



Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej)

Publication details, including instructions for authors:
<http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/rocznik/index.php>

ISSN 1732-1395

Constructing the Reality: the Perception of the European Union in the 2018 Hungarian Electoral Campaign

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Published online: 10 Dec 2018

To cite this article: Krisztina Arató, 'Constructing the Reality: the Perception of the European Union in the 2018 Hungarian Electoral Campaign', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2018, pp. 39-60.

Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej) is a quarterly, published in Polish and in English, listed in the European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS), Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), BazEkon and IC Journal Master List (Index Copernicus International). In the most recent Ministry of Science and Higher Education ranking of journals published on the Polish market the Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe received one of the highest scores, i.e. 14 points.

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Constructing the Reality: the Perception of the European Union in the 2018 Hungarian Electoral Campaign

Abstract: The European Union as a sui generis political system has had its political myths from the beginning of its existence. However, as political myths are not static but are subject to change as groups in the society come up with alternative explanations, countermyths started to emerge already in the 1980s. In our days, we witness competing views – myths and countermyths – on the EU that are presented in politics. In this paper I examine the use of these competing views on the EU in the 2018 Hungarian electoral campaign. I conclude that while FIDESZ and its leader Viktor Orbán applied all countermyths of the EU in his speeches, opposition parties did not talk at all about the European Union, thus leaving the positive myths about the EU unheard during the campaign.

Keywords: political myths, European Union, Hungary, 2018 elections

Introduction

Elections were held recently in key member states of the European Union: in spring 2017 Emmanuel Macron defeated Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election but the Front National leader still received 1/3rd of the votes; the 2017 September German elections resulted in a feeble majority for Angela Merkel and the presence of AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) in the Bundestag; the Italian general elections in spring 2018 led to a previously unseen coalition by Lega Nord and Movimento 5 Stelle. Also in spring 2018 the Hungarian general elections resulted in another supermajority in parliament – for the third time in a row – for Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ party.

Leading analysts and also political scientists understand these developments as signs of populism: it seems that more and more (successful) political forces argue that politics should be brought back to the people, that former elites do not represent them satisfactorily, that national polities should limit their engagement in the international arena both in economics and politics.¹ This nativist, anti-globalization argument has significant effects on the understanding of European integration: it seems that populist parties, among others, apply Euro-sceptic arguments, using the EU as a kind of a “punchbag”.²

The Hungarian case has been in the centre of attention for years – since 2010 Hungary is in the forefront of populism in government³, moreover, the quality of democracy is in question⁴. Populist tendencies has not left Hungarian EU politics untouched: the post-2010 period has been characterized by strong national interest representation (from time to time to the extent of making European solutions impossible⁵) – especially in the areas of the management of the financial/economic crisis and in the migration/refugee crisis. During this period, the image of the European Union in government communication basically returned to the pre-accession period when the EU was an outside actor (“them”) for Hungary (“us”).⁶

In my paper I would like to explore how parties talked about the European Union in the 2018 electoral campaign: what kind of understanding of Europe/the European Union was offered by parties. I am especially curious how Viktor Orbán’s well known anti-EU sentiments

- 1 There is a vast amount of literature available on populism, see e.g. J.-W. Müller, *What is populism?*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016 or C. Mudde and C. R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- 2 M. Buti and K. Pichelmann, *European integration and populism: addressing Dahrendorf’s quandary*, 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/jan2017-populism.pdf> [2018-05-22].
- 3 T. Boros et al., *The State of Populism in the European Union*, Brussels–Budapest: FEPS, 2016, https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/elemzes/264/state_of_populism_in_europe_in_2016.pdf [2018-05-22].
- 4 E.g. A. Bozóki and D. Hegedűs, ‘An externally constrained hybrid regime: Hungary in the European Union’, *Democratization*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2018.1455664.
- 5 J. Janning, ‘Hungary in the EU: From front runner to veto player. Commentary’, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 4 April 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_hungary_in_the_eu_from_front_runner_to_veto_player [2018-05-22].
- 6 K. Arató and B. Koller, ‘Magyarország és az Európai Unió’ [Hungary and the European Union], in: A. Körösné (ed.), *A magyar politikai rendszer – negyedszázad után* [The Hungarian political system – a decade after], Budapest: Osiris, 2015, pp. 377-400.

have been counterbalanced, if at all. I answer this question on the basis of the well-known constructivist approach: I share the view that apart from institutional reality, Europe, like many other political phenomena, is constructed through discourse.⁷ In the first section I introduce the theoretical background of the paper concentrating on discourse, narratives and myths and summarize the myths and countermyths of the European Union. In the second part I analyse the key speeches of Hungarian political leaders and available party programmes in the 2018 electoral campaign with special attention to the content on the EU. At the end, I draw some preliminary conclusions.

1. Discourse, narratives, myths and countermyths in the European Union

According to Amandine Crespy, there are three major directions in current EU discourse research.⁸ First, there are scholars who are interested in the discourse concerning the existence and reception of the European Union as a polity. Second, European discourse is key when finding out whether there is (and if there is, in what areas can we detect it) a European public sphere that is key to the development of European identity and citizenship.⁹ Third, discourse is widely considered when analysing Europeanisation with special attention to policy change.¹⁰ In this paper I would like to contribute to the first stream of EU discourse research: I am interested in how the European Union appears in political speeches and programmes, how it is presented (and thus evaluated) in the peak time of political communication (in a political campaign). This way I place my study in the constructivist stream of literature since my basic assumption is that discourse can create different realities by the speakers for their audience.

Thus, I am looking for general narratives about the European Union in the speeches of the 2018 Hungarian electoral campaign – ele-

7 A. Crespy, 'Analysing European Discourses', in: K. Lyngaard and I. Manners, K. Löfgren (eds), *Research methods in European Studies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 102-122.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 102-105.

9 Or, as Habermas calls it, the development of "constitutional patriotism". See J. Habermas, *Zur Verfassung Europas. Ein Essay* [About the Constitution: an essay], Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011.

10 See e.g. C. Radaelli, 'Harmful Tax Competition in the EU: Policy Narratives and Advocacy Coalitions', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1999, pp. 661-682.

ments in the political discourse that offer stories, simplified images of reality, that tell us what the European Union is, what it is like, what its problems are and what should be done about them. Since the stories suggested in this discourse are not only related to a chain of interconnected items but to the mere existence, history and overall purpose of the European polity, I suggest to call these – both historical and political narratives *myths*.

As Christopher Flood suggests, “a myth is a narrative, a story which presents a sequence of connected events”.¹¹ There are several definitions available for the concept of political myth other than Flood’s; the basic disagreement among writers seems to be whether political myths necessarily have a “true” basis (Flood’s definitions suggests that they do). George Schöpflin argues that myths provide a group with a story that help a group identify where they have come from and what makes them different from others. These beliefs (*mythos*) do not necessarily have to do with facts or rationality (*logos*). “Myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths (in so far they exist at all), about the ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and natural and others as perverse and alien.”¹²

Political myths are not static by nature: they evolve over time and change according to different influences – political campaigns, elections, scandals, economic processes, international developments; the list is endless. It is more useful to understand myths as a process of continuous work on a pattern that may be subject to change according to the change of circumstances.¹³ Thus, when analysing current myths of the European Union, accordingly, we can only take a snapshot of a certain point in time.

Myths can appear in a number of forms. Politicians may refer to them in speeches, interviews, also in political programmes; artists express them in very different works of art; in the mediatised world of politics, they can be expressed in innumerable forms of photos, clips, logos and other visual images; they can be seen in different rituals,

11 C. Flood, *Political Myths. A Theoretical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 27.

12 G. Schöpflin, ‘The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths’, in: G. Hosking and G. Schöpflin (eds), *The Myths of Nationhood*, London: Hurst & Company 1997, pp. 19-35.

13 H. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, Massachusetts: MIT, 1988.

such as memorial days, celebrations, marches and awards; in social practices such as participation in celebrations (or indeed, elections), support of different decisions, etc.¹⁴ Bennett even argues that myths are practically everywhere to such a degree that they can slip into our unconscious, that they not only influence the way we perceive the world around us but they can be understood as lenses through which we see it.¹⁵ This understanding of political myths also includes the notion that myths are not only rational constructions: emotions are also part of them. As Botticci and Challand put it, “political myths are mapping devices through which we look at the world, feel about it and therefore also act within it as a social group”.¹⁶

As well as being diffuse in appearance, myths also coagulate or crystallize into a few images, icons or stories. Myths can be discussed at length when writers or scholars elaborate on them; however, most can be expressed very briefly, clearly, and, most importantly, understandably to the public. As Bell argues, “Myth serves to flatten the complexity, the nuance, the performative contradictions of human history”.¹⁷ The power of myth lies in the ability to tell a simple story that makes the evolution of a society and its polity intelligible to people.¹⁸ This is why it is possible to use them very expressively using visual communication tools in modern media politics.¹⁹ This “iconic nature” of myths makes them highly visible to the public and also those actors who “use” them but also makes their analysis – especially scientific research – rather difficult. Behind one image, action or political speech, the appearance of a particular myth can be observed but it is hard to prove it was conscious and deliberate.²⁰

Political myths, as stated above, are not static by nature. This notion implies that that one particular myth is, on the one hand, subject to

14 Flood, op. cit., p. 27.

15 L. W. Bennett, ‘Myth, Ritual and Political Control’, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1980, pp. 166-179.

16 C. Botticci and B. Challand, ‘Rethinking Political Myth. The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2006, pp. 315-336.

17 D. Bell, ‘Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology and National Identity’, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2003, pp. 63-81.

18 V. della Sala, ‘Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2010, p. 4.

19 Flood, op. cit., p. 166.

20 Botticci and Challand, op. cit.

change within the framework of a particular narrative, or, on the other hand, it is also possible, that within the same group, an alternative explanation may potentially emerge, offering a different explanation for and about the community. Thus, it may be more precise to call myths accepted by the majority of community as “dominant” myths – since the pluralistic nature of societies necessarily brings about alternatives. Reid argues that emerging alternative explanations of the basic issues in a community – countermyths – have been either ignored or under-researched and under-theorised in the myth literature.²¹

Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist and philosopher, was first to mention the idea on countermyths in his volume “Mythologies”.²² The concept was quoted and partially discussed further by John Fiske who he argued that subcultures in a society offer alternative explanations to those of mainstream (dominant) myths.²³ Mary Sheridan-Rabideau described counter-myths as partly a social action of criticism against competing, mainly dominant, myths and also as the attempt to establish new myths.²⁴ With regard to the function of self-definition (defining “us” and “them” for a community), counter-myths perform a double task: first they reject the definition offered by dominant myths and, second, the communities concerned “accept the counter myth which encodes the identity of a certain group in a way which distinguishes it from the dominant myth discourse”.²⁵

Countermyths undoubtedly challenge dominant myths. They express the need for change; they are able to inspire the tellers of the dominant myths to review their version of why the community belongs together. Countermyths may induce processes where the revision of dominant myths leads to create a more accepted version, or that countermyths can actually “win” and become a dominant narrative in a community.

- 21 J. Reid, *A Theoretical Explanation of the Construction of Counter Myth: a Case Study of Post Apartheid South African Film*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Africa, 2011, http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/5961/dissertation_reid_j.pdf?sequence=1 [2018-05-22].
- 22 R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers, New York: The Noonday Press, 1972.
- 23 J. Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, London: Routledge, 1982, p. 90.
- 24 M. P. Sheridan-Rabideau, ‘The Stuff that Myths Are Made of: Myth Building as Social Action’, *Written Communication*, vol. 18, October 2001, pp. 440-469.
- 25 Reid, op. cit., p. 60.

The statement that the European Union/European Communities have had their political myths when they were established is a subject of debate among scholars. Obradovic argues that the legitimacy crisis of the European project is rooted in the missing myth of origin, that the EU lacks an essentially organic, mythical foundation.²⁶ Most scholars, however, say quite the contrary. Hansen and Williams state that the European project has had its special mythology, although it was intentionally a rather non-political one – the functional, technocratic picture that the EC drew of itself was really a mythical explanation of the birth and nature of the new political community.²⁷ Vincent della Sala argues that the European Union has a strong foundational myth built on humanist values, such as peace, tolerance, diversity, solidarity and progress, going back centuries and with rituals already built around them.²⁸

I argue that currently in the European Union we experience a struggle between dominant myths (those of the EU supporting elite, EU officials, pro-EU academics, and other tellers of the traditional Monnet-Schuman discourse) and countermyths offered by parties and politicians who are usually identified by the increasingly complex “Eurosceptic” attribute. I collected 3 myths and 3 countermyths of the European Union in my previous works in detail²⁹, here I only give brief summaries in order to apply them to the 2018 Hungarian electoral campaign.

The three most important myths are peace, rationality (technocratic nature) and economic success. Peace is considered as the first and key proof of the intention of the Founding Fathers of the European project indicated clearly in the Schuman declaration.³⁰ It says that Europe – especially France and Germany – has learned the lessons of history, the lessons from numerous wars between the two

26 D. Obradovic, 'Policy Legitimacy and the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, June 1996, pp. 191-221.

27 L. Hansen and M. C. Williams, 'The Myths of Europe: Legitimacy, Community and the "Crisis" of the EU', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1999, pp. 233-249.

28 Della Sala, op. cit., p. 11.

29 K. Arató, *Myths and Countermyths in the European Union*, Studies in Public Policy, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 2014; eadem, 'Pros and Cons in The Brexit Campaign: What do They Tell Us About The European Union?', *ELTE Law Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2016, pp. 49-72.

30 Schuman Declaration, 9 May 1950, <http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration/> [2018-05-22].

nations and across the whole Continent over the previous centuries and thus European institutions have been created in order to prevent further tragedies. The myth of rationality suggests that the system of European integration lacked any of the open romantic references to values, political motivations and alike usual in high politics. Hansen and Williams demonstrated that neo-functionalist anti-political sentiments also create their own myth, the myth of rationality.³¹ The elements of this myth are low politics, the community method (or the Monnet-method), where institutions independent of national governments would make rational policy (and not political) decisions, and the idea of efficiency. The economic myth of European integration contains the notion that economic co-operation is the core of the European Communities/Union is the key of European economic growth, prosperity and success and they inevitably lead to a political union. The crisis dating from 2008 that started with the collapse of Lehman Brothers brought to surface the systemic inconsistencies of the Eurozone and negatively affected economic growth and employment. Since economic cooperation – connected to success – is one of the leading myths of the European Union, that had to be very clearly questioned, the economic crisis contributed to the growing distrust of the EU and its institutions.³²

The three countermyths expressing major features of the European with negative connotations and fitting Eurosceptic arguments are lack of democracy, sovereignty takeover and inability to act. According to these arguments, the European Union is not democratic enough and thus its legitimacy is also questionable. This argument is in line with the democracy deficit literature of political science and European studies, however, in the political arena it is used to deligitimize European institutions without reference to the responsibilities of member states (as sole actors in intergovernmental conferences shaping basic treaties). The European Union as an actor taking away national sovereignty has been in the European discourse since the 1960s, then mainly represented by Charles de Gaulle, followed by Margaret

31 Hansen and Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

32 See the latest polls at: European Commission, Public opinion, *Standard Eurobarometer 88. Autumn 2017. First Results*, p. 15, <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2143> [2018-05-22].

Thatcher in the 1980s and all of the brexiteers and other populists in the 2010s. The main argument of this thesis is that the European Union (many times identified with “Brussels”) taking away competences from member states thus preventing them from acting according to their own interests. A bit on the contrary, the countermyth of the EU’s inability to act argues that (whereas the EU is taking away sovereignty from member states) it is too slow and incapable of solving problems quickly and efficiently.

After identifying the current myths (peace, rationality, economic co-operation and success) and countermyths (lack of democracy, threat to national sovereignty and inability to act) of the European Union, it is time to turn to our main subject – how those narratives came up in the Hungarian electoral campaign in spring 2018.

2. The European Union in the 2018 Hungarian electoral campaign

After the 2010 critical elections³³ that resulted for the first time the supermajority of FIDESZ (in alliance with the Christian Democrats, KDNP), the party system turned toward a predominant type³⁴ with a huge FIDESZ in the centre and a divided opposition (more than one small parties on the left and the extreme right Jobbik on the political right). This tendency continued in 2014 and 2018; the following parties could turn votes into mandates in spring 2018:

33 Zs. Enyedi and K. Benoit, ‘Kritikus választás 2010. A magyar pártrendszer átrendeződése a bal-jobb dimenzióban’ [Critical elections 2010. The realignment of the Hungarian party system in the left-right dimension], in: Zs. Enyedi and A. Szabó Andrea, R. Tardos (eds), *Új képlet. Választás Magyarországon 2010*. [New pattern. The 2010 election in Hungary], Budapest: DKMKA – Századvég, 2011, pp. 17-42.

34 G. Ilonszki and A. Schwarz, ‘Hungarian MPs in the context of political transformation (1990-2010)’, in: E. Semenova and M. Edinger, H. Best (eds), *Parliamentary Elites in Central and Eastern Europe: Recruitment and representation*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 54-73.

Table 1: Prime minister candidates, parties and electoral results in the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections (author's compilation on the basis of official electoral results, www.valasztas.hu)

PM candidate	Party	Date of establishment	Ideology	Mandates in 2018 parliament ¹
Viktor Orbán	Fidesz Hungarian Civic Alliance	1988	national conservative ² , right wing populist ³	133
	Christian Democratic People's Party	1989 (1944)	Christian democrat	
Gábor Vona	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for Better Hungary)	2003	right wing/far right	26
Gergely Karácsony	MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party)	1990	social democrat/left	20
	Párbeszéd Magyarországért (Dialogue for Hungary)	2013	left/green (split from LMP)	
Ferenc Gyurcsány	Demokratikus Koalíció (Democratic Coalition)	2011	left (split from MSZP)	9
Bernadett Szel	LMP (Politics can be different)	2009	green	8

¹ Data from official website of the National Election Office, www.valasztas.hu [2018-05-22].

² See e.g. V. Hloušek and L. Kopeček, *Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties: East-Central and Western Europe Compared*, London: Ashgate, 2010, p. 115.

³ E.g. T. Greven, *The Rise of Right-wing Populism in Europe and the United States. A Comparative Perspective*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016, http://www.fesdc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/RightwingPopulism.pdf [2018-05-22].

The five prime minister candidates had very different access to the voters; while FIDESZ had been already campaigning using budget resources for party purposes already before the campaign started in a legally and ownership-wise transformed media environment³⁵, opposition parties started their campaign using limited resources and limited mediaspace starting in the officially campaign-dedicated period.

Key feature of the environment of the electoral discourse was the united/single government presence with Viktor Orbán being the key speaker; while the divided (left-right) opposition was even more fragmented, especially on the left. As shown in Table 1., 3 prime minister candidates were representing four parties on the political left

³⁵ See e.g. G. Polyák, 'Political communication in the Hungarian election campaign', *Univienamedialab*, 4 April 2018, <https://univienamedialab.wordpress.com/2018/04/04/political-communication-in-the-hungarian-election-campaign/> [2018-05-22].

(Bernadett Szél, Ferenc Gyurcsány and Gergely Karácsony), while on the political right Gábor Vona challenged the government.

As indicated above, I analyse the discourse on the European Union in the 2018 spring electoral campaign – I wonder how political actors understood the EU placed in my frame of myths and countermyths. As accepted in discourse analysis, I use representative quotes in order to prove/challenge my hypothesis finding the presence or absence of the myths and countermyths shown in the previous section.³⁶ Before I present my findings, I would like to indicate some practical problems I faced during the building up of the corpus of texts.

The major resource for my analysis was twofold: I intended to re-view electoral programs presenting the essence of priorities in the case of parties and political speeches, especially those of prime minister candidates of the competing parties. In this latter case I chose major speeches – campaign launch and closing speeches and also speeches presented at the occasion of the national holiday (March 15 celebrating the 1848 revolution). This is a rather limited period (the starting date of the campaign was 17 February and the elections were held on 8 April³⁷) especially because the FIDESZ led government has been in constant campaign mode after the breakout of the refugee crisis in 2015 but opposition parties had limited chances and resources to enter the discourse earlier. However, this approach of analysing electoral programs and speeches turned out to be unexpectedly problematic: first, because FIDESZ simply did not publish a programme (just like in 2014) so its picture of the EU was to be known only on the basis of Viktor Orbán's speeches; and second, opposition parties scarcely documented the speeches of their prime minister candidates (most of them are not published in a written form, only available in youtube videos) so in these cases party programs turned out to be a more easily accessible source.

³⁶ Crespy, op. cit., p. 107.

³⁷ The date of the election is defined by the president and all connected dates and deadlines by decree of the Minister of Justice. See: Az igazságügyi miniszter 3/2018. (I.11.) IM rendelete a 2018. április 8. napjára kitűzött országgyűlési képviselő-választás eljárási határidőinek és határnapjainak megállapításáról, <http://www.valasztas.hu/3-2018.-i.11.-im-rendelete-a-2018.-aprilis-8.-napjara-kituzott-oroszaggyulesi-kepviselo-valasztas-eljarasi-hataridoinek-es-hatarnapjainak-megallapitasarol> [2018-05-22].

Myths – the idea of the European Union being the key for peace in Europe (more precisely, among member states), the EU being a non-political and mainly technocratic co-operation and a guarantee for economic success – have been present mainly in the narratives of left wing opposition parties. However, not all of them mentioned them and neither prime minister candidate used this narrative in their speeches – they were solely mentioned in party programmes read by few. The Hungarian Socialist Party (PM candidate Gergely Karácsony) in its party programme stressed the importance of peace brought by European intergation in the very beginning of its programme:

“The citizens of Europe have been living in peace for 72 years. Against all odds, it is clear that the guarantee for peace on our continent is the European Union. This is why all political acts that strengthen the European Union enhance the guarantees for peace. All acts that weaken Europe, threaten peace and prosperity. We, Hungarian socialists, stand for peace and stand for the European Union.”³⁸

While the non-political nature of the European Union as myth was not mentioned, the role of the EU as key for economic success can be found in the electoral programme of the party of Ferenc Gyurcsány (Democratic Coalition):

“Our aim is that Hungary introduces the euro at the earliest possible date in order to enjoy the security and economic advantages of the common currency. [...] We support all initiatives of the European Union that enhances the competitiveness the the European Union and the dvelopment of employment, thus energy union, the use of renewable energy, progressive economic policy, digital economy, the development of the internal market, EU free trade agreements, the youth guarantee programme, climate policy targets.”³⁹

While myth were mentioned in electoral programs of especially left wing opposition parties, they were not mentioned in political speeches. It can be observed however, that Europe and the European Union ap-

38 *Tegyünk igazságot! A DEMOKRATIKUS, EURÓPAI MAGYARORSZÁGÉRT! Választási program* [Electoral programme of the Hungarian Socialist Party], 2018, p. 5, <https://mszp.hu/dokumentumok> [2018-05-22]. Quotes translated by the author except for the speeches of Viktor Orbán as they are available in English.

39 *Sokak Magyarországa. A Demokratikus Koalíció választási programja* [Electoral programme of the Democratic Coalition], <http://www.dkp.hu/SOMA.pdf>, pp. 27-28 [2018-05-22].

peared in their speeches in a very general way. Gergely Karácsony, PM candidate of the Hungarian Socialist Party and Dialogue for Hungary said that the choice for the election is that between “East or West”⁴⁰ the West beigh the symbol of development, modernity and well-being. Bernadett Szél, PM candidate for Polititics Can Be Different (LMP) stressed in her March 15 speech that it is a wrong attitude to consider our allies (the European Union) as enemies, suggested by the Orbán government.⁴¹ Gábor Vona, prime minister candidate of right-wing Jobbik in his campaign-opening speech stressed the same: that Hungary should not quarrel with the European Union but participate in constructive discussions on the future of Europe; that we should fight for a “single-speed Europe” since it is our best interest to belong to the centre. He also underlined the issue of the wage union should that be in the centre of attention (a European Citizen’s Initiative where Jobbik is one of the key participants).⁴²

Countermyths reciting the lack of democracy, the sovereignty-takeover (centralization of power to “Brussels”) the inability of the European Union to act could be identified in the speeches of Viktor Orbán, prime miniszter of the FIDESZ-Christian Democratic Party coalition and in the programme and communication of Jobbik. As stated before, I could only analyse the speeches of Viktor Orbán since electoral programme was not published by his party. Since the Hungarian government used the refugee crisis for political communication purposes (securitization, dissemination of the anti-refugee agenda⁴³) after its breakout in 2015, most of the arguments on the European Union are framed in the context of the migration/refugee crisis in Orbán’s speeches.

40 G. Karácsony, ‘We have to stand on our feet now!’ Speech of Gergely Karácsony for 15 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8NT5tPW-IE> [2018-05-22].

41 B. Szél, *Speech of Bernadett Szél for 15 March 2018*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOH-x5upJN4> [2018-05-22].

42 G. Vona, *Speech of Gábor Vona at the campaign launch of Jobbik 29 January 2018*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxJ6LBiH8Y> [2018-05-22]. See information on the wage union initiative at <https://www.wageunion.eu/en/our-initiative> [2018-05-22].

43 V. Messing and G. Bernáth, *Infiltration of political meaning-production: security threat or humanitarian crisis? The coverage of the refugee ‘crisis’ in the Austrian and Hungarian media in early autumn 2015*, Budapest: CEU SPP Center for Media, Data and Society, 2016, <https://cmds.ceu.edu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/1041/infiltrationofpoliticalmeaningfinalizedweb.pdf> [2018-05-22].

The European Union being a non-democratic polity appeared in the March 15 speech of the prime minister the following way:

“The young of Western Europe will see this when they become minorities in their own countries, and they have lost the only place in the world that could be called home. Forces are appearing, the like of which the world has not seen for a long time. In Africa there will be ten times as many young people as in Europe. If Europe does nothing they will kick down the door on us. Brussels is not defending Europe and it is not halting immigration, but wants to support it and organise it. It wants to dilute the population of Europe and to replace it, to cast aside our culture, our way of life and everything which separates and distinguishes us Europeans from the other peoples of the world. It will be small consolation that the peoples of Europe will not forgive those leaders who completely changed Europe without first asking its people. Let us be proud of the fact that we are the only country in the European Union which has asked people whether or not they want mass immigration.”⁴⁴

He argues that European leaders (“Brussels” is also referred to in the text so the probably Europe and the European Union are interchangeable and can be understood as the subject of the discussion) is not given the mandate to conduct the migration policy they are doing.

The most widely represented countermyth in the electoral campaign was the loss of sovereignty. In this “story” the European Union is an actor that takes away national sovereignty in order to gain more and more power to make member states weaker and build a European superstate. Two prime minister candidates who presented this argument were Gábor Vona (Jobbik) and Viktor Orbán (FIDESZ).

“We are fond of the co-operation between European states and nations but we oppose the creation of a superstate without values. Public opinion polls show that Hungarians oppose the centralization efforts of the European Union. The EU tends to ignore the indication of Brexit but it is too strong of a message to be swept away. The question is: Quo vadis, Europe? This is the last chance to leave the Lisbon road that is

44 Orbán Viktor's ceremonial speech on the 170th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, 15 March 2018, Budapest, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/orban-viktor-s-ceremonial-speech-on-the-170th-anniversary-of-the-hungarian-revolution-of-1848> [2018-05-22].

opposed by the people, that means centralization and dictatorship and instead of a Brussels-centered empire we should create a framework for co-operation that respects the sovereignty of member states.”⁴⁵

Viktor Orbán talks about sovereignty mostly in connection of the European Union in cases combining pro-European approaches with criticisms towards supranationality. In January 2018 at a V4 conference on the future of Europe he said:

“We are pro-Europe politicians, and our goal is for Europe to be stronger. We Hungarians don’t think that it is good to have a debate on whether we need more Europe or less Europe. The objective is to have a stronger Europe. Where there is a need for more Europe, there should be more Europe; and where more national competence is needed, we should let the Member States do their job. The objectives are clear. In our opinion the new blueprint must include a passage about a work-based society, about full employment. We must set a target of returning to the technological forefront by using digitalisation. We think that in the new, large-scale European plan we must have our own defence force, and in this new, large-scale plan we must not talk about a European Empire, nor a United States of Europe, but an alliance of free nations. Competences must be returned to Member States, where they would be in better hands. This is all possible and viable; the only question is whether the European Union will have the right quality of leadership to achieve these objectives.”⁴⁶

While placing national sovereignty to the first place in his speeches, from time to time he addresses the issue of the sovereignty of Europe as well. Before the official 2018 electoral campaign but as part of the “permanent campaign” indicated above, in 2017 in Băile Tuşnad he said:

“Now if we speak about the future of Europe, we must first state in no uncertain terms that in order for Europe to be able to survive and remain the Europeans’ continent, the European Union must regain its sovereignty from the Soros Empire. Until that happens, we have no chance of retaining Europe for the European people. After that, once

45 *Magyar szívvél, józan ésszel, tiszta kézzel. A Jobbik választási programja* [Jobbik electoral programme], 2018, <https://www.jobbik.hu/hireink/a-jobbik-2018-as-valasztasi-programja>, p. 59 [2018-05-22].

46 Viktor Orbán’s speech at the Visegrád Group conference “The Future of Europe”, 26 January 2018, Budapest, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-visegrad-group-conference-the-future-of-europe> [2018-05-22].

we've regained our sovereignty we should reform the European Union. This is not the main topic of my speech today, and so I'll only talk about it in general terms. The first and most important thing is that the European Union's so-called Commission should be redirected to the role designated for it by the Treaties which founded the European Union itself. The Treaties clearly stipulate that the Commission is not a political body. It has a single task, a task which makes it a kind of watch dog: it is the custodian of observance of the Treaties. Therefore, although the nation states delegate commissioners to the Commission, after this their national links are broken, and for as long as they are in the Commission these people are required to ensure that the European Treaties are observed. This is not happening today. The situation today is that the Commission defines itself as a political body. President Juncker himself said that he will establish a political body which will play a political role. This is the source of all the problems, all the problems suffered by the nation states in the European Union today."⁴⁷

In this statement the sovereignty of the European Union and that of member states is interestingly combined. In Orbán's views the sovereignty of Europe should be regained from the Soros empire – that topos have been widely used in the electoral campaign in 2018 George Soros being the main enemy of the governing parties. Member states sovereignty on the other hand, in Orbán's views should be saved from the European Commission that is not fulfilling its original task (being an executor of the treaties, a non-political body – an idea belonging to the mythical narratives) but against the Treaties, it has entered into politics. And this approach already threatens the sovereignty of Member States.

The weakness of Europe (inability to act as the third counter-myths) has also been raised during the 2018 electoral campaign. Connected to the issue of immigration, the weakness of Europe, the "West" was raised:

"If this mass of several hundred million young people is allowed to travel north, then Europe will soon come under horrendous pressure.

47 Viktor Orbán's speech at the 28th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, 22 July 2017, Tusnádfürdő (Băile Tușnad), <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-28th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp> [2018-05-22].

Furthermore, the majority of immigrants will arrive from the Islamic world. If everything continues in this way, then the cities of Europe will clearly have majority Muslim populations – and London will not be an outlier, but a pioneer. If things continue like this, our culture, our identity and our nations as we know them will cease to exist. Our worst nightmares will have become reality. The West will fall, as Europe is occupied without realising it. Will this be a vindication of the views of those who think that civilisations are not killed, but commit suicide? Many believe that even if all this does take place, it will all take a long time. I think that those who believe this are mistaken. Analyses look ahead as far as 2050, and people of my age will reach their eighties at around that time. In other words, we – not to mention our children and grandchildren – may be able to see with our own eyes what direction the future of our Western world has taken.”⁴⁸

When we compare the discourses on the European Union based on the myth/countermyth frame, we need to look at both the form and the content of the message. While certain elements of myths were found in the electoral programmes of the opposition parties, mainly on the political left, it is important to add that apart from a very general pro-European discourse that mainly concentrated on the idealistic “West” they were not at all present in the campaign speeches of the prime minister candidates. On the other hand, countermyths were widely discussed – since electoral programme is non-existent in the case of FIDESZ – in the speeches of Viktor Orbán and from time to time in those of Gábor Vona. While Orbán considers himself a pro-European politician, he does not recite any of the political myths of the EU but all the identified countermyths could be found in his electoral speeches. Jobbik seems to present a bit of both approaches: while expecting a lot from the economic success of the European Union – especially considering their wage union project that was widely advertised before the electoral campaign – they share Orbán’s views in considering the European Union as a major threat to national sovereignty.

48 Viktor Orbán’s “State of the Nation” address, 18 February 2018, Budapest, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address> [2018-05-22].

Conclusions

I stressed in this article that political myths are key in the understanding of a political system. Since the EU is also a *sui generis* political system, I argued that it is possible to identify the myths that explain the existence and the nature of the EU. However, I also argued that this traditional understanding is challenged by countermyths that have developed in the previous decades.

These stories are present in member states politics as well – politicians in electoral situations more and more frequently talk about not only the future of their country but the place of their country in Europe and the future of Europe as well. I argued in this paper that during the 2018 parliamentary election campaign in Hungary myths about the European Union (peace, economic prosperity and technocracy) were mainly represented by electoral programmes of opposition parties on the left but they were not present in the public discourse – political speeches – that reach the electorate more directly. On the other hand, countermyths were widely presented in speeches – especially in those of Viktor Orbán – in full scale.

These findings lead to several further research questions. How can we connect the spreading countermythology of the European Union to euroscepticism? How are countermyths connected to the growing populism in the European Union? Does/will this process affect European identity? Will the more and more frequently told countermyths (and untold myths) lead to the stable decrease of the public (and elite) support for European project?

Mark Laity, head of Strategic communications at NATO's military headquarters gave a public lecture in February 2018 for the British Political Studies Association titled "How history, myths and narratives drive our decisions"⁴⁹. Among other things, he quoted Daniel Kahnemann: "Noone ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story". Laity added: "Story is what motivates us, stories are what make us go. And if we don't have those stories, then we'll find some-

49 M. Laity, *Storytelling and Politics: How History, Myths and Narratives Drive Our Decisions*, British Library – Political Studies Association lecture 19 February 2018, <https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/storytelling-and-politics-how-history-myths-and-narratives-drive-our-decisions> [2018-05-22].

body else's story". If myths of the European Union are not told, but countermyths are, the latter will take the lead.

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