

CEE National identity in CEE countries



Case study Hungary

Diaspora politics with the ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries

Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz-MPSZ)

As a consequence of the conditions stated in the Treaty of Trianon, about 2.2 million Hungarians live in neighboring countries, most of them in Romania (1.2 million) and Slovakia (450 thousands), Serbia (250 thousands) and Ukraine (156 thousands).

The turning point in diaspora politics was delivered by the first freely elected prime minister's inauguration speech. As the József Antall (Hungarian Democratic Forum) stated, he wanted to be *"in spirit the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians"*. This sentence drove the demarcation line between the politics of nation on the center right and social-liberal political sides. Although there was a consensual policy between the two sides on the issues of subsidizing Hungarian communities and normalizing relations with neighbor countries, frequent conflicts erupted on the measure of unifying the nation. The first government of Viktor Orbán (1998-2002) and the counter-politics of the opposition intensified this difference. The government of Orbán confronted with Slovakia and Romania along the law on the status of ethnic Hungarian in 2001. The law gave economic, like opportunity of employment, and cultural rights to ethnic Hungarians. Orbán managed to have an agreement with his Romanian counterpart, Adrian Năstase, extending benefits on employment to all Romanian citizens. In the coming electoral campaign the opposition pointed to potentially risky influx of 23 million Romanian employees. The new Socialist-Free Democrat government, leading by Péter Medgyessy (2002-2004) changed the status law, omitting the reference on national unity and several rights from the law.

Party positions (2005-2013)

In the end of 2004, the new prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004-2009) had to face the question of dual citizenship of ethnic Hungarians. The referendum on this question was raised by the World Federation of Hungarians, and later supported by the center right Fidesz. The rhetorical positions of the two political sides were designated by the referendum for the next years.

The governing **Hungarian Socialist Party** (in coalition with the liberal Free Democrats) rejected the idea of the right for Hungarian citizenship for people living outside of Hungary. They argued about the **cost of the migration of Hungarians from neighboring countries** (a) and preferred the concept of **"prosperity in the homeland"** (b), i.e. preserving Hungarian communities in their traditional birthplace. As PM Gyurcsány stated in a parliamentary debate in November 2004:

- a) *“I don’t know if there is anyone of you who tried to examine what consequences would a positive result of the referenda have on Hungarian education system, health system, social services, labor market and housing policy or the elections in Hungary.”*
- b) *“Trianon was a great geographical and regional trauma of the 20th century. If we do the wrong thing, we can have another Trianon in the 21th century – the ethnical one. It would make people leave their homeland.”*

“I don’t know if anyone of the initiators of the referenda spoke with the legitimate representatives of Hungarians in the neighboring states or if anyone actually discussed the question with the governments of the neighboring states to avoid a political fiasco. Hungary once became known as a stabilizing factor in Europe but now it becomes rather a destabilizing one.”¹

In a multi-party negotiation just before the referendum, government propounded establishing Homeland Fund (*Szülőföld Alap*) for subsidizing economic and cultural activities, and introducing the category of *“national citizenship”*, a symbolic alternative to dual citizenship. In the campaign coalition reclaimed national media channels, and organized his message with the slogan of *“responsible NO”*.

Because of the low turnout, the referendum rendered invalid, the initiative for dual citizenship failed. The Hungarian Socialist Party communicated the result as the success of their campaign, but, for alleviating of the resentment of ethnic Hungarians, the government announced the *Program for the Responsibility for the Nation in early 2005*. In its main points the program contained the *visa for ethnic Hungarians for easing their stay in Hungary, subsidizing of diaspora institutions and communities, and establishing the Homeland Fund*.

Regarding the Nationality Law enacted in 2011 by the coalition government of Fidesz and the Christian Democrats, the MSZP focuses on what its leader Attila Mesterházy called **“a new left-wing national policy”** (c). The party still sticks to the concept of **“prosperity in the homeland”** (c) and stresses the importance of **cooperation between Hungary and its neighboring countries** (d) on the issue. At the same time Mesterházy acknowledges a **responsibility of Hungarian politicians** for ethnic Hungarians in those states (d). He frames the MSZP’s positions with the notion of **responsible patriotism as opposed to nationalism** (e) and connects the topic to **cooperation on the European level** (f).

¹ http://www.parlament.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat_aktus?p_ckl=37&p_uln=180&p_felsz=13&p_felszig=28&p_aktus=6

In his speech on 9th March 2013 Mesterházy stated the following:

- c) *„I assured the skeptic that it was no coincidence that we have announced a new left-wing national policy. The essence of this new left-wing national policy was also emphasized by Victor Ponta in his speech here. In the core of this new left-wing national policy there is an increased attention in the symbolic and the rational space alike vis-à-vis ethnic Hungarians beyond our borders. We must be more attentive and helpful so that they indeed prosper in their homeland.”*
- d) *“I believe in it. I believe in it, and I am convinced that we are right, and good neighborly relations are part of this new national policy. We are attentive and responsive to the interests of the minorities. As a Hungarian politician, I am aware of the responsibility I have for ethnic Hungarians, and I know that Victor Ponta is responsible for Romanians living all over the world.”*
- e) *“This is not nationalism. This is true and brave patriotism. There is a great difference between nationalism and patriotism. While a nationalist despises neighboring peoples, a true patriot takes pride in his nation, homeland, but also respects the peoples of neighboring countries.”*
- f) *“All of us in this hall, and many more all over this country are good patriots. So, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very grateful to Victor [Ponta] and Sergei Stanishev who have joined us today offering their support. Their presence means that the Socialist Party has a strong alliance with the Carpathian Basin, and also with Europe. For us patriotism is a call that we stand for also in Europe. We stand for it in Europe, as Hungary throughout her history has always been part of Europe. No freedom fight against Europe shall be waged, but we shall seek to cooperate in alliance in order to effectively represent our national interests!”²*

Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance, and first of all its leader, Viktor Orbán eventually embraced the right for citizenship of ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary in the campaign of the 2004 referendum. Orbán proposed *“European passport”*, ensuring the freedom of movement of ethnic Hungarians from non-EU countries. In a multi-party negotiation, Fidesz also formulated the law of National Unity, as a symbolic act of the cross-border unification of Hungarians. In the campaign Fidesz mobilized their members and its political allies, as the president of the republic and the Churches. The center right party campaigned with the slogan of **“the spiritual unification of the nation”**.³

According to the abovementioned Nationality Law, applying for Hungarian citizenship, ethnic Hungarians should have the same rights as citizens in Hungary, including the right to vote. Viktor Orbán frames the topic in with the notions of **national strategic interest** and **avoiding discrimination** of ethnic Hungarians (g) and strengthening the **common national identity** of all Hungarians (h).

² <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/mszp-chairman-attila-mesterhazys-speech-on-the-state-of-hungary/>

³ See also in the Electoral Program of Fidesz, 2006, p. 37. (<http://static.fidesz-eu.dream.hu/media/1/9/3/6/1936.pdf>)

- g) *“Creating the legal institution of dual citizenship for ethnic Hungarians abroad is a historic achievement for Hungary. (...) By granting Hungarian citizenship to ethnic kin under a fast-track procedure, Hungary has achieved an important nation-strategy goal and put an end to the legal discrimination of the Hungarian nation within the Carpathian Basin. (...) the Hungarian state should take a stand for ethnic Hungarians and should not tolerate the deprivation of any ethnic Hungarian of their citizenship in their country of residence.”*⁴
- h) *“[A]fter 90 years of (the Treaty of) Trianon, we were able to unite the nation over the borders, and give back Hungarian citizenship to hundreds of thousands.”*⁵

⁴ <http://www.politics.hu/20111124/orban-calls-dual-citizenship-historic-achievement/>

⁵ Prime Minister’s Speech, 23/10/2012

(http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/beszed/nem_fogadjuk_el_hogy_idegenek_kormanyozzanak_minket)

Roma and Sinti in Hungary

Jobbik- The Movement for Better Hungary and LMP-Politics Can Be Different

Roma population constitutes the largest minority group in the country. Since the majority of Roma come from the younger segment of the society, demographic tendencies and a low societal status of the majority of Roma population play a leading role in the conflict between Roma and non-Roma population in Hungary.

Party positions (2005-2013)

The radical nationalists, **Jobbik- The Movement for Better Hungary** has ridden the issue from the ascension of the movement from a nationalist youth organization to a political party and built its political strategy on anti-Roma sentiments. Their invention was merely rhetorical: the party recalled the forgotten notion of “**gypsy crime**” (i).⁶ The notion is used in a populist manner, claiming to be a scientific concept and its existence supported by statistical data. Jobbik proposes solutions to the situations like “*aggravation of the penal law, re-introducing death penalty, fortifying police forces and establishing gendarmerie.*”⁷ With such rhetoric, Jobbik tries to attract the poor countryside citizens living close to Roma communities.

The party’s leader Gábor Vona on the topic of gypsy crime:

- i) *“There are three main forms of crime in our country – one of them is gypsy crime, the other two are political and economic crime. They are all interconnected and keeping a stranglehold of the country and slowly ruining it. “*

“[Gypsy crime] is not a way of collective judgment but a criminological concept. There are specific kinds of crime that can be only observed in Roma ethnic group. Who would dare to deny its existence? Who would dare to say it is not rampant? That the statistical data does not show an increase of gypsy crime?”⁸

In 2007 the party founded the Hungarian Guard, a volunteer nationalist organization for “defending a physically, spiritually and intellectually defenseless Hungary,” aiming to prevent „gypsy crime”.⁹ Hungarian Guard is often described as the paramilitary group of Jobbik, but leaders of Jobbik deny these allegations and regard the guard as an active cultural association.

⁶ Radical Change. A guide to Jobbik’s parliamentary electoral manifesto. 2010. p.11. (<http://www.jobbik.com/sites/default/files/Jobbik-RADICALCHANGE2010.pdf>)

⁷ The Speech of Gábor Vona, 13/02/2009 (<http://alfahir.hu/node/24090>)

⁸ <http://alfahir.hu/node/24090>

⁹ Founding Manifesto of the Hungarian Guard,17/07/2007 (<http://archive.is/HDq4q>)

The green party, **LMP (Lehet Más a Politika-Politics Can Be Different)** chose the liberal way to handle the social conflict between Roma and non-Roma people. In its 2010 electorate program, LMP took into consideration the tension and its causes of anti-Roma sentiments in Hungarian society, but rule out the operation of Hungarian guard and the proposals of radical nationalists (social card allowance, public work programs, segregation in education). The green party considers the problem first of all as a **social issue** which needs to be solved **comprehensively** (j). Thus, LMP offers support for employment, adult education, jobs in the green sector and minimal wage for the poor. On the second place, LMP propose changes in educational system, kindergarten support for Roma families, and anti-segregation education in primary schools. For mitigating conflicts between Roma communities and the majority population LMP offer a system of social mediation and strict regulation of the competence of police force.¹⁰ At the same time the LMP emphasizes that solutions **should not be targeted ethnically** but rather focus on all of the people in need (k). The party protested several times against the politics and parliamentary rhetoric of the radical Jobbik. In one of their campaign in February 2011, the leaders of the party said, Jobbik has nothing about solving social problems of Roma and non-Roma people, but only scapegoating.¹¹ LMP is the only party in the Hungarian parliament which has a Roma politician in leading position in 2013.

According to one of the LMP's MPs Ágnes Ostolykan

- j) *"integration of the Roma population cannot be taken as a separate problem but should be approached comprehensively."*

Another LPM's MPs, Kristof Szombati stated that:

- k) "[w]e need to put an end to the approach which applies so called "ethnically targeted" programs. "Color-blind" programs inspired by the "American style" would be open to all people in need and create chances for all the poorest."¹²

¹⁰ Electoral Program of LMP, 2010 pp.75-86 (<http://nezopontintezet.hu/files/2012/03/A-fenntarthat%C3%B3-j%C3%B6v%C5%91-a-befogad%C3%B3-t%C3%A1rsadalom-%C3%A9s-a-meg%C3%BAj%C3%B3-demokr%C3%A1cia-strat%C3%A9gi%C3%A1ja-2010.pdf>)

¹¹ „We protest against hate speech on the Roma and Jew”, [lehetmas.hu](http://lehetmas.hu/sajtokozlomenyek/10744/tiltakozunk-a-nyilt-ciganyozas-es-zsidozas-ellen/), 15/02/2011

¹² http://hvg.hu/velemeney/20100428_roma_LMP_program

Anti- and pro-European sentiments/arguments

Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and Jobbik- The Movement for Better Hungary

In the last years there were several frictions between the Fidesz-led government and EU institutions on the new „Basic Law”, the Hungarian media bill, taxation policy etc. In spite of these confrontations, the Hungarian government, with some reservations, belongs to the pro-European political forces.

Party Positions (2005-2013)

The **Hungarian Socialist Party** has been an adherent of European affiliation and politics from the early 90s. Hungary's accession to the EU took part under the Socialist government of Péter Medgyessy in 2004. Committed to European Union, Socialists also propagated the ratification of Lisbon treaty, as early as in the December 2007. Backed by the governing majority and the opposition as well (only 5 MPs voted against it), Hungarian Parliament ratified Lisbon Treaty as the first member of the European Union. In the parliamentary debate, Socialist PM, Ferenc Gyurcsány appreciated the benefits of the treaty, first of all, as a historical opportunity for compromise for the Central European region and its people. As the PM said, *European Union can give the political frame where the nations of the region, Serbs, Croats, Romanians and Hungarians etc., can live and work together*, i.e. he connected **the issue of European integration with the potential for cooperation on the topic of ethnic Hungarians** in the neighboring states (as well as Attila Mesterházy did in 2013 – see above).

The MSZP emphasizes the role of Hungary as a part of Europe both in historical and contemporary context (l). According to the MSZP, the institutions and values of the European Union represent the norms and benchmark for the politics of liberal democracy. In their new program, MSZP proposes to govern back Hungary from an in-between status to the **European norms**. Socialists want to restore the function of democratic institutions, national media and good relations toward **foreign investors**. They prefer a predictable and cooperative politics toward European countries and European institutions, endeavoring to **foster economic relations** (m) to the European Union and introducing common European currency as soon as possible.

- l) In his speech on a state of Hungary in March 2013 Mesterházy said that “[f]or [Hungarians] patriotism is a call that we stand for also in Europe. We stand for it in Europe, as Hungary throughout her history has always been part of Europe. No freedom fight against Europe

shall be waged, but we shall seek to cooperate in alliance in order to effectively represent our national interests!”¹³

- m) In this text called “Our future is in Europe” the party leader Attila Mesterházy scoured the Eurosceptic conservatives and radicals, and made a promise about *“leading Hungary back to Europe, increasing the rate of foreign investments, and creating a proper business environment and just tax system.”*¹⁴

Jobbik considers itself to be euro-realist rather than eurosceptic party. Positions of its members are framed **strongly nationalist** rhetoric (n), refusing the benefits of EU membership and calling for an **exit from the European Union**. From the beginning, Jobbik have proposed the Europe of Nations conception, a cooperative system of European nation states without any central European institution. They have propagated this idea from its founding declaration, and even rejected to run in EP elections in 2004. They considered the EU affiliation as *“disclaiming the Hungarian self-determination”*, and the European Union as *“anti-democratic, bureaucratic, central power”*. They outline a sad future for the EU membership of Hungary: lagging behind the agrarian countryside, pensioners, employees, while the rich getting richer forcing the country on the way of Latin Americanization. One of the main issues of the party’s 2009 EP campaign and electoral campaign a year later, was the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Jobbik attacks both political sides, and claims MSZP and Fidesz betrayed Hungarian people alike with the yes vote. The radical party sees the treaty as a renouncement of self-determination, first of all the *“sell-out of Hungarian soil”*. From the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, Jobbik commemorates *“the loss of Hungarian independence”*. In their 2010 electorate program Jobbik accuse Brussels, as one of the center of global capitalism besides Washington, for increasing bureaucratic power over European nations with the Lisbon treaty, for preferring individual and liberal values against Greco-Roman traditions and Christian values, and for repressing national interests and rights of Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries. The system of EU institutions is in large part anti-democratic. The vast majority of Union subsidies to Hungary end up in the coffers of multinational corporations that operate here, while most of the remainder is lost to the bottomless pit of political corruption—as the program stated.¹⁵

- n) As the party leader, Gábor Vona stated in his speech of the commemoration of the 1848-49 revolution, *“If Hungary’s freedom is threatened by the EU, there is a need to fight against the EU which colonizes the country and enslaves Hungarians”*.¹⁶

¹³ <http://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/mszp-chairman-attila-mesterhazys-speech-on-the-state-of-hungary/>

¹⁴ Our future is in Europe. mesterhazyattila.hu, 15/12/2013.
(<http://mesterhazyattila.hu/hirek/europaban-van-jovonk>)

¹⁵ Radical Change. A guide to Jobbik’s parliamentary electoral manifesto. 2010. p.21.
(<http://www.jobbik.com/sites/default/files/Jobbik-RADICALCHANGE2010.pdf>)

¹⁶ Vona urges fight against EU which colonizes and enslaves Hungarians. jobbik.com, 29.03.2012
(http://www.jobbik.com/vona_urges_fight_against_eu_which_colonizes_and_enslaves_hungarians)