

Putin's Unintentional Contribution to a Federal Europe



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JÁNOS
KÁRPÁTI

At the time of writing this article, a brutal military aggression by Russia on Ukraine is underway. How this war will end is still unclear, although Russian military superiority is evident, and NATO – in order to avoid a third world war – is not engaging in a direct fight against Russia. Nevertheless, Western nations are granting military support to Ukraine, and early assessments of a quick Russian military victory in a “Blitzkrieg” have proven to be unfounded.

Irrespective of the final outcome of this war, however, Vladimir Putin’s decision to attack a sovereign European country seems to have cemented Western cohesion on the old continent – both rhetorically and practically. The depth of new sanctions against Russia are unprecedented. It remains to be seen how effective these sanctions are going to be, but the direction is clear: Europe speaks almost with one voice.

This phenomenon will have an inevitable impact on the ideas of the European future as well. Those favoring deeper integration and unity in a more federal Europe – especially those who say there is an urgent need for a really common European foreign, security, and defense policy – are going to have fresh arguments against the advocates of a Europe of sovereign nations when they hint at the Russian threat.

Nevertheless, the war in Ukraine cannot be considered as the single turning point in the rivalry between these two concepts: it only strengthens a trend – or eventually even crowns a process – which can be observed since the elections to the European Parliament in 2019, when Eurosceptic parties performed below their expectations and the hopes of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to build a strong group of rightist parties on the European level were crushed.

ILLIBERALISM AND EUROSCEPTICISM

Viktor Orbán plays a unique role in the struggle between the two main European concepts mentioned above, which, with some simplification, can be referred to as *integrationist* and *Eurosceptic* concepts. PM Orbán’s narrative of sovereign European nations is connected with his illiberal state slogan and, what is even more important, with his illiberal practices.

Western European Eurosceptic forces are not in power at the present time and the upcoming French presidential election does not foretell a change either. Being in opposition, these forces evidently do not advocate the weakening of checks and balances and do not say they would undermine the rights of minority groups, the rule of law, or the foundations of liberal democracy. They criticize (and sometimes even attack) the Brussels bureaucracy and say more power should remain in the competence of member states. Their concerns are largely related to the handling of migration, reflecting

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a strong opposition to the alleged multiculturalism of Brussels¹.

This attitude can be illustrated for example by an article of *The Independent*, dated April 18, 2017, stating that Marine Le Pen has claimed she will “protect France” with a vow to suspend immigration and defend the country against the threat of “savage globalization”².

The rise of Euroscepticism was primarily caused by the refugee wave in 2015, and its decline can be attributed to the easing of this phenomenon. (The war in Ukraine may change that.) Eurosceptics may be more

radical or less radical in demanding *less Europe*, but they do not demand *less democracy*, at least not in general terms³. The principle of subsidiarity, i.e., attributing more importance to the lower decision-making layers, e.g., that regions can be, theoretically, a useful answer to several – though not all – questions raised by Euroscepticism, as it is usually understood in Western Europe. This is not the case with Orbán’s Euroscepticism mixed with illiberalism.

Without going into sophisticated details of what Fereed Zakaria wrote about the illiberal state, we can conclude that Viktor Orbán’s definition is twofold: his illiberalism is the opposition of liberal democracy as a political structure on the one hand and the opposition of liberal political forces on the other hand. Against liberal democracy, his offer is the so-called “regime of national collaboration”⁴ with strong leadership – in his words: “the central force field”⁵ – which practically means the lack of checks and balances. A remaining democratic component is that elections still exist, although the circumstances are far from fair. Against liberal parties, Orbán’s offer is conservatism, with an emphasis on the traditional values of Christianity.

Orbán does not make a clear difference between these two layers. According to his narrative, as it is repeatedly reflected in his speeches, liberal democracy means liberals hold power, which would mean that liberals are happy only if they are in power⁶. In his

³ It must be noted, however, that certain democratic backsliding could be observed in Italy concerning the human rights of refugees during the period when Matteo Salvini’s League party was in power.

⁴ https://www.academia.edu/35905650/The_name_of_the_game_The_Regime_of_National_Collaboration

⁵ <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-on-hir-tv-s-versus-programme>

¹ See: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-elections-latest-marine-le-pen-immigration-suspend-protect-france-borders-front-national-fn-a7689326.html>

² Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.



THE LESS INTEGRATION, THE MORE ROOM FOR MANEUVERING FOR ILLIBERAL PRACTICES

eyes, Christian democrats, if they are happy in a liberal democracy, are not really Christian democrats; in fact, they have given up their principles and deferred to the will of liberals. This came up several times in his speeches after Fidesz had to leave the European People's Party. Orbán says he wants to build a Christian democracy, but it is not equal to Christian democrats holding governmental power in a liberal democracy. Instead, it means his democracy is not liberal, but Christian – or, with another word, *illiberal*.

This play upon words has an important role in the domestic political communication of Fidesz, the governing party, because it creates confusion over the meaning of 'Christian democracy'. It implies you either have liberalism or Christian democracy, and so politics is about who can be victorious over the rivals, once and for all.

UNDERSTANDING ILLIBERALISM

It is important to note that Viktor Orbán used the term *illiberalism* for the first time in July 2014, i.e., after the Russian annexation of Crimea and before the first refugee wave. This fact indicates that illiberalism was not an answer to the migration crisis – it was already an existing tool to handle

the migration crisis in Orbán's hands. It also indicates that promoting the idea of illiberalism may have been inspired, at least partly, by Vladimir Putin's – then successful – move against Ukraine.

The question arises of whether illiberalism can be an acceptable alternative model to liberal democracy within the European Union, which is essentially based upon liberal democracy. In my assessment, the answer can only be yes in the case of the level of European integration being very weak and the idea of a Europe of sovereign nations being widely accepted.

The less integration, the more room for maneuvering for illiberal practices. If we realize this, it is clear that for Orbán, the Eurosceptic model for the future of Europe is a must if he wants to maintain the legitimacy of his illiberal state within the Union. (I do not speculate if he wants to remain in the EU at all.) PM Orbán must play on the European field if he wants to secure the foundations of his regime at home. And, in order to play on the European field, he needs allies.

Concerning Western ideological allies, Zoltan Bretter in his essay about the regime of national collaboration writes:

"It has all started with a reinterpretation of the meaning of 1968. Following Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign speech, as he was running for presidency in France in May, Viktor Orbán delivered his lecture on July 21, 2007. (...) According to both politicians, 1968 was a counter-revolution that "«shook the very foundations of traditional politics». The leaders of this counterrevolution declared that in order to achieve complete individual freedom the individual must be freed of all ties (...) one must free oneself of the ties that bind the individual to nation, family, language and sexual orientation. (...) However,

*as the counter-revolution, perceived as a creative force behind culture, is by now defunct, the new era of traditionalist politics will regain its leading role in shaping the future of Europe.*⁷

In 2007, Orbán was not a prime minister any more (he had lost the elections in 2002 and 2006), nor was he a prime minister yet – to be reelected with a constitutional majority in 2010. He was working on returning to power and, as part of this preparation process, he engaged himself with traditionalism with this lecture.

The reference to this speech may explain the emphasis on *traditionalist politics* but it does not give an answer to the *less Europe* demand, since, in theory, traditionalism in itself could also be one of the contenders aspiring for the position of the mainstream course in Europe. If traditionalism was the mainstream course within the EU, traditionalists would not need to be Eurosceptic – on the contrary, they would advocate as much integration as possible.

Indeed, Euroscepticism for Orbán is only “the next best thing”. From the mid-2010s, he tried to lead a European traditionalist attack against the EU, which he branded as unfaithful to the traditional Christian roots. However, as a result of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, he had to realize that the expected breakthrough did not take place – the People’s Party (moderate right) and the social democrats (moderate left), together with the Renew faction (liberals), have preserved their majority. Orbán was forced to retreat, and – instead of trying to play a dominant role over Europe – he attempted to gain control over the Visegrad

⁷ Bretter Z. (2013) *The Name of the Game: The Regime of National Collaboration – Hungary and Poland in Times of Political Transition. Selected Issues*, a doctoral dissertation, Pająk-Patkowska, B. and M. Rachwał (eds.), Department of Political Studies, University of Pécs.



PM ORBÁN MUST PLAY ON THE EUROPEAN FIELD IF HE WANTS TO SECURE THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIS REGIME AT HOME

Group, composed, apart from Hungary, of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

The common denominator between these four countries is that they are relatively new eastern member states, and thus net beneficiaries of EU funds. Now, the real question is if this common denominator can be a sound foundation of an alternative vision of the European future, opposing the mainstream European project.

THE HISTORICAL TURNING POINT: MAASTRICHT

In a speech delivered on June 19, 2021, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán summarized his views on the future of Europe in seven key points. His basic statement was that the continent is heading towards an empire-style European Union. In his view, today’s Brussels is being guided by those who see integration not as a *means*, but rather as a *goal*, a goal for its own sake. PM Orbán claimed that

“Brussels has outsourced a considerable portion of its power and has handed it over

to networks organized and controlled from outside Europe, primarily to the Soros networks and the Democrats of the US behind them.”⁸

He stated that without a common economic success the European Union will fall apart and argued that the next decade would be a period of dangerous challenges: mass migration, epidemics, and pandemics.

Furthermore, he also sharply criticized EU institutions – especially the European Parliament, saying it has proved to be “a dead-end street as regards European democracy.”⁹ His last, “*ceterum censeo*” message touched upon EU enlargement: Serbia must be admitted, he demanded.

Most of these views (and the conclusions PM Orbán drew from them) originated from domestic political considerations. They were basically designed to give a Eurosceptic foundation to his illiberal practices in domestic politics, with the aim of extending his power. He needed to collect arguments against an *enemy* in order to mobilize his supporters, claiming there was a permanent *freedom fight* underway against Brussels and that he himself was the champion of this fight.

As pointed out above, Viktor Orbán was originally not interested in the future of Europe – he was simply interested in keeping power and building in Hungary a firm legal and political structure, his infamous *illiberal democracy*. Brussels, however, was a troubling and more or less hindering factor in building the illiberal state, with different rule-of-law requirements. As a consequence, the headquarters of the EU proved to be an ideal *piñata*. PM Orbán’s vision is

⁸ <https://primeminister.hu/vikstories/viktor-orbans-address-conference-entitled-free-thirty-years>

⁹ Ibid.



TRADITIONALISM IN ITSELF COULD ALSO BE ONE OF THE CONTEND- ERS ASPIRING FOR THE POSI- TION OF THE MAIN- STREAM COURSE IN EUROPE

a European Union not strong enough to defend the rule of law, but generous enough to finance underdeveloped economies in eastern member states.

This leads us to partially understand why Orbán has so strongly emphasized the Serbian accession to the EU. Hungary, Serbia’s geographical neighbor, would evidently highly benefit from Serbian membership – but this is not the only reason. It may be equally important for PM Orbán to have one more illiberal leader – Aleksandar Vucic, the president of Serbia – among the members of the European Council.

The added value Vucic would represent within the EU in Orbán’s eyes is especially important if we consider that the Serbian leadership has traditionally had a close relationship with Russia. The Hungarian Prime Minister’s most reliable partner within the EU has been Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the *de facto* leader of Poland. Kaczynski shares – and in a certain respect even exceeds –



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Orbán's conservatism, traditionalism, and his resistance to the European rule-of-law requirements. On the other hand, he definitely does not share Orbán's friendship with Vladimir Putin and the Hungarian government's so-called 'Opening to the East'.

If Viktor Orbán wants to avoid being disciplined in the EU for violating the rule of law, he may count on the Polish veto. But if the Hungarian PM is trying to keep his attachment to his pro-Russian stance, Poland would not stand by him. With Serbian EU membership, Orbán would be in a stronger position within the European Union. The fact that this Serbian accession has not

moved forward as speedily as desired is rather painful for Orbán now since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, let us return to the impact of this invasion later.

Looking back, Viktor Orbán's *freedom fight* narrative, which narrowly preceded the migration crisis and practically coincided with Russia's renewed aggressive behavior in the middle of the previous decade, was received by an unexpectedly broad audience. It was strengthened with similar voices heard in several European countries,¹⁰ demanding a halt and even the reversal of the integration process, claiming for less Europe and more sovereignty of free European nations. In most EU member states, however, as already pointed out, these tendencies could not break through and did not become the mainstream political *credo*.

In the academic sphere, supporters of PM Orbán's different vision for Europe usually suggest the return to the times before the Maastricht Treaty. Why Maastricht? Because the Treaty on European Union concluded in 1992 was the turning point in European integration and a presage of a federal Europe. In this Dutch university town, the member states of the European Communities founded the European Union with provisions for a shared European citizenship and the introduction of a single currency, among others.

Former Czech President and Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, a recognized economist, expressed several times his views on how Europe, in his opinion, lost its way with the Maastricht (and later the Lisbon) Treaty. In his speech entitled "The EU Is Not Europe",¹¹ he wrote that both the Maastricht and the Lisbon Treaty (signed in 2007)

¹⁰ For example, France, Italy, the Netherlands, etc.

¹¹ Center for Financial Studies, Goethe University (2019) *CFS Presidential Lectures*, Frankfurt, March 12. Available [online]: <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/4374>

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brought about significant changes in the EU (originally EC) arrangements: *“Both of these treaties (...) were in my opinion historic mistakes. They transformed the original concept of integration into something else, into unification”* [bold in the original]. These treaties, he argued, pushed the heterogeneous community of sovereign European states into a union of subordinated regions and provinces, and they *“substantially augmented the power of the bureaucratic central agency in Brussels.”*¹²

Moreover, Klaus added that the treaties *“suppressed democracy and turned it into a post-democracy (misleadingly called liberal democracy).”*¹³ He also stated that instead of facilitating the mutually advantageous cooperation of European countries,

unification measures – not respecting economic realities – created deep disparities inside Europe:

*“Another unification measure, the liquidation of internal borders inside Europe, was supposed to facilitate the movements of the Europeans inside Europe and to create a new European Man, Homo Europeus [bold by the author]. It had an important side-effect. It led to the mass migration of non-Europeans who mostly didn't come to Europe as future Europeans (...), who don't intend to be assimilated and who don't want to accept European culture, religion, values, habits, ways of life.”*¹⁴

With this latter sentence quoted, Klaus essentially claims that cultural diversity in Europe is an illusion. He totally neglects the positive experiences of Germany and several other European countries concerning the inclusion of newcomers. He tries to attribute general relevance to extreme cases which, by their nature, always attract more attention in the media than the cases of non-existent successful inclusion.

The claims of Vaclav Klaus give a nearly complete toolbox of argumentation against the further deepening of European integration, which has been regularly repeated by Eurosceptic politicians in different EU countries. There is, however, a big difference between western and eastern member states with respect to the necessary or ideal level of EU financing projects. *Less Europe* in the frugal northwest usually goes hand in hand with *less money*, as it was reflected in several statements of, e.g., Dutch and Swedish government politicians, while certain eastern leaders would like to combine *less Europe with more money*. But it is not true for all eastern leaders. The picture is changing constantly and, since the beginning of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.



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Putin's war in Ukraine, this change has been dramatic.

V4 IS FAR FROM BEING HOMOGENEOUS

The most important country in the Visegrad Group is Poland where, in October 2015, the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) won an absolute majority in the Polish elections, and successfully established an illiberal one-party government. As Daniel Hegedüs reminded us in his 2018 essay,¹⁵ according to the already announced guideline "Budapest on the Vistula", the new Polish government, officially led by Prime Minister Beata Szydło but practically under the control of PiS Party Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński, had promptly attacked the country's Constitutional Tribunal and the media.

¹⁵ Hegedüs D. (2018) "Responding to Illiberal Democracies' Shrinking Space for Human Rights in the EU", [in]: *Will Human Rights Survive Illiberal Democracy?*, Muis A. and L. van Troost (eds), Amnesty International Netherlands.

"It introduced illiberal state-building and a deconstruction of constitutional checks and balances second to none in the European Union. With two member states in the EU characterized by illiberal democratic backsliding, the sanctioning of these countries for their democratic and rule of law non-compliance with European standards became nearly impossible, at least according to the literal interpretation of Article 7 TEU."¹⁶

The situation did not change much until recently. Poland and Hungary faced several infringement procedures and rule of law procedures in the EU institutions, and, last year, they went hand in hand to the European Court of Justice unsuccessfully seeking a remedy against a new conditionality mechanism.

Nevertheless, Warsaw and Budapest are evidently not considered to be outsiders and thus excluded from – or at least restricted from participating in – the debates about the future of the EU. As Gabor Halmai puts it in his 2018 essay, at the end of the day,

"the use of spending conditionality depends on the political will of the EU institutions, as well as on the future of the EU. (...) Concerning the future of the EU, the scenarios of the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe published on 1 March 2017 neither regarding general oversight mechanisms, nor particularly regarding financial sanctions seem to provide institutional guarantees against illiberal member states within the EU. Similarly, the Commission's Reflection paper on the deepening of the economic and monetary union suggests to strengthen the Eurozone governance, and leave the rest, including Hungary and Poland with their rule of law,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

*democracy and fundamental rights deficits behind.*¹⁷

PM Orbán has found a common language especially with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. On April 1, 2021, the two heads of governments met with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in Budapest. According to the report of *MTI-Hungary Today*, Orbán said they had agreed to get involved in the debates about the future of Europe and prepare a programme. *“The debate will be a good opportunity to promote and strengthen our values in Europe,”* he said. Orbán explained the timing of the meeting with Morawiecki and Salvini by the fact that *“Fidesz decided to quit the European People’s Party (EPP).”*¹⁸

Viktor Orbán described PM Morawiecki as Hungary’s most faithful friend¹⁹. In a press statement, Morawiecki said they have trust in the future of Europe and the European Union and hold the firm conviction that they together would be able to build a road for Europe. European integration can further develop but *“for it to bear healthy fruits, its roots should not be neglected either,”*²⁰ the Polish prime minister said, stressing the need to return to Europe’s Christian roots. He added that they believed Europe was “completely disintegrated” and damaged by various forces. The Brussels elite views Europe as a project for elite groups, he said,

¹⁷ Halmi, G. (2018) “How the EU Can and Should Cope with Illiberal Member States”, [in]: *Quaderni Costituzional*, Vol. 38, pp. 334-335.

¹⁸ Hegedüs D. (2018) “Responding to Illiberal Democracies’ Shrinking Space for Human Rights in the EU”, [in]: *Will Human Rights Survive Illiberal Democracy?*, Muis, A. and L. van Troost (eds.), Amnesty International Netherlands.

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²⁰ Ibid.



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adding that “we would like to represent a wide range of people.”²¹

Nevertheless, Warsaw and Budapest could not count on the full support of Prague and Bratislava in the debate about the future of

²¹ <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-morawiecki-salvini-budapest/>

Europe. In the Czech Republic, during the previous years of Andrej Babiš's government, Eurosceptic tendencies strengthened considerably but after the elections in October 2021, Petr Fiala became the new Prime Minister and he formed a government coalition of pro-European parties.

An article of *Politico's* European edition dated January 7, 2022 wrote about the growing divergence between Poland and Hungary – dropping fast in most measures of what makes a liberal democracy – and Slovakia and the Czech Republic, both of which have seen recent government changes, sending them back into the EU mainstream. The article quoted Czech MEP Tomas Zdechovsky, a member of the center-right coalition party KDU-CSL, saying the new Czech government will prioritize relations with Slovakia and Poland, and will focus more on dialogue with Austria and Germany than the previous administration²².

As for the Slovak position, it was highlighted in a report of the European University Institute about the lecture by Ivan Korcok, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, held on November 22, 2021. Korcok was quite clear, saying that *"without rule of law there is no European Union, everything we have achieved so far is based on the Rule of Law. [...] One should not question this basic principle on which the European Union has been built."* Minister Korcok added *"from the perspective of my country, a Central European country, there is no better tool than trying to agree on common European solutions."*²³

We can conclude that different positions exist in the four Visegrad countries to-

²² <https://www.politico.eu/article/central-europe-divided-visegrad-v4-alliance/>

²³ <https://www.eui.eu/news-hub?id=slovakian-minister-ivan-korcok-joins-the-conversation-on-the-future-of-europe>



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wards the idea of Europe. The Czech Republic often identifies itself as part of the West, irrespective of its geographic location. Slovakia, the only country which has already introduced the euro, is somewhat more traditional and perhaps less open to the so-called 'Multikulti', but it is definitely pro-Western now. Poland and Hungary have heated rule of law debates with Brussels, but Warsaw's strong anti-Kremlin sentiments bring Poland closer to European countries that try to build a stronger European identity. Hungary, Poland's traditional friend, nevertheless, lags behind.

UKRAINE: A FRIEND IN NEED

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has dramatically changed the possible future posture of Europe on the global scene. We are in the midst of warfare in Ukraine at the present time and, in this situation, it is

too early to tell what the world will look like after the end of the fights. In any case, it is highly probable that without an eventual power change in Moscow, the relationship of Europe with Russia is going to be hostile. This is also true for the relationship between the United States and Russia. Europe will supposedly regain its importance in American strategic thinking.

Transatlantic solidarity is going to be strengthened, and there will be attempts to solidify cohesion among EU member states. If bipolar international order returns at least to the European continent, it will be extremely difficult – if not impossible – for the Hungarian government to maintain any ambiguity concerning its priorities. Viktor Orbán has been looked upon as Vladimir Putin's most important ally within the EU. This cannot be continued any longer and all EU member states, including Hungary, must take sides.

This new development does not necessarily undermine the very existence and the rivalry of alternative concepts in the European future. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly makes it difficult to argue against deeper integration – or at least coordination – in foreign, security, and defense policy.

At the same time, however, Vladimir Putin's war has highlighted the problems originating from the very different level of energy dependence in individual member states from Russia. This has provoked intensive discussions about possible means of answering this challenge and developing common European resilience. These debates reflect the fact that the debate about the future of the EU has swiftly – at least temporarily – changed its character. At the moment, it is not about theoretical institutional frameworks in a broader sense, but about practical steps to be taken without delay.



THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE HAS DRAMATICALLY CHANGED THE POSSIBLE FUTURE POSTURE OF EUROPE ON THE GLOBAL SCENE

Another special aspect of this whole complexity brought to the surface with the war is the question of the eventual creation of a European army. The Russian aggression has brutally raised the awareness of the military threat to Europe's security, but it remains to be seen what countermeasures can be expected. NATO member states on the eastern flank would clearly prefer increased American military presence, while in Western Europe the French concept of the EU's strategic sovereignty has considerable support. In the short term, at least, American deterrent build-up seems to be an adequate answer to the Russian challenge.

The European Union did not only condemn the Kremlin's behavior with the strongest possible terms, but also decided to introduce sanctions against Russia on an unprecedented scale, in several steps following each other. Hungary has been among the few EU member states to oppose



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sanctions in the energy sector. It is understandable if we take into account that more than 80% of Hungary's gas consumption comes from Russia, while the EU average is 40%. As for sending weapons to Ukraine, it is again Hungary's refusal that is breaking the ranks, while Poland, with bitter historical experiences of Russian – not only Soviet but also Tsarist – oppression, is a fully dedicated supplier. In the Polish media, critical voices can be heard recently towards Orbán's government.

Nothing of these Polish-Hungarian tensions is touched upon in recent political declarations of the Visegrad Four. In their joint statement after their talks in London with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson

on March 8, 2022, the leaders of V4 condemned "Russia's aggression" against Ukraine. *"Together we offer our full support to the government and people of Ukraine as they stand up for the sovereignty of their country,"* the leaders added²⁴.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the common denominator of the Visegrad countries does not give a solid foundation for this group to promote a coherent and viable alternative scenario for the future of the EU. If there was any real chance at all for opposing the mainstream European integration project, for advocating a loose cooperation of sovereign nation states within the EU, Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine swept it away overnight.

CONCLUSIONS

Even without the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European landscape did not offer too many chances for Euroscepticism, mainly because there exists no clear and comprehensive alternative vision to the integration efforts. Different Eurosceptic players cannot agree exactly on what kind of 'Brussels centralization' they should fight against.

Hungary and Poland do not want to accept all European rule-of-law requirements – in this sense, they can be qualified as 'sovereignists' – but they claim they are entitled to receive EU funds without any restrictions. However, a certain level of funding requires an adequate level of integration, and in this respect, Warsaw and Budapest are rather 'integrationalists.'

The V4 countries do not want to accept migrants from Asia and Africa. The Ukrainian refugee wave has not changed this hesitance, and Hungary's unlawful border practices in the south remain in place. The

²⁴ https://twitter.com/V4_PRES

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Each EU country has certain national interests and priorities. They support integration when they see it helps these national interests. Euroscepticism usually prevails only occasionally and in restricted topics. Fragmentation, *per definitionem*, does not constitute a complex idea of Europe.

Visegrad Four's 'solidarity' definition is highly restrictive, while they claim EU support for border defense should be much more extensive.

Nevertheless, even in Italy during the Salvini era, there was a kind of dichotomy to be observed. Italy wanted to push back migrants, which was an act of the denial of solidarity – and thus it contradicted integration – while Rome wanted other European countries to show solidarity and accept migrants to be resettled.



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JÁNOS
KÁRPÁTI

.....
A Hungarian journalist. A former Brussels correspondent of Hungarian public media. At present, a regular contributor to Hungarian independent radio station KLUBRÁDIÓ