous Hungarian poet, Sándor Csoóri, who, like Csurka was one of the MDF co-founders, similarly suggested that Jews were not “true” Hungarians for they could never comprehend “real Hungarian pain.”¹¹

This construction, which suggests that Jews cannot be “true” Hungarians, dates back to the early part of the twentieth century, following the end of the First World War, and was the basis for the *Numerus Clausus* laws, which limited access for Hungarian Jewry to universities, the civil service, and positions within certain professions, and even placed restrictions on property ownership. At the time, the then leader of Hungary, the Regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, said that it “was not a bad thing to frighten the

⁸ ÁVÜ Annual Report 1992, Budapest. Quoted in A. Canning, P. Hare, “The Privatization Process—Economic and Political Aspects of the Hungarian Approach,” in: S. Estrin (ed.), *Privatization in Central and Eastern Europe*, Longman, New York, 1994.

⁹ I. Csurka, *Vasárnapi jegyzetek* [Sunday Notes], February 1991, Budapest, pp. 35–37.

¹⁰ *Magyar Fórum*, Budapest, 20 August 1992.

¹¹ S. Csoóri, “Nappali hold” [Daytime Moon], *Hitel*, 5 September, 1990, p. 6.

Jews a bit, because otherwise they became too insolent.”¹² This invocation of the past restructured the political debate in the early days after the collapse of Realised Socialism. As the MDF lacked concrete economic strategies, the party attacked the SzDSz for its “excessively capitalist views,” while simultaneously attacking the Marxist pedagogies of many of the SzDSz intellectuals, claiming that these Lukács School sociologists and their students were closet Marxists, who would maintain strict socialism. Thus, the MDF attacked the SzDSz as being both too “socialist” and too “capitalist.” For example, Antall spoke of the “*liberálbolsevisták*”—the liberal/Bolsheviks—who threatened the economic stability of Hungary.¹³ As the most outspoken member of the MDF, Csurka asserted, with little regard for the apparent ideological contradiction, that the “Jewish-communists” serve at the behest of “thieving capitalists.” In his inflammatory 1992 tract, *Setting the Record Straight*, published in *Magyar Fórum*, Csurka wrote of a liberal conspiracy to exploit Hungary.¹⁴ This combination of allied threat endures in the rhetoric of the Hungarian far right in the present. Urban communists, in league with their global capitalist allies, all of whom are “Jewish,” are believed by the many supporters of Jobbik and previous parties, to have plans to dismantle the Hungarian economy and destroy Hungarian values. In this way, Jewishness and Zionism are the “enemies” of Hungary, and anyone who is deemed to be an enemy by these far right politicians is likewise deemed to be “Jewish.” As will be described below, in 2014, even France’s Marine Le Pen and the Netherland’s Geert Wilders were accused by the Hungarian far right of being “Zionists.”

However, for some even within the ranks of the MDF, Csurka’s rhetoric was too baldly anti-Semitic, too evocative of the anti-Semitism associated with the revanchist politics of the inter-war period and that of the fascists during the Second World War, who together with the German Nazis murdered 450,000 Jews in the span of six weeks in the spring of 1944. In 1993, Csurka was expelled from the MDF, when he founded his own movement. Many members of the parliamentary faction left the MDF with Csurka to form the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja—MIÉP). The name of the new party was very telling, as it referenced the inter-war group, the Hungarian Life Movement (Magyar Élet Mozgalom), a pro-fascist

¹² T. Sakmyster, *Hungary’s Admiral on Horseback: Miklós Horthy, 1918–1944*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 210.

¹³ *Népszabadság*, 19 September 1997.

¹⁴ *Magyar Fórum*, 20 August 1992.

group whose slogans proclaimed “national unity, discipline, land reform, and defence of the Hungarian race.”¹⁵ These would also become slogans chanted by members of the Hungarian far right well into the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although the MIÉP failed miserably in the 1994 elections (receiving a mere 1.4% of the vote), Csurka was able to draw large crowds of supporters to rallies and political events. For example, in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 revolution, the MIÉP-sponsored rally was attended by 25,000 supporters,¹⁶ and a 1997 rally commemorating the 1848 Hungarian revolution against the Austrians attracted a crowd of 150,000.¹⁷ For the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 revolution, the largest crowds attended the MIÉP rally in Hősök Tere, numbering more than 50,000, compared to only 5,000 at the government-sponsored rally, led by the socialists at Petöfi Sándor Tér.¹⁸ In 1998, Csurka gathered one of the largest crowds (200,000 people) at an outdoor post-communist political rally, demonstrating the immense support for MIÉP.¹⁹ Csurka once again thundered onto the mainstream political stage, declaring in an interview with Reuters news service that Hungary needed his programme of “national radicalism.” During a televised debate, between the first and second rounds of voting in 1998, Csurka completed his remarks by giving the fascist Arrowcross²⁰ salute of two outstretched fingers. This rhetoric resonated with those who felt dislocated from the economic shifts that accompanied the coming of capitalism. At an MIÉP rally on 15 March 1997, there was a young man standing in the crowd of nearly 150,000. He stated that he was university educated, held a “good job,” and “had many Jewish friends,” but he believed that the “Jews and the IMF control Hungary,” and that only the MIÉP, which represented “true” Hungarian values, could defend Hungary against the IMF.²¹ In 1998, the MIÉP rebounded from its previous dismal electoral showing

¹⁵ Cf. M. Szinai, L. Szűcs, *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy*, Corvina Press, Budapest, 1965, p. 437.

¹⁶ *Budapest Week*, 31 October 1996.

¹⁷ *Budapest Week*, 20 March 1997.

¹⁸ *Budapest Sun*, 19 March 1998.

¹⁹ Author’s interview with eyewitness, political analyst István Hegedüs, Chicago, 26 May 1998.

²⁰ The explicitly fascist Arrowcross party, led by Ferenc Szálasi, formed the government of Hungary from October 1944 until Budapest’s liberation by the Red Army in March 1945. The Arrowcross was responsible for tens of thousands of deaths of mostly Jewish and Roma Hungarians. The Arrowcross is seen as the Hungarian equivalent of the German Nazi movement, and it was Arrowcross founder Gyula Gömbös who coined the term “national socialism” in 1921 as an explicitly anti-communist political movement.

²¹ Author’s interview, Budapest, 15 March 1997.

by garnering 5.55% of the national vote, and secured 13 parliamentary seats. However, in the same elections, even though the reformed former communists, as the Hungarian Socialist Party, won more votes both on the national list and within single member constituencies, the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége—Fidesz) won the most seats, and formed a centre-right coalition government with the MDF and the agrarian Independent Small Holders Party (FKgP). As the MDF split with the Csurka expulsions, and lost the 1994 elections to a resurgent Socialist Party, Viktor Orbán, as the leader of Fidesz, saw a political opportunity, and purged the more liberal and leftist elements from the party and significantly re-orienting it to the right of centre. Over the years, Fidesz would come to dominate this right of centre position. With the socialists re-cast as the European liberals, not dissimilar to the neo-liberal French or Spanish socialist parties, and little political interests in the Green Party and others to the left of the socialists, the functional space of political opposition and contention beyond the socialists was the space to the right of Fidesz.

The Rise of Jobbik

In the immediate aftermath of the changes of 1989 and 1990 in Hungary, there was a collapse of the politics of the left. The reformed Socialist Party, which split from the rump of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, was nearly wiped out in the 1990 election, managing to win seats in only 15 of 296 constituencies, garnering only a total of 33 seats. The Alliance of Free Democrats, which became the opposition in 1990, was seen as a liberal party, inviting ideas from the West, and joining the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe. In 1994, the reformed Socialists were able to return to power. During that campaign, the MSzP proclaimed itself the party of experts. It emphasised its experience in running the government and promised to improve the economic situation. The MSzP also promised to increase the pace of privatisation and governmental restructuring, and like many Socialist parties across Europe, especially in France and similar to the UK's New Labour, the MSzP embraced the tenets of neo-liberalism. However, the Socialist Party's rhetoric was also tempered by a promise of social democracy and the continuation of state welfare against the social and economic disruption of marketisation. The party also appealed to a "technocratic middle class." It directly targeted educated workers and those who had "done well" under the previous system, but had experienced

economic decline under the MDF government.²² In fact, Evans and Whitefield, while examining the 1994 Hungarian elections, did not find large numbers of manual labour workers voting for the MSzP, rather most of them chose to stay away from the polls; an incredible 62.6% of these workers abstained from voting.²³ For the most part, the Socialist Party's supporters tended to be "pragmatic" on economic issues and cooperation with the West. Additionally, although the Socialist Party won an absolute majority (209 of the 386 seats), the MSzP invited the Alliance of Free Democrats to join them in a coalition, furthering the connection between them and Western liberalism.

The large tasks of the political transition, such as the development of the rule of law and privatisation, were seen as only benefiting the elites of the previous regime. Liberal principles, such as the rule of law, came to be seen as a "pseudonym of class rule" and property rights as the "hypocritical description of exploitation and organised theft."²⁴ The crisis of the legitimacy of communism gave way to a crisis of the legitimacy of liberal principles and capitalism for those who fared poorly during the initial phases of the transition. The Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás wrote at the time: "The collapse of communism has proved in the eyes of the new ethnic or tribal warriors that there is no such thing as politics; crude personal interest is not mediated by anything like law, which is the ridiculously and transparently mendacious device of the powerful anyway."²⁵

It was in this environment that Fidesz turned toward the right. If there was to be a critique of neo-liberalism, it was to be from the right and not from the left. While the Fidesz leadership, especial Viktor Orbán, thought it could gain significantly from making such a critique from the right, it was unprepared for the rise of Jobbik.

A new phase of Hungarian right wing politics began in 2003 with the creation of the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom), more commonly known simply as Jobbik. The word itself is an interesting word play, in that *jobb* means both "better" and the direction "to the right," thus, the comparative form of the word *jobbik* can mean both that which is better and that which is further to the right. Jobbik is the

²² G. Evans, S. Whitefield, "Social and Ideological Cleavage Formation in Post-communist Hungary," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 47, no. 7, 1995, pp. 1177–1204.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ G.M. Tamás, "Ethnarchy and Ethno-anarchism," *Social Research*, vol. 63, no. 1, 1996, pp. 147–190.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

“better” and “further to the right” choice. Gábor Vona, one of the founding members of the party in 2003, became leader in 2006, and took the party into an electoral alliance with the older far right, nationalist party MIÉP, the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, for that year’s parliamentary election cycle. The MIÉP–Jobbik Third Way Alliance only garnered 2% of the vote, and won no seats. The subsequent end of the acrimonious alliance represented a passing of the baton as István Csurka’s MIÉP dissolved, and Vona became one of the most prominent players on the far right. In the next parliamentary election, in 2010, Jobbik enjoyed great success, securing 47 seats, finishing as the third largest party with nearly 17% of the vote. Jobbik was becoming a true force in Hungarian politics. In the 2014 campaign, Jobbik polled very well among young people,²⁶ and while their number of seats in parliament decreased to only 23, the entire number of parliamentary seats was reduced from 386 to only 199. So while the number of Jobbik seats was cut in half, the overall percentage of the popular vote, especially important for the national lists seats, increased to 20%. The Jobbik seats represented roughly the same percentage of overall seats from the previous parliament. Further after the election, Jobbik became the second largest party, as the left-liberal Unity was a campaign-only coalition of five parties that did not always see eye to eye on parliamentary issues.

In the October 2014 municipal elections, Jobbik demonstrated that it had nation-wide support by finishing second in 18 of 19 counties in Hungary, also winning control of 14 towns and villages. In April 2015, Jobbik won its first single member constituency, in a by-election following the death of the Fidesz incumbent Jenő Lasztovicza. The seat was won by Lajos Rig, seen as a fresh and incorrupt new face in politics, albeit one who had a reputation as being an adamant anti-Semite, and was rumoured to sport an SS tattoo. The campaign slogan “We’ll say it and we’ll do it” was intended as a slap to Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz government, which was increasingly seen as by Jobbik as a corrupt, ruling elite governing for itself rather than for the Hungarian people. As Jobbik seeks to increase its electoral support, it looks to convince more people that it is capable of governing, and to moderate its positions, or at least make them appear more palatable. A good deal of energy and effort is put into making the party look professional. One way of doing this has been through the separation of party political functions,

²⁶ D. Varga, “Miért szavaz egy fiatal lány a Jobbikra?” [Why would a young girl vote for Jobbik?], *Népszabadság*, 16 May 2014, <http://nol.hu>.

communications and allied group activities through the creation of direct action organs. The symbols, language, rhetoric, and even sartorial choices set the Jobbik party apart from the direct action groups. Vona wears a suit; the direct action network members often do not.

The Creation of Direct Action Groups

In 2007, and with the blessing of his party, Vona founded the Magyar Gárda, or Hungarian Guard, as a direct action organisation intended to “strengthen national self defence” and assist in “maintaining public order.”²⁷ The organisation was founded with a mass loyalty oath ceremony, during which its members sported black boots, forage caps, and bandanas of red and white stripes. The latter represent the proscribed Arpad Flag, associated with the Second World War era Hungarian fascist organisation the Arrow Cross (see illustrations 3 and 4). The Metropolitan Court of Budapest disbanded Magyar Gárda in 2009,²⁸ but the group has reorganised under at least three banners, as the Új Magyar Gárda (New Hungarian Guard), the Magyar Nemzeti Gárda (Hungarian National Guard), and the Szebb Jövőért Polgárőr Egyesület (Civil Guard Association for a Better Hungarian Future). Szebb Jövőért is the most active of the three, and has its roots in paramilitary organisations from the inter-war period and the Second World War. These groups work together, with one another, with the Jobbik party, and with other groups.

For example, in August 2012, members of Új Magyar Gárda, Magyar Nemzeti Gárda, Szebb Jövőért Polgárőr Egyesület, Betyársereg (the Outlaws’ Army), Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal (the Hungarian National Front), and Véderő (Defence) converged on the small village of Devecser to demonstrate against *cigánybűnözés* or “gypsy crime.” The demonstration began with a welcome from the Jobbik affiliated Veszprém county chairman Gábor Ferenczi, who told the assembled that “self defence is a fundamental right.”²⁹ The “self defence” was for ethnic Hungarians and so-called Hungarian “values” only, which by definition the Roma residents of Devecser do not hold. Zsolt Tyirityán, the leader of the Betyársereg, stated that he would use

²⁷ *Alapító nyilatkozat* [Establishment Manifesto], 25 August 2007.

²⁸ The court passed the ruling in December 2008, and it was upheld by the Budapest Tribunal (court of appeals) in July 2009.

²⁹ “A cigánybűnözők felett győzött a nemzeti összefogás” [National unity prevails over criminal elements], *Szentkoronaradio*, 6 August 2012, www.old.szentkoronaradio.com/devecser.

“any means necessary to protect our race. I am a racist and I am proud of it, because I love my race I’m going to defend it.”³⁰ The demonstrators then began throwing bottles and rocks at homes they believed to belong to Roma, and shouted “you are going to die here.”³¹ This was no idle threat, as the events in Devecser resembled those the year before in the small village of Gyöngyöspata in the northeast corner of Hungary.

In March and April 2011, elements of these far right direct action groups descended upon Gyöngyöspata and decided that they would run “military exercises” and walk “security patrols” to defend the residents against crime. Véderő announced that it was going to establish a paramilitary training centre in the Roma section of town.³² As the police had done nothing to stop the incursions by the paramilitary groups, Richard Field, an American businessman, with assistance from the Hungarian Red Cross, organised the evacuation of around 270 Roma women and children from the beleaguered village.³³ The village became such a focal point for tensions between far right militants and the Roma community that the Hungarian National Front (MNA) published on their web page that they believe the confrontations in Gyöngyöspata were the “outbreak of a cleansing civil war.”³⁴ Since then, the MNA has held monthly paramilitary exercises either at their headquarters on a former Soviet military base outside of Böny, or in other cities all around the country. These groups coordinate with one another, and organise training exercises not only for other Hungarian groups, but for groups across the region.³⁵ The Hungarian National Front does this because, according to their propaganda materials, they believe that civil war is imminent.

³⁰ *Ibidem*. On the next commemorations of the 1956 uprising, 23 October 2012, Tyirityán gave a speech in which he vented his hate against certain Jews who he said “should be put on into freight cars and taken a good distance away and put to work.” See: “Outrageous police reaction to crimes against Hungarian Roma,” *Hungarian Spectrum: reflections on politics, economics, and culture*, 7 October 2103, www.hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² “Hungary Roma battle far-right vigilantes,” *BBC News*, 27 April 2011, www.bbc.co.uk.

³³ “Right-wing Militants on Patrol: A New Wave of Anti-Roma Violence in Hungary,” *Der Spiegel Online*, 27 April 11, www.spiegel.de.

³⁴ To “celebrate” the anniversary of the Hungarian–German attempted breakout from the Siege of Budapest of 11 February 1945, Blood and Honour Hungary, the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, the New Hungarian Guard, the Hungarian National Front and Pax Hungarica met with representatives of the German National Front. This has become an annual event. Athena Institute, Hungarian National Front Profile, www.athenainstitute.eu/en/map/olvas/20.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

In the logic of the Jobbik affiliated direct action groups, and within the rhetoric of Jobbik itself, Jews and Roma become two sides of the same threatening coin. For the extreme right, and increasingly for more politically mainstream Hungarians, a shared fantasy of small-scale crimes by Roma is allied with conspiracy theories concerning large-scale financial crimes perpetrated by bankers and the European capital. In this paranoid fantasy, both must be violently opposed. Moreover, just as Roma are habitually associated with the commission of petty crime, larger financial degradations associated with globalisation and capitalism are often attributed to Jews. This combination could be seen in a December 2012 propaganda campaign from the Hungarian National Front (MNA), which claimed "...a virtual bulldozer is destroying our country. The blade of the bulldozer is made up of gypsy criminals and its driver, who is directing the whole process, is the Zionist Jewry."³⁶ Similarly, Zsolt Tyirityán declared at a November 2013 anti-Roma demonstration in Vác, that people "should stop being the prey and start being the predators" vis-à-vis Roma. In Pécs, in February 2014, he declared vis-à-vis the ruling class that "it might be a better solution for those with debts in foreign currencies if one started killing the banks and the tax advisors." In October 2013, Tyirityán observed that "burning financial institutions will be the symbols of our age."

Oppose Roma! Oppose the Bankers! Oppose Jews!

If there was any doubt regarding the connection between Vona and Jobbik with Zsolt Tyirityán and his Betyársereg, one need only look to a February 2014 campaign rally that Jobbik held in the former synagogue that became Esztergom's civic hall with the coming of communism. Vona and Jobbik wanted to hold the event there to demonstrate that that "true Hungarians" could go anywhere and say anything, including discussing the "evils of capitalism" in a former synagogue.³⁷ While Vona addressed the 200 or so Jobbik supporters inside, Tyirityán's Betyársereg provided "security" to defend the Jobbik speakers against the nearly 100 demonstrators who protested outside, some with yellow Stars of David pinned to their chests. One demonstrator, who herself is a Holocaust survivor, told Agence-France Press

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ Athena Institute, Outlaws Army Profile, <http://athenainstitute.eu>.

“it’s disgusting that anti-Semites are able to get away with this provocation in modern Hungary.”³⁸

In 2009, Betyársereg and Jobbik signed a cooperation agreement, saying that “we support each other and take part in each other’s events.”³⁹ While Betyársereg does not receive funds directly from Jobbik, it did have access to more than 40 million forint (approximately €130,000) provided by the Jobbik Party Foundation to the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement.⁴⁰ Tamás Sneider, vice-president of Jobbik, stated recently that the relationship between Betyársereg and Jobbik “must be acknowledged to be a division of labour. It’s good to have an Outlaw’s Army; it’s nice to have the Sixty-Four Counties because they are able to do what I cannot from inside parliament.”⁴¹

The separation of the direct action groups from the formal political/parliamentary party of Jobbik, allows the party itself to suggest that it is more moderate, without actually alienating the participants in the direct action groups. The separation also allows the party to claim that it does not endorse violence in any way. Jobbik told Reuters news service through a communiqué that “Jobbik condemns violence, and its members cannot be linked to such acts either.”⁴² It is well understood that it is possible to be an active member in both, and this is evident at any Jobbik rally, where participants sport the uniforms and other sartorial attire that denotes membership of Betyársereg, Szebb Jövőért, or Magyar Gárda. Szebb Jövőért in particular invites women and young people to join the ranks of the group, often organising family camping events, and other group activities, especially in the summer. Family life, especially collective activities away from mass consumption, tie the political message of these groups to a way of social being, suggesting that the other political parties are insensitive to the politics of everyday life. On the other hand, having the formal political organisation separate allows Vona to cultivate the appearance and gravitas of a statesman. Ironically, this has been enhanced by his organisation’s presence in the European Parliament.

³⁸ “Rally in Ex-Synagogue Sparks Fury in Hungary,” *Aljazeera*, 15 February 2014, www.aljazeera.com/news.

³⁹ T. Fabian, “Náci vagyok, vállalom! Vona meg a barátom” [I am a Nazi! I accept that! Vona is my friend], *Index.hu*, 15 June 2015, <http://index.hu>.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² M. Goettig, C. Lowe, “Special Report: from Hungary, far-right party spreads ideology, tactics,” *Reuters.com*, 9 April 2014, www.reuters.com.

The Paradox of the European Union

One profound paradox of democracy within the European Union has been the ability of far right political groups across the Member States to find political legitimacy through the European Parliament. Jobbik has likewise used the occasion of European parliamentary elections to change the perception of its standing and mobilise capabilities.⁴³ After the disastrous parliamentary alliance with the MÍEP in 2006, in which the combined lists of the two parties barely received more than 2% of the vote, and only little more than 100,000 votes,⁴⁴ Vona set his sights on the 2009 MEP elections. Jobbik dramatically reversed its fortunes, securing nearly 15% of the vote, winning three of Hungary's 22 seats, and working in alliance with an MDF candidate for a fourth. This performance was nearly equal to the then governing Hungarian Socialist Party's four seats, and demonstrated that Vona could organise and win an election campaign. In Strasbourg and in Brussels the three Jobbik members sit with the other so called non-aligned members (*non-inscrits*), including members of the French Front National (FN), Geerts Wilders' Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), Greece's Golden Dawn, and the Italian Northern League.

Krisztina Morvai, one of the members of the Jobbik delegation, has on the one hand a prestigious curriculum vitae, including teaching law in the United States, serving on the European Commission of Human Rights, and being a member of the United Nations' Women's Anti-discrimination Committee. On the other hand, she warned "liberal-Bolshevik Zionists" living in Hungary to "start thinking about where to flee and where to hide" once Jobbik comes to power.⁴⁵ Further, Morvai rather cynically used her

⁴³ The founder of France's Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, used this to great effect when he was first elected to the European Parliament in 1984, and then subsequently in every EP election until 2009. In just the second election to the European Parliament in Strasbourg since its inaugural direct election in 1979, the FN managed to garner nearly 11% of the French vote, securing 10 of France's 81 seats. Le Pen immediately formed a Parliamentary Group, ER, or European Right, which was joined by five members of the fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), and one member of the Greek National Political Union (EPEN), founded by Colonel's Junta leader Georgios Papadopoulos. Le Pen was suddenly no longer a merely French politician, especially popular in the south, but, following the 1984 election, he had a continental platform. As the leader of a parliamentary group he became a figure to be quoted by the mainstream political press, and had to be treated with the respect appropriate to that position.

⁴⁴ The alliance received 119,000 votes, or 2.2%, finishing fifth overall and coming nowhere near the 5% threshold required to win seats.

⁴⁵ "Der Marsch auf Budapest," *Jungle World*, no. 13, 26 March 2009, <http://jungle-world.com>.

reputation as an advocate for human rights in 2010, when, after walking the halls of the European Parliament in a “Free Budaházy” t-shirt, she nominated György Budaházy for the Council of Europe Human Prize, for his “languishing in a Hungarian jail for a year without being charged.”⁴⁶ Budaházy and 16 others were days later charged with terrorism offences, relating to bomb manufacturing and systematically intimidating leftist activists and journalists. Morvai has defended the Magyar Gárda from the floor of the European Parliament, as have her Jobbik colleagues. One, Csanád Szegedi,⁴⁷ wore the Magyar Gárda uniform to his inaugural parliamentary session.⁴⁸ Sitting among the *non-inscrits* has allowed Jobbik to build a number of trans-European political alliances and supports, funnelling money to allied movements and organisations. In this way, the very institution that these non-aligned parties oppose facilitates their cooperation, and perhaps their very growth.

In many ways it is in the environment of the European Parliament that Jobbik is best able to advance its political ambitions. For example, at the all-EU meeting of the European Affairs Committee, held in Riga in June 2015, Jobbik MEP Tibor Bana denounced the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, stated that European energy security was dependent upon good relations with Russia, and further promoted energy diversification by suggesting the European Union should be open to Iranian and Algerian gas deliveries.⁴⁹

Similarly, Jobbik MEPs represented the only party not to support a draft resolution suspending Russia’s voting rights in the Council of Europe. Márton Gyöngyösi wrote on Jobbik’s web page that the party considered the proposal “unacceptable on moral grounds.”⁵⁰ He similarly denounced NATO as “serving American interests unconditionally,” and said that

⁴⁶ “Far Right Demands Budaházy’s Release,” *Budapest Times*, 21 September 2010, www.budapesttimes.hu.

⁴⁷ In a surreal turn of events, Szegedi’s Jewish ancestry was discovered in 2012. He was expelled from Jobbik, resigned his seat in the European Parliament, and now practises orthodox Judaism, traveling to schools and community centres around Hungary to discuss hate crime.

⁴⁸ “Jobbik MEP wears banned Hungarian Guard uniform to first session,” *Politics.hu*, 14 July 2009; see also A. Holland, “Fascist follies in the European Parliament,” *Adamhollandblogspot*, July 2009, <http://adamholland.blogspot.co.uk>.

⁴⁹ Jobbik, “Definite ‘No’ to the United States of Europe,” 3 June 2015, www.jobbik.com.

⁵⁰ Jobbik, “Jobbik finds the Council of Europe’s anti-Russia sanctions worrying,” www.jobbik.com.

a deterioration of relations with Western Europe, due to its cooperation with the United States, was “not in the interests of Russia.”⁵¹ This theme, that the EU is corrupted by the United States and that American culture is in itself corrupt, is regularly repeated by Jobbik representatives. Vona told *The Voice of Russia*, “today’s ‘Rome’, the USA, spreads a subhuman culture which has nothing but economic interests.”⁵² It is perhaps ironic that, via the platform of the European Union, and especially the European Parliament, Jobbik members are able to find a far larger audience to disseminate their anti-capitalist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Roma views. Jobbik disrupts EU attempts to speak with one voice on issues ranging from human rights to the crisis in Ukraine, while at the same time appearing to promote Russian interests, or at least to counter American ones. While the themes are often also articulated by other far right parties, Jobbik sees itself as being among the most popular “right wing parties in Europe” and could potentially lead a new movement to the right, and to the east, with cooperation among right-wing parties, thus extending to relations with Russia, Turkey and Iran.⁵³

Follow the Money

As far back as the 1990s, Jean-Marie Le Pen readily proved that he and the Front National were allies of the Hungarian far right. He would frequently attend MIÉP rallies and fund raisers. At one event, on the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 uprising, Le Pen visited Budapest to give a speech warning against globalisation, global capitalism, and the potential “return of communism,” which was warmly welcomed and loudly applauded.⁵⁴ More recently, in 2012, Bruno Gollnisch, FN Member of the European Parliament, took the stage at a Jobbik October 23 rally, and stirred the audience by opening his speech with the words “*Nem, nem, soha*” (No, no, never), the historical refusal of the Horthy government to accept the losses of territory and population imposed upon Hungary at the end of the First World War by the Treaty of Trianon.⁵⁵ The audience responded with chants of “Down with Trianon.” Gollnisch added that, just as the “Hungarian nation rebelled against the dictatorship of the Soviet Union” in 1956, Hungarians also “set

⁵¹ Jobbik, “Provocation against Russia not in the interests of Hungary and Europe,” www.jobbik.com.

⁵² Jobbik, “Voice of Russia Interview with Gabor Vona,” www.jobbik.com.

⁵³ Jobbik, “Jobbik is the strongest right-wing party in Europe,” www.jobbik.com.

⁵⁴ Author eyewitness, Budapest, 23 March 1996.

⁵⁵ “Bruno Gollnisch: Trianon Unjust,” www.jobbik.com.

an example in resistance against Euro-global union.”⁵⁶ He continued, stating that “the European Union imposes [on] everyone the intemperate flow of goods, people and capital, the import of such goods, which are produced at an iniquitously low cost and destroys our enterprises, the mass emigration, which absorbs our people, and the foreign capital, which appropriates our assets. You have the right to choose another destiny.”⁵⁷ For 20 years there has been support from France for the Hungarian political far right.

However, unexpectedly, following the great electoral success among far right parties across Europe in the May 2014 European Parliamentary election, the potential to create a new Euro-sceptic far-right bloc was actually dashed by Marine Le Pen. Thirty years after her father created the European Right Group, Marine Le Pen vowed that she would not form an alliance with Jobbik, the Greek Golden Dawn, or Bulgarian Ataka, specifically mentioning Jobbik’s anti-Semitic rhetoric. In May 2015, Marine Le Pen suspended her own father, and founder of the Front National, over similar concerns about the party being seen as Nazi-sympathisers. Upon the news that Le Pen would not include Jobbik in a potential anti-EU integration block, Vona accused both Le Pen and the FN, as well as Geerts Wilders and the PVV, of being Zionists. In June 2014, Vona stated explicitly “we do not make alliances with Zionist parties, like the French Front National, the Austrian Freedom Party or the Dutch Party of Freedom, simply for financial reasons.”⁵⁸ Márton Gyöngyösi, Jobbik parliamentary caucus leader, told Arthur White of the *Budapest Times* something similar back in February 2014, stating that he thought Le Pen and Wilders had their priorities wrong, and that liberalism and Zionism are the enemies, not Islam.⁵⁹ Gyöngyösi suggested that all promoters of “traditionalism,” regardless of religion, should share the common enemy of liberalism, saying “the common enemy of traditionalists, regardless of where they come from, is liberalism, which wants to sweep away every type of religion and culture. I think they [Wilders and Le Pen] are complete liberals.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ “French, Austrian far-right parties ‘Zionist’: Hungary’s Jobbik,” *EU Business*, 26 June 2014, www.eubusiness.com.

⁵⁹ J.A. White, “Jobbik to Wilders and Le Pen: Liberalism and Zionism are the Enemies, not Islam,” *Budapest Times*, 22 February 2014, <http://budapesttimes.hu>.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

Even as the ties of cooperation linking the far right of Hungary and of France appear to be weakening, Jobbik is building stronger new relationships to the north and south, rather than the west. Jobbik has been engaged in a series of reciprocal events with the Polish political group National Movement (Ruch Narodowy). In November 2013 Gyöngyösi addressed 150 Ruch Narodowy members, urging regional cooperation, especially between Hungary and Poland. Following the event, Jobbik issued a press release stating that the party hoped “that Central and Eastern Europe could unite as an alliance that spreads from the Adriatic to the Baltic to counter Euro-Atlantic suppression.”⁶¹ RN’s leader, Robert Winnicki, at the 1956 commemoration ceremonies in Budapest in 2013, articulated this common goal. He identified that important common issues in both Poland and Hungary included the local control of agricultural land, away from mass holdings by large-scale agro-corporations.⁶² Gyöngyösi also addressed the second congress of Ruch Narodowy in May 2014, and RN and Jobbik held another joint rally in Budapest on this year’s Petöfi Sándor day, 15 March 2015.

This cooperation can also be found between Jobbik and groups in the south of Central Europe, such as in Croatia and Bulgaria. Angel Dzhambazki, from Bulgaria’s National Movement (VMRO), said its “close cooperation” with Jobbik and a Croatian group had helped the Bulgarian movement to grow, adding “we invited them to participate in our meetings, and at the same time we take part in events organised by them [Jobbik].”⁶³ Dzhambazki sees the VMRO as being similar to Jobbik in being a “defender of ordinary people” against Syrian immigration, against “the Gypsy question,” and against “the destruction of a European value system.”⁶⁴ The VMRO joined with other nationalist parties in the electoral alliance “Patriotic Front,” which won 7.29% of the popular vote and took 19 seats in the Bulgarian parliament.

One of the biggest worries for many analysts is not the shared electoral politics and rhetoric, but the spread of the direct action groups, operating either in league with or autonomous from the larger political organisations. Marcin Goettig and Christain Lowe describe, in a *Reuters* special report, the cooperation between Jobbik and Ruch Narodowy, an encounter they had with Polish paramilitaries, organised in what the participants called “chorągiew,”

⁶¹ M. Goettig, C. Lowe, *op. cit.*

⁶² Author eyewitness of RN leader Robert Winnicki’s speech, Budapest, 23 October 2013.

⁶³ M. Goettig, C. Lowe, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Y. Kosharevska, “Interview with MEP Candidate Angel Dzhambazki,” *One Europe*, 23 May 2014, <http://one-europe.info>.

a historical word previously used to describe Polish cavalry formations. The group seemed to the reporters to be quite similar to the types of paramilitaries found among the Hungarian direct action groups. When one of the individuals participating was asked about his motivation, he simply replied that he “finally had to do something” in the face of all the tradition being broken by Brussels. While addressing a crowd of Jobbik supporters in Budapest, Winnicki, said “following your example, we are organising a national movement today in Poland.” With more martial rhetoric, Winnicki concluded his remarks by saying “an army is quickly growing in Poland, which soon, on its section of the front, will join the battle you are conducting, and together we will march to victory.”⁶⁵ With increased funds, the opportunities to train in Hungary, and far right political activists returning from eastern Ukraine (even if these number only a few handfuls), these organisations pose a very real and serious threat of violence to Roma communities, other non-white communities, the LGBT community, and immigrant communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Perhaps the most politically troubling for the European Union is the persistent assertions of the presence of financial connections between Jobbik and the governments of Russia and Iran. Not long after Jobbik’s prominent showing in the 2010 parliamentary elections, Gabriel Ronay, writing in *The Herald* of Scotland, reported that the Hungarian Public Prosecutor’s Office was investigating claims that Béla Kovács, then a Jobbik foreign policy advisor, was Moscow’s money channel, bringing funds directly from the Kremlin into the party’s coffers.⁶⁶ In the same piece, Ronay suggested that MEP Morvai received cash gifts from Iran, and “is known in Brussels for her pro-Iran views.”⁶⁷ In 2010, she attended a “human rights conference” hosted by the then-President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and met with Iranian political officials. In May 2014, the assertions of a connection between Jobbik and Moscow continued when Jávör Benedek of the Hungarian political party “Politics Can Be Different” (LMP), claimed in the Budapest daily *Magyar Nemzet* that Béla Kovács, now a Jobbik MEP, is regarded in Brussels as “a lobbyist for Russia and Gazprom, someone whose career

⁶⁵ Author eyewitness, Budapest, 23 October 2013. See also M. Goettig, C. Lowe, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ G. Ronay, “Hungary’s far-right backed by ‘rolling Moscow roubles’,” *Herald Scotland*, 13 June 2010, www.heraldsotland.com.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

clearly demonstrates a commitment to Russia.⁶⁸ It was further alleged that Kovács was spying on EU institutions for the Russians.⁶⁹ The consequences of this connection between Jobbik and the Kremlin are significant, as Jobbik MEPs oppose EU sanctions against Russia, inflame the Ukrainian crisis, and disrupt EU foreign policy.

However, such positions are not Jobbik's alone. Tibor Navracsecs, from Fidesz, asserted that EU sanctions in response to Russian activities in Ukraine hurt Hungary more than Russia, claiming that Hungary was losing €223,000 each day due to the suspension of economic activity with Russia. Such declarations led Roland Gúr of the Hungarian Socialist Party to quip "Jobbik and Fidesz are competing as to which one can better serve Russia's interests."⁷⁰

This confluence of Russian interest and cooperation from Jobbik and Fidesz is most apparent in the rhetoric of "Eurasianism." As Orbán declared in a May 2014 speech that Hungary "continues the policy of openness to the East," he pressed further that Hungarian identity regarding citizenship questions in Ukraine must be "revisited," and that the 200,000 ethnic Hungarians in western Ukraine should receive dual citizenship with Hungary. He further added that "Hungarian questions of the Second World War remain unresolved."⁷¹ This insistence on revisiting border issues parallels the Russian position on a federalised Ukraine. Jobbik goes even further, suggesting that just as Crimea is Russian, the Carpathian region of western Ukraine is Hungarian (Kárpátalja-Magyar).⁷² These Hungarian claims on Ukraine make it difficult for the European Union to speak with one voice on the ongoing conflict. In these ways, attempts to create a unified European Union foreign policy on many issues, but especially on Ukraine and Iran, have often been made more difficult by Jobbik and Fidesz. But while EU President Jean-Claude Juncker jokingly called Orbán a "dictator," and playfully slapped

⁶⁸ "Felfüggeszhetik Kovács Béla EP-beli mentelmi jogát" [European Union Suspends Bela Kovacs' Immunity], *Mandiner.hu*, 7 January 2015, <http://mandiner.hu>.

⁶⁹ "Investigation under way against Jobbik MEP for spying against EU," *Politics.hu*, 15 May 2014, www.politics.hu.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ R. Field, "Viktor Orbán re-elected Prime Minister of Hungary," *Budapest Beacon*, 12 May 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com>.

⁷² "A Jobbik gyűjtést szervez a Kárpátaljai Magyar családik megsegítésére" [Jobbik helps Transcarpathian Hungarian families], *Videk.ma*, 5 May 2015, www.videk.ma.

him on the cheek,⁷³ Vona has gone so far as to demand a referendum similar to the one called by British Prime Minister David Cameron, as to whether Hungary should even remain in the European Union. Vona said, in a June 2015 speech, that “Europe is in crisis; Europe is sick.”⁷⁴ Whether Jobbik is actively anti-EU or pro-Russian, the activities in the European Parliament and the close connections revealed in frequent trips and lectures, such as Vona giving a lecture at Lomonosov University in Moscow in May 2013 at the invitation of Russian far right “Eurasianist” Alexander Dugin, are certainly an irritant for Brussels, and have led to discussions among political scientists as to whether Jobbik and other far right parties in the European Parliament are acting as “Russia’s Trojan Horse.”⁷⁵ In the end, this may be a relationship of convenience, whereby Jobbik is happy to receive funds, stand against the transatlantic capitalism it associates with the European Union and the United States, and suggest that politics for Europe lie to the East and not to the West. If that appears pro-Russian, so be it; if it is seen as anti-EU, all the better for Jobbik.

Being the Far-Right Party in an Environment of Illiberal Politics

For some analysts, however, the greater threat to democracy in Hungary comes not from Jobbik and its allied organisations, but from Orbán himself and his Fidesz government. On the one hand, allies of the government, for example Zsolt Bayer, Orbán’s friend, confidant and co-founder of the contemporary organisation of Fidesz, wrote inflammatory remarks in response to the revelation that the two assailants involved in the 2013 New Year’s Eve stabbing of two men in a pub in the small town of Szigethalom, just outside of Budapest, were both Roma. Bayer wrote in the right-leaning newspaper *Magyar Hírlap* that a significant part of Hungary’s Roma population should be considered “animals” and excluded from society. He added “this part of the Gypsy population are animals, and behave as animals ... let there be no more animals. A solution must be found, immediately and

⁷³ “EU’s Juncker calls Hungarian PM ‘dictator’, slaps him on the cheek,” *Today’s Zaman.com*, 25 May 2015, www.todayszaman.com.

⁷⁴ “Vona: ‘Europe is in crisis; Europe is sick’,” www.jobbik.com.

⁷⁵ See: V. Petsinis, “Random friends or asymmetric Trojan horses?,” *Open Democracy*, 18 December 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net>. Cas Mudde also wrote a piece for *Open Democracy*, stating that far-right party activity did not constitute a “Russian Trojan Horse.” See C. Mudde, “Russia’s Trojan horse,” *Open Democracy*, 18 December 2014, www.opendemocracy.net.

by any means.”⁷⁶ The “by any means” is an echo of the sentiments expressed by Zsolt Tyirityán, the leader of the Betyársereg. Yet on the other hand, the threat Fidesz poses to democracy is far greater and far more structural in orientation.

In a speech last July at the Bálványos Free Summer University in Tusnádfürdő, Orbán made clear that his goal is to create an “illiberal democracy.” He stated that Hungary is not the sum of individuals, but rather is a “community that needs to be organised, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.” He continued by saying “it does not deny foundational values of liberalism, such as freedom for example, but it does not make this ideology a central element of state organisation, rather it applies a specific, *national*, particular approach in its stead.”⁷⁷ Throughout the speech Orbán referred to “Christian Hungary,” which is often understood as a stance against secularism, liberal cosmopolitanism, and as being anti-Semitic. As such he stressed the distinction between illiberal “Christian democracy” versus liberal democracy, stating that liberalism and the European Union had lost their legitimacy after “the 2008 financial crisis, or the Western financial crisis.”⁷⁸ The speech concluded that Hungary’s future is to look eastward at “today’s stars, Singapore, China, India, Turkey, and Russia.” He added that Hungary should be “searching for ways to part from Western dogmas, making ourselves independent from them ... we need to state that democracy is not necessarily liberal.”

Since regaining as prime minister in 2010,⁷⁹ Orbán has enacted a number of policies that were explicitly illiberal or anti-liberal in both the economic and political senses of the word. In 2013 the prime minister appointed György Matolcsy as the new governor of the Hungarian Central Bank. Previously, Matolcsy had advocated “unorthodox monetary policies” that included the nationalisation of privately managed pension fund assets that, along with other measures, including forint exchange rate adjustments, provided

⁷⁶ Quoted in R. Hodgson, “Bayer at Bay,” *Budapest Times*, 22 January 2013, www.budapesttimes.hu.

⁷⁷ C. Tóth, “Full text of Viktor Orban’s speech at Büile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014,” *Budapest Beacon*, 29 July 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com>.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ Orbán was prime minister as well in the first *Fidesz* coalition government from 1998–2002.

sufficient liquidity for Orbán to suspend talks with the IMF on a bailout loan.⁸⁰

The nationalisation of pension assets was merely one scheme in many, in which private assets have been nationalised and then resold to political allies and supporters. There were nationalisations of energy assets and public utilities, beginning with the Fidesz local council takeover of Pécs Water in 2009, through to the purchase of German gas giant Eon assets in 2011. The list goes on, including the 2013 nationalisation of all tobacco shops, which were then re-licensed to political allies.⁸¹ Policy Agenda, an economic think tank, estimates that the Orbán governments have spent more than three trillion forint on acquiring hitherto privately owned business.⁸² The blog site Hungarian Spectrum suggests this is merely a scheme of asset transfers, in that the state is uninterested in actually holding the assets for the long term, at least outside of the energy sector. The blog writes that, in most cases, “the state doesn’t actually want to own these companies. Rather, it wants to change the ownership structure of a particular business sector. In plain language, to take away from some in order to give to others.”⁸³ This can be seen as a different form of what David Harvey calls “accumulation through dispossession.” For Harvey, the dispossession is the sale of state assets through privatisation, depriving the public of collectively held assets, and is a key aspect of neo-liberalism. In the Hungarian case, Orbán’s government dispossesses a private asset holder through state action and then redistributes that wealth, not to the commonwealth, but into the holdings of a private political ally.

Politically, from coming to power in 2010 until the February by-election in 2015, Orbán’s Fidesz government has held a two-thirds super majority in the Hungarian parliament. As such, Orbán and his party have been able to rewrite the constitution with impunity. If they need a new law they simply pass one. If they need to change the constitution they simply do so. They reduced the number of seats in parliament from 386 to a politically convenient 199. In

⁸⁰ Z. Simon, “Matolcsy to focus on growth, inflation at Hungary Bank,” *Bloomberg.com*, 1 March 2013, www.bloomberg.com.

⁸¹ “State Monopoly on retail sales of tobacco,” *The Orange Files*, 15 July 2013, <http://theorangefiles.hu>.

⁸² “Államosítás másképpen? Így osztják újra a piacokat” [Nationalisation differently? To redistribute the markets], *Policy Agenda*, 26 June 2013, www.policyagenda.hu.

⁸³ “Nationalization Hungarian Style,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, 27 June 2013, <http://hungarianspectrum.org>.

fact, so sure were they of holding on to their two-thirds majority, that Fidesz made this the mandatory threshold for a whole host of laws. However, since February 2015, and especially after the Jobbik victory in the April 2015 by-election, Fidesz has not held a two-thirds majority in parliament. Thus, it must regularly find support outside the party rank and file in order to pass its legislation. According to Princeton University professor Kim Scheppelle, it has been Jobbik that has provided the support the government has needed.⁸⁴ Perhaps we have seen a very quiet victory of the far right in Hungary.

Previously, concerns had been the shift to the right of Fidesz voters. With “ardent anti-communism, and a shamefully opportunistic anti-liberalism as the natural connecting tissue of Orbán’s neo-conservative alliance,”⁸⁵ Fidesz supporters have been increasingly drawn to the far right worldview promoted by Jobbik, and to the view held by those further right that they are, the “Christian” defenders of the nation against assaults and onslaughts by enemies both without and within. But now, due to procedural issues, the government itself is dependent upon the cooperation and initiative of Jobbik parliamentarians. Vona may have become the power broker he wanted to be, but, more dangerous for Europe, Jobbik and its political agenda now appears to hold great sway in contributing to an illiberal politics of Central Europe. Jobbik is becoming increasingly bold and increasingly self-assured. As a party it is unapologetic for its anti-liberal, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, anti-Zionist positions; perhaps Europe needs to look more seriously at the broader implications of Jobbik’s 2014 campaign slogan, *Kimondjuk. Megoldjuk* (We’ll say it, we’ll solve it). Jobbik’s solutions may be not only undesirable, but also violent and exclusionary. Hungary’s shift to the right may pose one of the biggest challenges to the European Union yet.

⁸⁴ K.L. Scheppelle, “Hungary without Two Thirds,” *New York Times blog*, 17 March 2015, <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com>.

⁸⁵ M. Haraszti, “The ‘Real’ Viktor Orbán,” *Open Democracy*, 12 May 2002.