

THE CONSOLIDATION OF POLARIZATION. HUNGARIAN DISCOURSES ON MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT: *What discursive structures, interactions, and related material conditions have helped in the consolidation of polarization and the rise of an extreme nationalist counter-hegemony related to migration discourses? Utilizing Karl Polanyi's conceptual framework, we advance a strong hypothesis that general marketization and market utopias have led to opposition among pro-market utilitarian, pro-EU, and nationalist anti-migrant and anti-liberal EU discourses. It seems that, in this, the change in migration processes themselves could be an important factor as they have embodied many of the tensions and contradictions of the neoliberal era.*

However, we need to focus on how to locate the exact historically evolving mechanisms linking marketization with polarization and the rise of the counter-hegemony of anti-migrant nationalism. In this complex realm, we also need to focus on the discursive mechanisms whose own autonomous and immanent role played out in interaction with material processes and conditions. In this paper, we focus on Hungary, which has become an exemplar in terms of the establishment of counter-hegemonic anti-migrant nationalist discourses as opposed to the pro-European managed migration discourses of the 2010s.

The analysis is based on 91 systematically selected articles from the overall pool in the period between July 2021 and March 2022. At the end of the paper, we briefly discuss, based on a few preliminary results, how public opinion approves of, follows, or has an alternative view concerning the discursive functioning of the media.

KEYWORDS: *migration, rules of silence, counter-hegemony, liberal managed Europe, civilizational slope*

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INTRODUCTION

Hungary has become a key country in the intensifying debate over migration. This is clear not only in everyday politics, where the Hungarian government loudly and openly takes one side in international and local debates but also in the fact that since 2002, according to the European Social Survey, the Hungarian public, together with many East European countries, has been extremely negative with regard to taking immigrants from non-European countries (Melegh 2023, 262; Messing-Ságvári 2017, 2019). Concerning media discourses, we have repeated evidence that Hungarian media discourses have overwhelmingly framed the immigration of asylum seekers as a danger in terms of cultural and security concerns (Bernáth-Messing, 2016; Sík 2016). We also have evidence that the Hungarian media is more polarized and compares its views via “positioning” *vis-à-vis* other nations (Maneri, 2023; Melegh et al. 2019).

When we try to identify how discourses evolve, we need to have a complex strategy, including integrating material structures and processes into our analysis (Fairclough 2001). Very often, authors argue that such developments are simply the results of the instrumentalization and normalization of certain discourses to achieve certain goals, mainly associated with populist nationalism transgressing previously upheld norms (Wodak 2015). Some other authors speak about moral panic buttons, thus about the instrumental use of such types of reactions (Sík 2016; Lázár-Sík 2019). Several scholars also claim this is part of the authoritarian turn, managed from above based on political rationality.

These lines of argumentation, of course, capture certain elements, but here, we not only miss the role of non-right-wing discourses (i.e., those generally termed “liberal discourses”) and the interactions with them but an analysis of the complex process of historical development is lacking, without which we cannot see how various hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discursive blocks emerge and develop. This is a complex task, and we can solve only some elements of it here, although we will make reference to some factors that are not elaborated here. Thus, when we analyze Hungarian discourses, we need to look at various historically evolving structures and discursive frames about migration, the idea of Europe, and Europeanization. We also need to link cognitive patterns to overall economic and social change. Thus, this paper has three theoretical perspectives from which we analyze developments.

First is the postcolonial theory of the cultural hegemony of Europe as applied to Eastern Europe, as developed by various authors (for an overview, see Kołodziejczyk and Huigen 2023). The key element of this perspective is the analysis of a longer-term hierarchical imagination according to which, from the 19th century onward, different colonized or previously colonized parts and

people of the world have been portrayed as necessarily subjugated to European rule and guidance due to their cognitive and social inferiority (Said 1978; Spivak and Mignonolo 2001). This hierarchical imagination within Europe could also be detected from the 19th century onward, although in this case, Eastern Europe and the Balkans have been seen as being ordered as an in-between area between Europe and non-Europe (Wolf 1994; Todorova 1997). This idea can be termed the “civilizational slope,” and it appears directly in various Eurocentric population discourses (Melegh 2006). In this theorizing, Böröcz focused on the monopolization of “goodness” on behalf of Western Europe and specifically the EU, including the humanitarianism of receiving immigrants, which needs to be followed by that of “inferior” East Europeans (Böröcz 2000, 2005).

This constructed cultural dominance leads to specific reactions by East European actors and speakers, who may accept but can also challenge this dominance. These patterns have also descended into the popular imagination, and imagining development hierarchically may be identified from public opinion surveys in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria just before the so-called refugee crisis (Kiss 2017; Melegh et al. 2016). This phenomenon may also be demonstrated, especially with regard to migration, and the material below gives ample evidence of anti-dominance protests against Brussels and Europe. Within the context of joining and maneuvering within the EU, East European nationalisms have led actors to resist being seen as second-class European nations to be governed by other parts of the world. The questioning of European dominance has become a key tenet of rising nationalism in the form of authoritarian tendencies in some East European countries (Krastev, 2022; Melegh, 2006, 2023). This hierarchical rule is associated with various other rules (for instance, that of pro-Europeanness), structures a complex set of sayable and not-sayable topics, and fosters a set of maneuvering techniques on behalf of the interacting elites.

It has also been demonstrated that migration has been a divisive issue in population discourses as it has been able to create two competing, in some sense, Eurocentric blocks with clear lines stretching back into history (Melegh 2023). One is a pro-market and pro-migration block promoted by major institutions of global capitalism like the World Bank in the name of market rationality, and the other is the so-called anti-migrant nationalist block, which disputes the scale and the selection possibilities associated with the migration process that promote both the dominance and the interests of Europe and the West (Melegh 2023).

The second perspective is to find linkages that explain why such discursive mechanisms, especially the ones that challenge it, prevail or become dominant. In this respect, we utilize the insights of Karl Polanyi, who argued that periods of

market utopias are followed by certain double movements, including nationalism (Polanyi 2001, 1945/2018). The more exact historical material background of this rise of nationalism and the decline of pro-European liberalism has been developed in several publications (Kalb 2011; Hann 2019; Fábry 2019; Mihályi-Szelényi 2019; Messing-Ságvári 2017, 2019, Andor 2017; Böröcz-Sarkar 2017). Also related to migration, and as an explanation, authors have repeatedly pointed at unequal economic and social exchanges between different parts of Europe, the revolt of the nation-state against the opening up of markets and the marketization of societies, a lack of trust in state authority and political institutions, income and welfare gaps. In addition, concerning migration, extremely negative public opinion has been measured on a regional level, especially in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Estonia, where demographic decline and relatively strong fears of competition from immigrants have all contributed to a rising panic and blaming of Western Europe for “increasing and forcing” immigration onto fragile East European nations (Melegh 2023).

The third perspective is polarization and the development of discourses. Here, we operate with two insights. The first is closely related to the emergence of an abstract concept of migration, which is related to an abstract evaluation of the utility and the overall value of migrants, mainly related to the perceived market-related “demand and supply” problem with the labor force (Melegh 2023). This marketization (reification) of migration is important as its abstraction as a socially constructed concept allows it to be easily misused in polarized debates (through selecting and vilifying elements to represent the whole) and can lead to the radicalization of those forces that would make use, either negatively or positively, of these wider processes and related fears for political purposes (Wodak 2015). This process has been especially successful in transgressing norms and values institutionalized in asylum and migratory regulations.

The second insight is related to the polarization of political systems and media. In this respect, Hallin and Mancini introduced very important arguments in their classic book on comparing media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In this, they claim that in systems of polarized pluralism, there is a lot of political parallelism, and the media becomes highly politicized and a key instrument of the political struggle itself. Hungary clearly fits this pattern, and this development has become very important in the steps toward an authoritarian turn (Polyák-Urbán 2024).

Together with this complex set of analytical angles and perspectives, this paper intends to clarify what discursive structures, interactions, and related material conditions have helped consolidate the polarization of discursive blocks and explain the rise of an extreme nationalist counter-hegemony as related to the discursive linkages between Europe, Europeanization, and migration. The

paper argues that the consolidation of polarization is the result of materially conditioned specific linkages between the symbolic use of imagined hierarchies and the manipulative use of the term “migration,” which combination was linked to various anxieties and fears within the population. This we will test via analyzing the co-occurrence of discursive forms in the analyzed media outlets and through checking whether significant associations can be found in the answers to certain survey questions.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The media outlets covered public and private, online and print, pro-government, and opposition media. First, we selected two television channels, one public and one private (M1 and RTL), for their evening news programs. Then, two dailies, *Magyar Nemzet* (MN) and *Népszava* (NSZ), were added, the first pro-government and the second government-critical. Both online and print versions of these dailies were taken into account. In addition, two popular online outlets (HVG and ORIGO) were also incorporated, the first government-critical and the second pro-government. Finally, after realizing that these media outlets do not adequately represent the total spectrum of the political discussion – even if we take into account the problems of the vagaries of live speech – these were supplemented by HÍR TV and ATV, in which political discussions strongly feature. The former is pro-government, and the second used to represent the liberal-critical stance, although recently, this characterization has been questioned by media analysts due to a change in ownership and, in parallel, in tone.

On a weekly basis, overall, between 50 and 100 articles could be identified in the specific pro-government and anti-government media outlets with relevant keywords like “migration,” “migrants,” “asylum seeker,” “immigrant,” “emigrant,” and “migrant quota.” The Ukrainian crisis blew these figures up (sometimes above the level of 400 articles), and the previously rarely used term “refugee” became common. This was supplemented with the keyword “Ukraine” in order to help follow war-related events. Each week, 3-4 articles were chosen to systematically cover key themes, key media outlets, and possible discursive formations based on previous and newly found patterns (for these previously identified patterns, see Bernáth-Messing, 2016; Melegh et al. 2019; Melegh, 2006; Melegh et al. 2016). Ninety-one articles were analyzed and coded altogether.

The Hungarian population survey was conducted within the framework of the Mediatized EU project. The aim of the nationally representative survey of 1,022

respondents was to describe the main features of the Hungarian adult population's views and attitudes towards European integration, elites, and the media. Research fieldwork was conducted from 21.07.2023 to 02.08.2023 using the CAPI method. The sample was formed using a three-step probability sampling method. The work was conducted within the omnibus survey of TÁRKI, an experienced polling company. Quality control was applied in the form of a 10% callback. The raw data were weighted by gender, age, and type of municipality.

The key discussions were dominated by the Hungarian election, the changes in Afghanistan, the Belarus border crisis, and, from February onward, the Russo-Ukrainian war. This latter event proved to be important in the history of the discursive developments in Hungary, as explained below.

We regard our approach as valid and fruitful if we are able to show the following results: Based on closely related discursive formations, we can identify discursive blocks in terms of co-occurrence (cross-relations) of discursive themes and formations within articles. This we will treat as evidence of polarization; also, especially if the formations are formed via opposing and, importantly, degrading discursive formations in the other blocks. In this analysis, we will check if material conditions are mentioned or reflected upon in the discourses and how they are incorporated. Omission is also an important result in this respect.

In the discursive analysis, we will specifically check if the above-described East/West discourses (postcolonial perspectives) link (i.e., appear and organize) both blocks. Then, we will see how this historically inherited hierarchical Eurocentric imagination is related to the identified blocks; otherwise, we need to refute this perspective. We can expect discursive strategies of refuting hierarchies (we are not “second class”) or perceptions that we need to “civilize ourselves” according to “European” standards.

We will also need to check if this hierarchical maneuvering can be demonstrated in the population surveys via a question on developmental hierarchies asking about the subjective ranking of 12 different countries, including Hungary, in terms of developmental level (“Using a scale of development from one to seven where would you put individual countries?”). On the basis of answers to this question, an average value can be computed for the various countries, and we can check whether the approval of items related to certain blocks is associated with an “overrating” or “underrating” of the development of Hungary. In a nationalist block, overrating is relevant, while in the case of pro-European liberal blocks, underrating is possible (see Melegh 2006). We will use the Kendall tau-b association and test its significance. If there is no significant association, we will refute that East/West hierarchies appear in public opinion or that they organize blocks of opinion.

Concerning the existence of blocks, we will explore how migration-related questions and answers to them are related to the following certain items, including the above-mentioned hierarchy question.

Within this survey, agreement with the following questions was asked concerning migration:

- The EU is helping to manage immigration from non-EU countries
- Migration solves the EU's labor market problems
- It would only make things worse if many foreigners were allowed to enter the country

Responses to these questions were then checked to see whether items related to blocks were significantly associated with answers related to migration and whether internal cohesion was observable. The blocks, as explained below, were first constructed on a discursive level in the media and then checked in the public opinion surveys. In our analysis, after having discursively identified the liberal-managed *Europe block*, this was translated to the following public opinion items:

- Using a scale of development (1-7 where would you put Hungary ('downrating' compared to average score)
- The EU has an important role in protecting human rights and democracy
- EU-positive: Better management of migration
- Some Member States' deviation from the European course endangers the EU
- The Hungarian government has not used EU funds in a sufficiently transparent way
- The EU has a positive role in Hungary's economic development
- The EU's central institutions must be strengthened
- The EU increases Hungarian security in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine (this statement is not linked to hierarchies; it is cross-cutting)

In the media, the discursively constructed *nationalist block* (see below) was operationalized for public opinion via the following items.

- Using a scale of development (1-7 where would you put Hungary ('uprated' compared to the average score)
- The EU's so-called LBTQ propaganda is harmful to children
- The EU threatens Hungary's national identity and related traditional values
- The EU intrudes into Hungary's internal affairs and endangers its sovereignty
- The West is chaotic, ineffective, and in decline.
- Hungary is the depository of true European values, Christianity, and the family

- The countries of Central Europe share common values and traditions that the EU should respect (only the last migration item)
How important do you think it is for a true European to be Christian

KEY DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS: ‘NATIONALIST’ AND ‘LIBERAL-MANAGED EUROPE’ DISCURSIVE BLOCKS AND EAST/WEST DISCOURSES AS ORGANIZING DISCOURSES

After analyzing each article and observing co-occurrence, the lists below identify the key discursive formations and their linkages. We have also paid special attention to identity and pragmatic elements and, very importantly, to linkages across discursive blocks. By discursive formations, we mean basic interrelated discursive elements, patterns, and perspectives, as understood by Foucault.

“Whenever one can describe between several statements such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlation, positions, and functionings, transformations) we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation.” (Michel Foucault 1972, 38).

The complex linkages of discursive formations can be understood as discursive blocks or larger-scale discourses. The linkages are identified via the co-occurrence of discursive formations in the same article. We have described these elements in the list below.

As can be seen, there are very strong interlinkages and major discursive blocks can be constructed, also with some cross-linkages:

The nationalist block contains mainly those formations that legitimize national state-level control and cultural-historical opposition to market-oriented and EU-managed migration. This block is Eurocentric concerning Europe and its historical achievements, but it claims that liberal and non-discriminatory liberal values are either mistaken and/or lead to decline and refers to an earlier version of colonial and nation and religion-based Europe. This Eurocentrism also involves distancing and moral panic related to immigrants, most importantly non-European (in particular, Muslim) asylum-seekers. Such supported formations include:

- Biopolitical control and direct intervention into population processes to defend the “local” and the “normal.”
- Defense of national identity and sovereignty (Westphalian logic) against “globalist.” elites imposing their will on nation-states regarding migration-related issues.
- The decline and chaos of the West and the EU, and this civilizational decline hindering the emergence of real answers to migration based on strength and “fundamental” values.
- “Deep” Europe or Central Europe as the last bastion of Europe as opposed to the declining West.
- Security mechanisms are to be strengthened against immanent terrorist and criminal dangers arising from migration.
- Migration pressure (Malthusian type) from non-European countries due to grave economic and ecological problems and related overpopulation.
- Defence of endangered white Christianity (the latter a historically important force) from liberal identity politics.

The liberal and, anaged Europe block mainly contains those formations that involve Eurocentric perceptions of a common market based on ideas of a non-nationalist, federal Europe. In these formations, the core countries represent development/civilization and promote the joint European management of migration. This type of management has to satisfy liberal humanitarian utopias (liberal values guide political action and change) and human rights and, at the same time, involves certain utilitarian gains from marketization (Mannheim 1936; Melegh 2006). Namely,

- The EU represents the normal management and control of migration associated with various versions of liberal humanitarian discourses, like the West represents civilized manners.
- Market and labor needs are to be satisfied through migration.
- Fundamental values of liberty, human rights, solidarity, and civilizational values are to be protected even if it is difficult to maintain them in relation to migration.
- Strong Europe. Europe stands up to defend its borders, interests, and values, even in the case of migration.
- The nationalist threat is a critical formation that focuses on the rise of radical nationalism; this formation is dangerous and appears most significantly in Eastern Europe.
- Humanism is a discursive formation that is organized around the need to defend the vulnerable.

- The inequality and unequal exchange (developmentalist) formation is built on the idea that migrants, most notably East European emigrants, are exploited in terms of wages and working conditions.

Linking and organizing formations involve the following formations

- Critical reflection on migration and European discourses, focusing on how to distance the speaker from various “offered” discourses and narratives seen as misleading or “abnormal”
- East/West discursive formations are general organizing structures for evaluating the social development of countries and regions together with migrants in a hierarchical manner within Europe and globally. They are often linked to racialized hierarchies of migrants that determine inclusion and exclusion. They may also be a guide to claiming more dignity for those (nations, migrants) positioned at lower levels.

Beyond the linking and organizing discursive formations (like critical reflection and East/West discursive formations), there are some further important connections between the above discursive blocks, meaning that different blocks can use similar discursive formations in somewhat modified forms. So, the polarization is not complete. Very importantly, the following discursive formations may show up in different blocks in parallel (i.e., both can appear in the same article): the decline and chaos of the West (in the managed Europe block, decline linked to liberal values), securitization, migration pressure, strong Europe, humanism (in the Nationalist block, only associated with Christians, etc.), fundamental values (both liberal and so-called illiberal values), inequality and unequal change. Co-occurrences and possible overlaps show that a new European ideal may be in the making (where the blocks can meet), which common terrain involves a stronger and more combative Europe in relation to the outside world, which at the same time maintains a certain humanism not in general, but toward certain selected groups (whites, Europeans and Christian) and which fights against intra-European inequality.

The opposition among these blocks of formations concerns mainly the modes of intervention in migration processes, the actors of control, and, very importantly, identity-related questions, while the critique of marketization is either related to cultural consequences only or focuses on the “second class,” exploited position of Hungary and Eastern Europe. This identity focus and the lack of systematic contextualization of the migration process can explain the polarization.

In this discursive process, **East/West and immanent racialized hierarchies** structure ideas about the struggle and inclusion and exclusion of social,

political, and migrant groups within and among the discursive blocks. The first targets the liberal and “diluted” West and its East European clients colonizing or ruling other parts, while the latter may see East Europeans and those within the Hungarian pro-government forces as nationalists – i.e., as obstacles to handling challenges on a “European” and collective level and dysfunctional in relation to achieving “civilizational” upgrading.

The debate also refers to the economic necessity and realities of the free market and the related opening-up, as well as the need to restrict and regulate related processes on national or regional levels. In this process, the added values and contributions of the labor of different migrant and non-migrant groups (e.g., immigrants replacing emigrants or compensating for population loss) are seen as comparable from a biopolitical and labor market point of view, thus establishing their formal equality and involving an abstract concept of migrants that includes various, often widely different forms. It is thus a process that can trigger complex counterdiscourses.

SOCIAL AND DISCURSIVE CONDITIONS AND KEY DISCURSIVE MECHANISMS: MARKETIZATION AND THE ABSTRACT CONCEPT OF MIGRATION

In critical discourse analysis, it is very important to clarify the material and some discursive conditions of the various semiotic orders during the period of analysis. There are general and specific conditions, both of which evolve historically (Fairclough 2001; Foucault 1972).

Different forms of migration can be understood as an incredibly rich phenomenon. Geographic mobility involves a large number of complex relations between and among wanderers and sending groups, families, hosts, agents, authorities, and social organizations. This could lead to incredibly rich and diverse forms of representation, while these discursive images and patterns can also be very simplistic and abstract. This depends on how migrants are integrated into power structures based on material conditions and relations.

As a general condition underlying the discursive processes associated with recent decades of globalization, marketization and the opening-up to global markets have increased migration due to the further fragmentation of economic and labor processes, the increased “flexibilization” of labor, and the domination of cross-border value chains (Antunes 2021; Melegh 2023). Moreover, this has increased demand for transnational migrant labor, which is now globally reified and integrated into massive fictitious exchanges. Thus, a migration turn

has been completed, creating a global migratory market around the world in which Europe has been a key player since the 1980s. Naturally, these combined transformations have radically challenged cultural patterns, discursive patterns, and communal mechanisms, thus affecting the identities and interactions of various groups as well as nations. These transformations have been particularly important in certain regions, including the European Union and Eastern Europe, via creating a single unified, unhindered market. The marketization in Eastern Europe has been even more shocking, where socialist mixed economies (regardless of the manifold differences among them) collapsed and where the globalization cycle associated with capitalism was only one of the many difficulties societies had to face. In addition, the decline in fertility, the stagnation in economic redistribution, and thus emerging social security and public service tensions paved the way for conflicts centered around the issue of migration and welfare competition in the context of wider demographic anxieties. Therefore, the emergence of pro and anti-migration blocs utilizing East/West discourses was not a surprise. In fact, Due to the combination of discursive and socio-material processes, the rise of such historical-political blocs has been fueled by actual historical driving forces within the system and thus should be seen as an outstanding historical event in conjunction with globalization.

MARKETIZATION: PRO-MARKET AND THE LIBERAL MANAGED EUROPE BLOCK VERSUS THE NATIONALIST, PRO-SELECTION OR NO MIGRATION BLOCK

The liberal-managed Europe block is represented well by the economic weekly HVG, which, in its discourses, unites all the categories of migrants (refugees, those who purchase settlement bonds, guest workers, etc.). It also makes comparisons among the Visegrád countries, Hungary, and the EU, argues how minor immigration is compared to emigration, and shows the increasing demand for immigrants. Furthermore, it contextualizes their contribution within an East/West framework. As we can see below, the East/West divide also appears in relation to the social positions of the immigrants.

With regard to the labor market, the role of foreign employees was the most significant in 2018 (in Hungary), when they represented 2% of the total number of employees. According to the Economic Research Institute, Ukrainian, Serbian, and Romanian guest workers typically

did manual labor, while those coming from Western Europe filled top manager positions and those requiring special professional knowledge. ERI claims that Hungary is not a popular destination among guest workers. The labor force coming from the East often continues toward the West, toward Austria and Germany, due to higher wages there. The number of guest workers is determined by the expansion of Western firms, as the former are mainly employed by multinational and German companies. In some time, we can expect a rise in the number of Asian employees due to the construction of South Korean and Japanese battery and chemical factories. (HVG, 2021.07.29)

https://hvg.hu/itthon/20210729_GKI_Ot_ev_alatt_20_ezer_kinai_es_18_ezer_nemet_kapott_magyar_allampolgarsagot

This perspective of market-based capital-labor exchanges can be termed an underlying discursive framework of market normalcy, which is directly linked to the above marketization condition and the discursive units referring to “normal” cross-EU market management and East/West hierarchies. The nationalist, pro-selection, or no migration counter-discourse is based on the rejection of marketization, but not on a systemic basis (it visualizes no alternative models and system critique), but due to its perceived or claimed cultural and social consequences (cultural identity, crime rates, great replacement, etc.) In this formation, racialized and hierarchical differences are used to delegitimize the normalcy of the (Western) European management of migration. This is all done using a migration category *in abstracto*, and the statements legitimize the need for direct national and state control with full and unhindered sovereignty not governed by any universal legal norms. Only the will of the “Magyar people” matters in this respect, which makes the discourse a populist one (Joppke 2021; Berezin 2009; Kalb 2011; Sík, 2016; Lázár-Sík 2019)

This is a counter-discourse, and its mechanisms are clearly illustrated by the published Facebook post of Zoltán Kovács (state secretary responsible for governmental communication) in which he argues that there is no need for migrants; migration as such should be stopped and national control enhanced. In this discourse, border fences should be financed by the EU as opposed to establishing “legal migration routes leading toward Europe.”

Migration has to be stopped, and the Brussels-led management of migration has to be finished – writes Zoltán Kovács, state secretary, on his social media page. The state secretary responsible for international communication and relations wrote on Facebook that on October 12,

twelve EU member states, including the ministers of interior affairs within the Visegrad group, wrote a letter to Margaritis Schinas, vice president of the European Commission and Ylva Johansson, commissioner of interior affairs. He added that the ministers of interior affairs drew the attention of the two commissioners that physical obstacles (like the Hungarian border fence) are efficient tools of border defense that serve the interest of the whole European Union and not only the countries with outer borders. He underlined that following this situation, they demanded from the European Commission that this “legitimate measure” shall be financed from the budget of the Union. In contrast, at the 6th European Migration Forum focusing on the integration of migrants, Ylva Johansson argued that we can better “manage” migration and that our society and economy need migrants. According to the international spokesperson, in the meantime, the LIBE Committee asked the European Commission to establish legal migration routes toward Europe. He [Kovács] continued that migration shall be stopped, and the Brussels-led management of migration shall be ended! (2021 11 28)

<https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20211028-kovacs-zoltan-a-migracio-menedzselesenek-veget-kell-vetni.html>

Thus, within this frame (concerning abstract market-based migration category), we see polarization in the context of “migration” as being either beneficial or detrimental overall to local societies, which leads to the rather irrational, hasty deploring of “opposing” arguments in the Hungarian media. At the same time, we see no overall critique of the market mechanisms themselves, so in this sense, the arguments are rather similar, which can increase the need to differentiate.

POLARIZATION RULES AND DISCURSIVE BLOCKS

If we wish to identify why polarization occurs or even why it is necessary, then we have to look deeper into some discursive mechanisms. International migration has been reformulated as an abstract market category, and this shift has increased the tension and antagonistic blocs associated with the debate in the given socio-material and historical context. Such polarization may be an important consequence of constructing general and abstract categories, which,

precisely because it separates migratory processes from social relations, could support “slippery,” overgeneralized debates. These discursive developments avoid addressing the social and motivational contextualization of migration and avoid framing this as a historical and social process, and thus, perceive it as a broader category to be judged as useful or harmful. This calculus leads to polarization,

This we could see above, but general undifferentiated discursive support for immigration (as a market category) can also be found in other cases. Publishing the view of Bloomberg, the Hungarian opposition newspaper *Népszava* takes a pro-market and pro-EU management stand when commenting on the Hungarian Demographic Summit, which frames migration as a threat (this is a regular, larger-scale neoconservative political and intellectual pro-family rally in Budapest) with the aim of showing that anti-migrant rhetoric is just nationalist fear-mongering:

It confronts a larger number of studies demonstrating that immigration helps the economy and leads to wage increases. According to the IMF, if the number of employees increases by 1 percent within five years, it leads to a 1 percent increase in GDP. (2021 09 24)

https://nepszava.hu/3133156_szabad-szemmel-a-nagy-lakossagsere-elmelet-korul-forog-orban-demografiai-tanacskozasa

In the nationalist counter-discourse, mythical, overgeneralized perspectives can be very clearly seen in relation to the criminalization of migrants. Here, we present a case of a report by the pro-government public media talking about the proportion of foreigners living in European countries. Citing the total number of foreigners, the TV report argues that non-European migrants may be disciplined according to this framework as it leads to demographic change and an increase in insecurity. This maneuver is completed by first “going general” and then switching to addressing very specific cases.

In Austria, the proportion of foreigners reached an all-time high level in 2015, that is to say, after the peak of the migration crisis. According to official data, in this country of 8.9 million people, there were living 1.8 million foreigners. This adds up to one-fifth of the population. Half of the foreigners have an immigration background, that is to say, came from outside the European Union, and thus every tenth has an immigration background. And this does not include those born in Austria with an immigration background. According to studies, as

the number of migrants increases, criminality also goes up. There was an increase in knife attacks and atrocities against women. In Italy, the number of schools with a majority of students of migrant background as opposed to Italians is close to 1,000. Despite critiques about increasing migration pressure and increasing criminality, the EU does nothing and campaigns for diversity. However, according to experts, a more efficient policy against migrants should target compliance with European norms, which would help their integration. (2021.11.18)

<https://mediamonitor-observer.hu/company-common-web/#/view-article/rtvArticle/6196226ff40f1941838df24e/5c57fa781e5ff-d006727ae3b/618bbabf08698c2e14f427da>

This position is hardly conclusive, not only because it involves overgeneralization and the clear mixing of analytical levels but also because the universalist utilitarian perspectives and vicious claims of generalized criminality cannot be harmonized. Such exchanges (without looking at the deeper structural links) lead to polarization because each position necessarily remains isolated. There is no talk about why and how various contextualized forms of migration are linked to social change and social structures within Europe. In this format, the positions cannot be linked to each other rationally, and only mythical solutions can come out, like impersonal and calculated market utility versus evil Soros-type conspiracies that dominate the EU terrain. We may assume that this polarization may even be a conscious discursive strategy on behalf of actors trying to mobilize various segments of the population.

RULES OF SILENCE: WHICH MIGRANTS CAN BE HEARD AND SEEN IN POLARIZED DISCUSSIONS?

In the context of overall marketization and its cultural-nationalist critique, Hungarian media discourses clearly follow social (East/West) hierarchies in selectively representing the voice of refugees or migrants (Meleg 2006; Böröcz-Sarkar 2017). This silence is most conspicuous with regard to asylum seekers appearing at the Hungarian borders. In the period concerned, no article contained an interview with asylum seekers at the Southern border (i.e., non-European migrants). Refugees from Ukraine were treated differently. There was even an occasion when the press reported a conversation between the

prime minister and a family at the Hungarian border (<https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2022/03/orban-viktor-ukrajnai-menekulteket-latogatott-meg-video>).

This is in massive contrast with the representation of asylum seekers from the South, who mainly appear as inhumane, depersonalized images on night cameras and who are mainly spoken about as targets to be caught. If they speak, especially on the government-serving public and private media (M1, HírTv), then they are always outside Hungary, and they briefly speak only about their plans to cross Hungary and to go on toward Germany or Sweden and in the context of locals talking about being robbed by them (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnr4Ua30Pcg>). This does not represent the real voice of such individuals as it only serves fearmongering purposes and for setting the elite agenda. Even the opposition media avoided giving them a voice, and in the surveyed media outlets, there was not a single case when people being turned away or detained at the fence could speak freely and in a complex manner, at least in the articles we reviewed (Bernáth-Messing 2016).

Ukrainian refugees are treated differently, and opposition and even governmental media provide space and longer interviews with people fleeing Ukraine. A good example of this is an article in *Népszava*, in which journalists interview a woman who says, “My husband has been taken to the front, and we are fleeing with our children.” This fact in itself shows that in the current period, involving the Russo-Ukrainian war, humanitarian discourses are revitalized as opposed to previous periods when they were isolated and marginalized (Melegh et al. 2019; Bernáth-Messing 2016; Nagy 2019). This also shows that the basic rules of East/West hierarchies are not overcome with historical change, and we can even argue that they are actually reinforced. Non-European subalterns cannot speak in the Hungarian media, while “Europeans” can (Spivak 1990).

Furthermore, regardless of the earlier huge debate in the opposition media about the phenomenon of providing settlement permits in return for large fees paid by private investors, there were no reports in which such people buying settlement bonds could talk about their perspectives (Melegh et al. 2019). This suggests that not only do hierarchies matter, but there is a general disinterest in migrant perspectives. Even more, migrants should not be shown at all, as the Hungarian public is so negative about them, especially toward any kind of Easterner.

In addition to the above “rules,” we may also see that legal labor migrants coming in from outside (West or East) are not shown personally and mainly appear as figures in assessments of the impact of migration. For instance, regardless of the tens of thousands of Ukrainians who were staying in Hungary even before the war, in no instance would one have been listened to and their perspectives taken seriously (Meszmann-Fedyuk 2019). If reporting emerges

in this respect, it involves the protests of local workers fighting with such “intruders.” So, we can assume that class perspectives also play a role.

This silence applies very notably to employers whose perspectives and employment policies are not asked about and not explained. This omission is very important proof that the current discourses cannot and do not deal with the systemic context involving migration, and readers/viewers cannot obtain a picture of why certain groups appear in Hungary – beyond “their” wish to earn more, or due to the action of various forces, including the Hungarian government.

HIDING BEHIND THE WEST AND DISCURSIVE UNITY CONCERNING EASTERN BORDERS

The above observations and rules partially related and organized according to East/West hierarchies can be further supplemented by the fact that certain discourses are rarely used by journalists and local political actors. Pro-market and normal EU management or humanitarian frames were rarely used with Hungarian developments, and even the opposition media used them only by hiding behind foreign newspapers or foreign speakers in this respect. This technique may include a review of Western newspapers (we do not find systematic reviews of East European newspapers) or Western, EU, or global speakers. This is a hidden form of East/West framing, as enunciation from the West/Europe/civilized world is a tacit (non-confrontational) technique used to show that the pro-migration attitude is the civilized attitude that is not followed in Hungary.

This happened when the opposition weekly HVG cited the Pope through a BBC report when talking about asylum seekers:

The pope used his East Mediterranean roundtrip to draw attention to the miserable situation of the migrants and refugees. He stressed that the Mediterranean Sea is becoming a cold cemetery without gravestones (...). I beg for stopping the sinking of civilization. https://hvg.hu/vilag/20211205_Ferenc_papa_Politikai_propagandara_hasznaljak_a_menekulteket

A similar choice of speakers and methods could also be identified in the same weekly when it reported on sending humanitarian support to the asylum seekers at the Eastern borders of the EU. HVG Weekly explained that Janez Lenarčič, the

Commissioner for Crisis Management, and Ylva Johansson, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, together with 11 union members, sent tents and other help to Lithuania during the Belarus crisis, during which – the article claims – the Hungarian government stayed idle. This was published in the EU section of the weekly version: https://hvg.hu/eurologus/20210723_Humantiarius_segelyt_kuldott_az_EU_a_litvanoknak

This does not mean that the pro-government press does not use such “Under Western Eyes” techniques by citing politicians, newspapers, and TV programs. They simply swap “Europe as good” for “Europe as bad” (Böröcz 2005). Nonetheless, these cases do not involve the silence of Hungarian speakers. On the contrary, the latter want to show that the “normal” part of Europe and the West actually follows the Hungarian position. An example of this is the following article in the government newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*. Here, the visit of the radical right-wing French essayist-politician Zemmour is used to show the vicious nature of the Hungarian and Western liberal press and the normalcy of Orbán and Zemmour, as opposed to fake anti-racism.

The domestic liberal press, again – as always – is the spokesperson of the Western liberal power. Nothing can show this better than when they write the same about Éric Zemmour after the announcement that he will come to Budapest on Friday, being invited by Viktor Orbán. Immediately, the customary – and by now rather empty – denunciation of him being “far right,” “racist,” and “hate provoking” is repeated as a mantra. After all, this is an excellent opportunity to frighten uninformed people and to connect the prime minister with these denunciations – as the electoral campaign has started.

https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemeney/2021/09/eric-zemmour-avagy-az-iro-aki-megvaltoztatja-a-francia-politikat?utm_source=default&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=hiraggregator

THE JOINT FIGHT AGAINST THE HARMFUL EAST

A similar working of East/West discursive links can be seen in the fact that there was rather great unity in evaluating the Belarus crisis, where the two blocks mainly used similar discourses as this was connected more with the East, not Hungary. In this case, in most Eastern countries like Ukraine and Belarus, themes of securitization, strong Europe, and migration pressure were used by all

the media outlets we analyzed. In this, we see how “Western” suspicion against “despotic” “Eastern” governments like Belarus or Russia can be combined with “Western” and “Central European” panic over Muslims, illegal migrants, and non-Europeans. In this way, a new common terrain emerges where the blocks can agree with each other.

This unity is clear in the liberal weekly HVG, which writes in an article at a meeting in Brussels (citing politicians) that the moves of Belarus to export migrants are the acts of a mafia and that we need to have solidarity with countries representing the outer borders of the EU. Then, it ends the text with the following Eurocentric quotation:

At the end of the debate, EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said that we need unity, determination, and solidarity. We cannot prove ourselves weak in the face of brutal oppression and provocation; we represent democracy and not autocracy. (https://hvg.hu/eurologus/20211005_Nemzetkozi_birosag_ele_allitanak_Lukasenkat)

The joint platform also appears in the pro-government newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*, which supports the Polish acts of defense and approves that illegal migrants have to be blocked at the Polish-Belarus border:

Péter Szijjártó warned – ‘We Central Europeans continue to protect ourselves, Europe, and our borders; we help each other in this regard’ – he said, adding that this year, around 100,000 illegal immigrants have already arrived on the continent from the south. He underlined that Hungary is grateful to the other Visegrád states for their support in the protection of the borders, as well as to Austria for the continuous consultation. (<https://magyarnemzet.hu/kulfold/2021/10/szijjarto-peter-a-lengyeleket-siker-es-politikajuk-miatt-tamadjak>)

Thus, here, we see the functioning of the East/West discourse as creating hierarchies and interlinkages across the blocks.

Rejection of anti-racism and the approved violation of rights

This leads to another rule, which involves a discursive fight over who may shout racism and who may not. The pro-EU management discourse often uses the formation that East European nationalism is dangerous and uses racist

language. The liberal weekly states in the title of an article that Orbán is seen as racist, xenophobic, and shameful in Bosnia. (https://hvg.hu/vilag/20211223_Boszniaban_rasszistanak_tartjak_Orban_szavait). In opposition to these claims, nationalist discourses reject universal, equal rights, potentially legitimizing the rejection of anti-racism and solidarity (Cantat 2016; Cantat-Feischmidt 2019). As shown above, one of the key elements of the nationalist discursive block is that “normal” love of one’s own group outweighs claims of racism, and actually, the competing block uses double standards and basically serves various interests in fighting against racism.

This can take the form of the rejection of the free market itself, which, according to the discursive logic, requires a non-discrimination rule. In an article, the pro-government *Magyar Nemzet* argues like this:

A French migrant protection organization intends to sanction those labor agents who exclude foreign workers. French employers do not want immigrants. A study by the SOS Racisme, a civil rights organization, shows that almost half, 45% of labor agencies help French employers to filter and avoid foreign and “not European looking” workers. (2021.10.08)

https://magyarnemzet.hu/kulfold/2021/10/lapozo-a-francia-migrans-vedo-szervezet-szankcionalna-a-bevandorlokat-kiszuro-munkakoz-vetitoket?utm_source=default&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=hiraggregator

This aspect of the rejection of anti-racism is strongly connected to the above-analyzed fact concerning the Hungarian media discourses, namely the almost non-existent perspective of the migrants themselves. As explained above, this changed slightly with the Ukrainian refugees, which once again clearly shows that there is an almost unbroken consent around silencing and deploring the rights of the subaltern if he/she is non-European, supposedly Muslim, or African. This decontextualized fear and silencing allows for the legitimization of the infringement of rights regarding asylum and proper treatment, which is a clear novelty in our illiberal era (Melegh et al. 2019)

Need for European and non-European migrant labor and the exploitation of East European labor as separate discourses concerning Europe

Apart from the rule of hiding behind the West, another very interesting development was present in the Hungarian media. The demand for migrant labor within Europe and Eastern Europe is put into the mouth of the EU Commission, or most importantly, into the comments of investors, while the massive outflow of East European migrants and their possible exploitation is separated from the discourse about labor demand. This shows the hegemony of the nationalist bloc and the lack of systematic critique of the market.

For instance, we may read the following:

In Great Britain, employers ask the government to provide 10 thousand temporary labor permits to truck drivers. Otherwise, markets will not be able to function, which has already become a problem after Brexit in certain areas like Northern Ireland.

Finland is seen as the happiest country because it has taken the first prize in this competition, but the population is aging rapidly, and the labor force is declining. After Japan, Finland is in the worst position in this respect. Among the OECD countries, here we find the greatest shortage of skilled labor, but their employment is hindered due to the demand for knowledge of Finnish. Now, they slowly move toward the English language.

https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20210827_Szallitas_epitkezes_vendeglatas__egesz_Europat_sujtja_a_munkaerohiany

As seen in our description of the key formations above that are connected to the market and labor demand, no exploitation discourses appear. These discursive formations remain separate from the topic of the misuse of migrant labor, which applies to East Europeans. Yet there are separate discursive formations on the “misuse” of East Europeans. For instance, this:

Brussels should stop the exploitation of contracted (East European) guest workers – this is suggested by several MPs in the European Parliament after reading the fact-finding report of the Guardian that [found that], in the meat industry, guest workers employed by labor agents had to work for low wages and among deplorable labor conditions. (2021.10.07)

https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20211007_Hiaba_mennek_nyugatra_sok_keleteuropai_keleti_bert_kap_ott_is

The friction between the discursive formations of inequalities connected to Europe, and Europe as a civilized/moral agent of fundamental values is even clearer in an interview with the moderate leftist András Jámbor on ATV. In this interview concerning China, there was an open clash between discourses about a moral (fundamentally value-protecting) Europe and the local East European working class, including migrant workers. In this Europeanization paradox, one of the most leftist politicians calls for a moral stand against China among German investors and, at the same time, better protection of East European workers. The clash is played out by the interviewer.

AJ: Well, I think we agree on this basically. These large companies basically buy cheap Hungarian labor, and then, in exchange, Viktor Orbán gets power from them, and they help him in Western and EU political debates. So, the Bavarian leader who asked to illuminate the Munich stadium (with rainbow lights as a protest against the anti-LGBTIQ moves of the Hungarian government) is the leader of the CSU partyand has supported the migration policy of the Orbán government. I think this is the link.

I: I had a different argument When you protest against Chinese universities and credit ... China and Germany are the most important trade partners within the EU sphere... So what can we expect beyond words?

JA: When we talk about political community, a country, the EU with elected representatives ... then it is an important expectation to have a moral minimum to defend human rights....

This shows that in leftist discourses, German companies can be criticized as investors for supporting the Hungarian government as supporters of migration policies while approving the latter's anti-homophobic stand. This confusion is acknowledged, while the politician asks for moral and economic unity against China. This shows how East/West hierarchies, taking different perspectives in relation to this, and the lack of an overall market critique actually blow up the idea of Europe as being moral and show that there are serious schisms within the Liberal-managed Europe block.

Very interestingly, there is no such friction in the nationalist bloc, which, of course, while filtering out non-Europeans and non-Christians, does not consider intra-European inequality and the exploitation of East European migrant labor as a separate discourse but as being linked to the biopolitical loss and demographic fragility of the nation. This is possible as, for instance, in an article, Kóvér, the Speaker of Parliament, explained that the “cannibal West” had robbed 25 million people from East European nations and made their national identity fragile. This linkage between a biopolitical and nationalist framing and intra-European hierarchical discourses may illuminate why East European working classes and masses have given much credit to these perspectives (Kalb 2011).

Does the public resonate with these findings? Preliminary results

In 2023, one and half years after the media analysis, a representative survey was launched partially based on the media analysis. When measured according to significant Kendall tau-b association, we could clearly see that both the nationalist and the liberal-managed Europe items had significant links to migration-related questions with the right positive or negative signs. So, according to those who approved the liberal-managed Europe items (protecting human rights, East European countries deviating from EU policies, the misuse of funds, EU helping with economic development, the need to strengthen EU bodies and related security issues, and support European identity), the EU solves labor market problems with migration, and Europe manages migration from non-EU countries well. The only migration-related item that did not correlate well with the discursive statements was that respondents agreed that there is no need to allow many foreigners into the country. This shows that this fear is shared to some extent, even among the respondents associated with the liberal-managed Europe bloc.

The nationalist bloc is more cohesive, and there was only a little hesitation around the question of whether the EU is helping manage migration from non-European countries. It can be assumed that this statement could also be read negatively, namely that, according to the respondents, the EU unfortunately helps immigrants from non-European countries. Nonetheless, we can conclude, based on these results, that the identified discursive blocks in the media resonate rather well with the public, so polarized communication is also related to public division. Very importantly, when we check the predictive strength of various items, then our assumption that the East/West discourses organize most of the various blocks proves to be right. Underrating or overrating the country's

development is an outstanding predictor of whether someone opposes the entrance of more immigrants (Melegh et al. 2016). In this way, the interaction of media and public opinion becomes a key issue, and further studies are needed to better examine this relationship and causality.

CONCLUSION

In the above analysis, we have shown the emergence of two relatively well-organized basic discursive blocs in the Hungarian media concerning Europe and Europeanization and the question of migration. So, we not only observe singular discursive formations but also firmly established actual blocks. In some ways, the latter can be understood as historical-political blocks (Gramsci, 2000). These are in a continuous struggle with each other, while neither provides any systematic critique of social factors and marketization as the key engines behind the rise of migration. Material conditions are mentioned, but no critique is formulated. These blocks interpret and frame many issues differently, but most importantly, they differ in the areas of migration as related to various identity-related questions, the level of sovereignty, the need to protect local culture, and EU actions and policies. They portray each other in an inflammatory mode and present each other as being dangerous to Hungary. This vilifying is a key mechanism in the polarization process.

We have also demonstrated that media polarization can be observed in public opinion a year and a half later after our media analysis, which shows that these blocks may be stable and well formulated, and thus, they directly influence power structures at a societal level. This also shows that these attitudes and public opinions have developed over a long period of time, and they are not the immediate result of governmental or media campaigns (Messing-Ságvári 2017, 2019; Melegh 2023). Further, this indicates that we need to maintain a complex approach as opposed to just focusing on the rise of nationalism and seeing the changes in discourses as transgressions (Wodak 2015).

We have also demonstrated how various discursive mechanisms, like polarization, silencing, positioning in East/West hierarchies, and the rejection of anti-racism, help to consolidate the blocks in their interaction with each other, and they can be seen as important societal mechanisms in Hungarian political development. We also showed that the creation of a general migration category and related material and ideational marketization could be one of the key material factors behind the observed discursive mechanisms that have fueled the polarization among the discursive blocks.

Regardless of polarization, we have shown that there are linking discourses like East and West hierarchies intimately linked to inequalities within and outside the EU. These historically inherited discourses create the ground for how various themes and topics are formulated and what dangers and fears can be named. The nationalist block makes special use of the discursive position that they are fighting for normalcy and against the claimed superiority of the West, which has declined and lost its common sense. It also seems clear that the public resonates with these discursive mechanisms, as we could see on the basis of the survey.

In other ways, common themes like strong Europe versus the decline and chaos of the West and Europe also appear in both blocks. These commonalities and linkages deserve significant attention if we would like to understand the dynamics of the discursive developments – we can envisage the emergence of a new Europe that is more concerned about securitization, fundamental values, and a supposedly stronger Europe. Actually, we could also see that the war in Ukraine led to the emergence of topics associated with a more selective and hierarchical humanism without any real, systematic attempt to reflect on material conditions and the phenomenon of marketization.

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APPENDIX 1. KEY TOPICS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

| | |
|-----------|--|
| July | National consultation on LGBTQ and migration is organized by the government, Fudan Chinese University is challenged by the opposition and the crisis in Belarus start over refugees. |
| August | Crisis in Afghanistan, Orbán interview with Tucker at Fox News on issues like migration, asylum crisis at the border of Belarus |
| September | Crisis in Afghanistan, US leaves and future migration crisis is feared, and Belarus crisis continues, rule of law investigation by the EU against Hungary, German election is held, migration policy is reviewed, Demographic Summit is organized by the government with neo-conservative forces, |
| October | Crisis in Afghanistan, and Belarus, the rule of law investigation by the EU continues, visit of the Egyptian president and Marie Le Pen, where migration is discussed, The Opposition pre-election campaign starts with migration issues discussed marginally. |
| November | Opposition program launch and countering government policies including migration, Crisis in Belarus continues, the ruling of the EU court against the Hungarian law Stop Soros counters government policies on NGOs and migration, the campaign of the Hungarian opposition figure showing that Orbán takes migrants not Soros. |
| December | The visit of Macron leads to further discussion on migration, the ruling of the Hungarian Constitutional Court supporting the taking over of EU authority in the case of border control and not granting asylum in case it is EU rulings are not efficient. |
| January | Ukrainian tension evolves, election campaign continues in which migration issues are promoted by governmental politicians and journalists. |
| February | War in Ukraine broke out and there was a need to rethink migration discourses according to migratory relations. |
| March | War in Ukraine continues, refugee waves evolve, and humanitarian help is offered widely. Government help is offered if Ukrainians are employed. Who wants to stay out of the war debate goes on between opposition and government. Government rally is held with migration issues also, and hierarchies are established. Frontex deal with Moldova, EU activity on refugees, |
