CLIMATE CRISIS, HUNGARY AND THE EU: IS THERE A UNIQUE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE? A CASE STUDY ON THE MEDIA DISCOURSE INVOLVING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY POLICY

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the dominant discourses concerning the climate crisis and climate and energy policy as they are interpreted in the context of the European Union within Hungarian news media from July 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022. Applying content and discourse analysis methodologies, we identified and interpreted key discourses emphasizing Hungary's positioning within both EU and global contexts. Our findings show that climate change is not associated with a distinctive and autonomous discursive framework. Instead, it is predominantly embedded within dominant narratives reflecting the current government's stance, specifically its criticism of the European Union. This critique often alleges the process of diminishing the role of nation-states and favoring a federalistic EU approach within EU decision-making processes. These findings align with prior research indicating that climate change discourses in Hungary exhibit parallels with global narratives but are primarily reframed within pre-existing dominant discourses.*

KEYWORDS: *climate change, climate crisis, energy policy, EU*

INTRODUCTION

Recently, climate change has become a dominant, overarching problem around the globe, shaping the relationship between numerous actors on various levels. This study examines the dominant discourses surrounding the climate crisis and climate and energy policy related to the European Union within Hungarian news media. The objective is to analyze the various perspectives through which the EU is interpreted in these discourses and contextualize the findings within broader EU-related narratives. The analysis is based on the media contents of the Hungarian media corpus of the Horizon 2020 project MEDIATIZED EU – Mediatized Discourses on Europeanization and Their Representations in Public Perceptions.

The discourse on the climate crisis in connection with the European Union (EU) has a peripheral position in Hungarian news media. It is often loosely attached to wider narratives addressing Hungary's role within the international community or integrated into discourses on migration, family dynamics, or the broader future of Europe. Therefore, through the analysis of the interpretation of climate crisis and energy policy, a deeper and more complex image can be formed about the position of the country on a national, European, and global scale.

To obtain a clear interpretation of this relationship through the discourses of the news media, it is essential to briefly introduce the complex relationship between Hungary and the EU and the main dimensions of conflicts with a special focus on climate change and energy policy.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Hungary in the EU

The relationship between Hungary and the European Union since Hungary's accession in 2004 has been complex and shaped by both pragmatic and ideological differences. While Hungary and the EU share some main goals— such as enhancing Europe's economic strength—their visions for achieving these objectives often contradict. These tensions have become more pronounced since 2010, following the electoral victory of the current Hungarian government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

A key source of conflict lies in the weakening of democratic institutions within Hungary. Scholars have described the political system in various ways, reflecting on this erosion of democratic characteristics. Terms such as "populist democracy" (Pappas, 2014), "deconsolidation of democracy" (Brusis, 2016, p. 272), "simulated democracy" (Lengyel & Ilonszki, 2012), and how PM Viktor Orbán also defines it, "illiberal democracy" (Rupnik, 2012; Bozóki, 2015, p. 4; Enyedi, 2016, p. 218; Buzogány, 2020), highlight the perceived shift toward hybrid governance. Critical perspectives also describe Hungary's system as a "hybrid regime, a mix of democratic and autocratic practices" (Ádám & Bozóki, 2016, p. 105). The government's reaction to this criticism centers on the disagreement associated with several key issues such as migration policy, external relations, and, recently, climate strategy – issues which are all based on allegedly core differences concerning the future of the EU as a federalist structure instead of prioritizing the sovereignty of nation-states. There are, therefore, strong ideological and pragmatic differences. While the EU seeks to enhance the norms of liberal democracy, Hungary highlights an illiberal democracy with conservative Christianity-based values as the foundation of the future of Hungary. The current political system has found various allies inside the EU over the previous twenty years, mainly among the V4 countries. Moreover, strong bilateral relations have also been established around specific political issues, such as the relationship between Hungary and France, which is strengthened through their common understanding of nuclear energy as a clean and climate-friendly energy source.

Energy and Climate Policy in the EU Context

The situation with energy and climate policy further exemplifies the complexities of Hungary-EU relations. As highlighted by Osička et al. (2018), energy policy remains a particularly sensitive issue for many Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Hungary. These states are mostly dependent on fossil fuels and have a complex and dependent energy relationship with Russia, which became more complicated with the Russo-Ukrainian War considering the EU sanctions and the hastening of the energy market liberation policies of the EU (Zuk et al., 2023). However, the energy sector is differently structured in these countries regarding the role of state ownership and the diverse types and mixtures of energy, making them even more vulnerable to these changes (Zapletalová & Komínková, 2020). Therefore, in these countries, the discourse on climate change and energy policy is strongly related to the current discourse about sovereignty represented by populist political parties that

"ally with climate skeptic positions and impede the green transition in the name of a supposed national interest" (Paris, 2020, p. 20; Vanderheiden, 2020, p. 184).

A contemporary approach to the climate crisis in Hungary

Since 2010, when the Fidesz-CDP coalition gained power, the issue of climate change has been pushed back, and the government abolished the independent Ministry of Environment and the Ombudsman for Future Generations. However, by the end of the 2010s, when climate change became a central political topic in the EU, but most importantly, Hungarian society became more conscious, environmental organizations were born, found their voice, and had growing and visible power in the public sphere; climate change became the top concern and fear of Hungarian youth (Bíró-Nagy& Szabó, 2021) and the government could no longer reject this problem. As a result, it became a political issue that shaped a climate and environmental protection action plan for 2020. All this led to a unique, conservative green approach to the environment, which "rests in the belief that only local solutions, not vague, unenforceable global commitments, will lead to effective improvements in environmental protection"[2] (2020.01.27. Judit Varga, Politico). Previous research distinguishes three approaches to climate change by right-wing populist parties in northern countries: climate denial, climate nationalism, and climate conservativism. According to Mikecz and his colleagues (2023), the governmental approach seems to best match the climate-nationalist approach because it focuses on local solutions and nation-based decision-making processes.

The main topics dealt with by this conservative approach, however, share similarities with globally urgent climate issues – questions of energy policy, pollution, etc. – but also construct a special discursive framework in harmony with the main governmental discourses on an international level, namely, those of national sovereignty and the important position of nations with regard to every global question; the narrative of "protection" – of families, Hungarian people, culture, etc. – and the importance of eastern economic relations. Moreover, it may seem like a national characteristic, but discussing climate change as a "threat to national sovereignty," a "plot by global elite groups," and transforming a scientific debate into a political one on an ideological level and highlighting the unequal effect of actions taken to counter climate change on people living in poverty on a structural level is typical in the discourses of conservative politicians and right-wing populist parties around the world. (Zuk, 2020; Forchtner, 2015, 2018)

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2 https://www.politico.eu/article/christian-conservative-green-policy/

Previous research results and their application

Sociological research on climate change in Hungary has been relatively limited, with studies primarily focusing on two key areas: 1) the perceptions of youth regarding climate change as a dominant issue and future threat (Bíró-Nagy & Szabó, 2021) and 2) the position of climate movements within the Hungarian public sphere (Gerő et al., 2023; Mikecz, 2017). The intersection of these two research strands was identified in a study conducted by Vochocová and colleagues (2023), who examined the online media representation of the Fridays for Future movement, comparing the Czech Republic and Hungary. The results concerning Hungary showed that climate activist youths are not taken seriously, and minors are criticized for lacking enough knowledge concerning climate issues, in parallel with critiques of their parents for letting "kids" into the field of politics (Vochocová et al., 2023). This discourse fits into the governmental narrative about protecting youth and kids in every domain.

In a more recent study, Mikecz and colleagues (2023) analyzed the media framing of climate change within the context of populist political discourse in Hungary. Their comprehensive literature review identified dominant framing strategies, which were then examined related to the Hungarian media discourse. The results showed that the Hungarian media framing follows a conservative approach embedded in the actual dominant governmental discourse rather than the international framework of the conservative climate approach.

For the present analysis, we have considered this framework, particularly emphasizing the frames related to the European Union. However, we kept in mind that our database is not limited to right-wing populist discourses and that frame analysis differs from qualitative content and discourse analysis. Therefore, these frames are investigated as integrated elements of certain discourses, not separate entities.

METHODS AND DATA

It is important to note that the media market is asymmetrically polarized in Hungary (Bátorfy & Urbán, 2020; Urbán, 2022; Lengyel et al., 2021); it is distorted by the state. Public service media regularly spread government propaganda while independent media outlets struggle for their existence. Due to the strong interrelation between politics and the media, political opinions and discourses are clearly identifiable in online media and show a dualistic "pros and cons" system with weak and marginalized alternative discourses. The media

framing of climate change is embedded in this system of discourses in which the main topics are dictated by the government's communication strategy. This situation had an impact on the data collection and analysis.

For the climate change topic, we used additional keywords in the pre-existing corpus: climate (*climate crisis, climate protection, climate tax), energy policy (energetics), and* environment *(environmental protection).* The final database (Table 1), after cleaning for relevance and balancing the massive weight of governmental interpretations, consisted of 100 units.

Table 1. *Database used in the analysis*

Media Outlets	Abbreviated name	Type	Political position (pro-government: G; government-critical: C; Neutral: N)	Number of analyzed articles
Magyar Televízió Esti Híradó, V4 Híradó, Unió27	M1	Television	G	13
RTL Klub Esti Híradó, Fókusz	RTL	Television	N	3
Magyar Nemzet, magyarnemzet.hu	MN	Newspaper/ Newspaper online	G	29
Népszava, nepszava.hu	NSZ	Newspaper/ Newspaper online	C	10
Heti Világgazdaság, hvg.hu	HVG	Newspaper online	C	9
origo.hu	ORIGO	Newspaper online	G	21
ATV Egyenes beszéd	ATV	Television	C	5
Hír TV Híradó, Csörte	HÍR TV	Television	G	10

Source: MEDEU Research, authors' compilation

We employed a combination of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis methodologies to examine the integration of the climate change topic within the context of the European Union (EU). The first is valuable for exploring both explicit (frequency of words, topics, references to actors, institutions) as well as implicit meanings (emotions, context, etc.) (Mayring 2014). These characteristics make content analysis useful for analyzing discourses in the public sphere (Krippendorff, 2018). The second considers language not only as a means of communication but also as a form of social practice in terms of both reflecting and creating social reality (Gee, 2014; Fairclough, 2013).

Discourse analysis investigates this role in maintaining or changing certain social structures and power relations (van Dijk, 2011) by emphasizing unfolding ideologies and the power structures behind them.

As part of a comparative research project within the EU, qualitative content analysis supported the creation of concrete and comparable findings regarding key actors, institutions, and prevailing topics in news media discussions about the European Union. Simultaneously, discourse analysis offered advanced insights into the positioning of these characteristics and the use of pragmatic and symbolic argumentation by reflecting on distinct social and political contexts across the studied countries.

Events during the period of analysis

In the analyzed period, four events shaped the discourse on climate change and energy policy in relation to the EU in the Hungarian news media. During the summer of 2021, a novel national consultation campaign started dealing with "Life after the epidemic," mostly focusing on economic decisions and incorporating a statement concerning climate change, the Global Climate Summit (COP26) in Glasgow, Planet Budapest 2021 Sustainability Expo and Summit[3], and the outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian war at the end of the period in February 2022.

The relevance of the national consultation requires further brief explanation as it is strongly related to the issues of democracy and national sovereignty discourses in the country. National consultations have served as unique deliberative practices since the 2000s in Hungary, initiated by Fidesz (in opposition at the time), ostensibly to highlight the importance of listening to and reflecting on Hungarian people's voices. However, these consultations are now criticized as they have become simple instruments intended to strengthen the party's position and mobilize people, including their supporters, while they have lost their deliberative function (Pócza & Oross, 2022). They include no questions but only politically constructed statements followed by the binary answer options "agree" or "do not agree." In this context, the statement was the following: "*Brussels wants to impose new taxes on us to make Hungarian families pay for the costs of pollution and climate change caused by multinational corporations*

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3 Planet Budapest is a 'local' Central European trade-fair intended to be a platform for discussing climate issues with experts, decision-makers and companies. It aims to call attention to climate change and represents a possibility for a number of professional exhibitors from the Visegrad countries to introduce technological developments, innovative products and services concerning climate change.

through higher utility bills." This event significantly influenced the discursive framing of climate change during the initial three months, exemplifying the key role of political communication in shaping the narratives presented by the pro-governmental news media.

Dominant discourses

The dominant discourses presented in the analyzed news media are the following: *the discourse of protection the discourse of responsibility, the discourse of the anti-global versus global dichotomy, the discourse of ideology vs. reality, and the discourse of the weakness and legitimacy of the EU.*

Among these, the *discourse of protection* and the *discourse on responsibility* are central disursive frameworks employed by the Hungarian government across a wide spectrum of political issues. While the discourse on *protection* is crucial but has no specific actors in the case of climate change discussions (the same people and political action are to be protected as in many other governmental discourses), the *discourse of responsibility* plays a prominent role in discussions surrounding climate change, involving actors of the political opposition and numerous sub-discourses.

The discourse of anti-global versus global dichotomy also appears as a recurring theme in various political contexts; in the case of climate change and energy policy, this dichotomy is particularly significant. It highlights the global nature of climate change and the supranational character of European Union (EU) solutions related to climate change and their effect on policy-making processes.

The EU is frequently criticized by the Hungarian government for being driven by ideological frameworks, particularly those associated with liberal ideologies. In contrast, the Hungarian government positions itself as grounded in pragmatism, reacting based on social and economic reality. This discursive framework, *Ideology vs Reality*, plays a critical role in shaping climate-related discourse in the EU context, confronting ideology, politics, and science.

Furthermore, in the context of the EU's approach to climate issues, several critics have noted the balance between national sovereignty and federalist structures. These debates are part of a broad critique regarding the *weakness and legitimacy of the EU.* While the sovereignty-federalism discourse is present in the previous discourses as well, it assumes a distinct logic in relation to the EU's authority, thereby creating a separate discourse in the analysis.

Discourse of responsibility

One of the main challenges associated with climate change is finding easily targetable actors responsible for it since the whole globe is involved and affected by it. Therefore, the discourse of responsibility is, per se, a discourse on the externalization of responsibility, too. This discourse is one of the most common types in this area and can be identified in almost all the analyzed content in some form. The question of responsibility is connected to the debate on the future of Europe, the position of sovereign nations in the fight against climate change, the role of local-global actors and actions, the responsibility of everyday people, politicians, power actors, and so on. We focus on the most dominant sub-discourses in the context of the EU. For several years, the discourse on the externalization of responsibility has been present in Hungarian political communication mainly in case of global issues such as migration (Melegh et al., 2019) and economic processes but also concerning international relations, including the relationship between Hungary and the EU (Sata, 2023). This means that external – non-national, non-governmental – actors are the ones to be blamed for the difficulties the nation is facing. There are several positions (questions) related to this discourse: (1) who is responsible for climate change? (2) Who is responsible for acting against climate change, and on what level? And (3) who should *not* have to take responsibility?

Most articles we analyzed deal with the complicated relationship between Hungary and the EU concerning the climate issue. However, the media reflection on the Climate Summit (COP26) in Glasgow changed the narrative about the position of the European Union on the global climate issue.

> *Climate protection is typically a story in which even the EU is a small fish. So, this is something that can only be solved globally. The fact that we agree on anything here at a European level or that we push or screw up has very little relevance. The biggest players here are in Asia, the biggest polluters.* (RTL, 2021. 11. 16.)

and after the COP26 event:

> *At the same time, the EU again failed to play a decisive role and could not contribute to the North-South rapprochement, the "big players" being the US, China, India, and other countries.* (MN, 2021. 11. 17.)

The Hungarian government seems to systematically underestimate everyone's potential contribution at all societal levels in Europe concerning direct action

against climate change. The European Commission is strongly criticized for its ideological position to lead the world in the fight against climate change. However, it has no actual power to force anyone outside the EU to act; it only regulates and gives direction to its members. This is also part of the process of externalization on a different scale, associated with no actual solutions or ideas for acting.

In the case of climate change, three main actors are named as the perpetrators in political communication represented in the news media. Two of them are global actors.

• big companies should shoulder responsibility

The cost of a climate-neutral economy should primarily be borne by the climate wreckers – the large polluting countries and large companies. (Origo, 2021. 05. 25.)

• countries with high emissions are responsible for climate change

The European Union is responsible for around 8% of global emissions, and as its emissions continue to fall, those of other developing countries are increasing dramatically. This share will continue to fall significantly in the coming years and decades. (M1, 2022. 02. 01.)

These two sub-discourses are typical anti-globalization discourses – not part of anti-EU discourse – since neither the European Union nor Hungary is found to be responsible for the situation. First, this seems to contrast with the unique governmental "externalization of responsibility" discourse about migration (Melegh et al., 2021), involving blaming Brussels for the crisis in 2015, but it fits well with the anti-globalization discourse concerning migration in general. This approach to climate change is pragmatic by pointing to actors while avoiding responsibility.

• Brussels is blamed for overemphasizing the need for climate consciousness

The third actor to be blamed is the EU. Criticism often centers on Brussels –not for causing the climate crisis itself, but for its energy policies and their alleged contribution to rising inflation, thus contributing to another form of crisis, the energy crisis. These issues are frequently framed within the broader discourse of combating climate change. Two dominant arguments emphasize Brussels' role in climate-related matters. The first focuses on interpreting why Brussels

is advocating for a specific approach to addressing climate change, which is further elaborated in the discourse on the *EU's weakness and legitimacy.*

The second argument – discussed in this section – emphasizes Brussels' role as an educator and leader in fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainable practices among its Member States.

> *I see that in the European Union, and particularly in the narrative of the European institutions of the European Commission, there is a very strong narrative that they are a kind of climate bully of the world, setting an example for other big regions... Certainly, it [the EU] doesn't dictate the pace, but it has been an important reference point for Europe for the last two thousand years, and it can and should be perceived as such, so I think that this kind of guidance as an intention is important.* (HírTV, 2022. 01. 10.)

This perspective also reflects the global positioning of the EU, which seeks to act as a leader in climate policy. However, the EU is challenged to have a tangible influence on actors outside its borders due to its relatively limited cultural and economic weight. At the same time, the EU places substantial pressure on its Member States to comply with ambitious climate policies.

There is a marginal sub-discourse related to Brussels's responsibility, involving stressing the voting membership of Hungary in the EU in contrast to positioning the country as an external actor.

• Those who bear the public burden and those who should not be responsible

While the primary governmental discourses center on identifying those with responsibility, an alternative perspective emphasizes the shared burden of addressing these challenges. This view acknowledges the unequal circumstances among nations and societies while recognizing that all individuals and countries bear some level of responsibility for the future of the planet. Timmermans is quoted in one of the articles:

> *Climate is everyone's business: it's not always a question of who's responsible but of what the public spending should be, not in the same way [for all countries/actors], of course.* (MN, 2021. 12. 09.)

Discussion of the responsibility of all is represented only by the political opposition in highlighting the following:

> *The EU climate plans, climate targets, explicitly put a lot of emphasis on the social dimension [....] There is a mechanism for a just transition and, within that, a fair transition fund. So, the EU has a very strong political will and a strong set of measures and financial frameworks specifically designed to ensure that climate transition is not an unbearable burden for people.* (ATV, 2022. 01. 06.)

A marginal discourse exists regarding the potentially positive effects of climate change in relation to addressing social inequalities – a perspective systematically absent from the dominant climate change discourses in Hungary. The latter's dominant discourses fail to address specific social groups based on their economic status; instead, they focus primarily on families and refer to them by the number of children they have.

The former approach was mentioned only occasionally, primarily by members of the political opposition, such as Benedek Jávor, a former Member of the European Parliament and an expert in environmental law.

> *The green turn is not a luxury for the rich but a chance for the poor to catch up.* (NSZ, 2022. 01. 11.)

One of the most dominant narratives in global climate crisis discussions arises in relation to the tension between individual and collective responsibilities. However, this narrative is largely absent from the Hungarian discourse. While the political opposition tries to introduce this perspective, it is often labeled a "green ideology" and criticized for allegedly opposing the interests of Hungarian families. The dominant governmental narrative interprets families as the smallest social unit. However, their responsibility – both as those who contribute to climate change and as actors who can combat climate change – is not acknowledged. Instead, families are portrayed as passive entities that require protection. This passive interpretation aligns with the broader governmental narrative that positions the state as the primary protector of its citizens, reinforcing its role as a guardian rather than engaging citizens as active participants.

There is an interesting dichotomy concerning the attitude to protecting families or degrading the role of individuals, as the governmental framing also introduces a conservative approach to climate change based on local and individual actions.

> *While the liberals virtually eliminate the responsibility of individuals*
> *by empowering supranational institutions, the conservative side thinks*
> *in terms of a local solution: the role and the attitude of the individual.*
> (MN, 2021. 11. 30.)

Meanwhile, in the dominant governmental discourse, people and individuals cannot be "educated" or dictated to and should not be told to shoulder responsibility for the issue of climate change.

The discourse on responsibility is complex, with several actors and sub-discourses, yet the majority of the latter share one common element: anyone can be responsible for climate change or for poorly managing the topic – except for local actors and everyday citizens.

Discourse of protection – the securitization of families and Hungarian households

The discourse on protection is essentially related to the *discourse on responsibility* as the other side of the coin, namely, who is responsible for protection and who needs to be protected, as previously referred to.

Since the migration crisis, the issue of protection has dominated Hungarian political discourse. This includes the protection of people from migrants (Szalai, 2016), Christianity from liberalism (Vancsó, 2020; Sata, 2023), children from "LGBTQ+ propaganda" (Gera, 2023), and the nation from the effects of war. In each case, Hungarian families—or the concept of family— are positioned as the central target of protection (Sata, 2014), albeit from different perspectives.

The discourse on protecting families is also important concerning climate change, as the latter is alleged to enhance generational conflict and destroy traditional family structures and the future of youth. As Viktor Orbán said in an interview in 2019, "*The family protection action plan offers Hungarian people unprecedented support and an opportunity to plan for their future*" (Origo, 2019. 02. 10; Viktor Orbán Prime Minister announces the family protection program).

Protection happens on both ideological and economic levels. Concerning the topic of growing inflation and energy policy, overhead reductions are one of the keys to protecting Hungarian families, which are being targeted by Brussels, and since the economic regression and even the start of the war in Ukraine, the topic is strongly connected to the topic of climate change.

> *The "policy of artificial price increases in Brussels" must be suspended because until the effects of the war have passed, families cannot be exposed to a three to four-fold increase in energy prices. Let us stop this process now, let us suspend it, let Brussels stop raising energy prices, and then suddenly, the price of energy will be affordable, or at least more manageable.* (NSZ, 2022. 03. 27., based on an interview on Kossuth Radio with the Viktor Orbán).

This governmental discourse on the protection of families is part of the discourse on national sovereignty from many perspectives. Who has the right to decide about the concept of families or the conditions of how people live, or how to make economic decisions on topics such as overhead reductions, even more so when they are related to global issues such as the climate crisis?

According to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, energy prices had already started to rise; the war just added to this, but in fact, energy prices are rising in Europe because the EU is raising prices.

> *The European Commission is saying that the way to protect the climate is to force people to use as little energy as possible, so they are raising energy prices centrally every year. [...] And I don't think that the European Commission should raise the costs for families and try to force households to change their lives.* (NSZ, 2022. 03. 27., based on an interview on Kossuth Radio)

and

> *According to Judit Varga, Hungary's performance in the fight against climate change is exemplary, as, in addition to our environmental protection measures, we have managed to defend the overhead reductions and the sovereignty of the Hungarian economy.* (HÍR TV, 2021. 11. 03.)

This is closely related to the sub-discourse about who should not be responsible for climate change but from a protection point of view. The "overhead reduction scheme" is a Hungarian "invention"; not only should Hungarian people be protected from EU decisions, but such initiatives as well.

Discourse on the anti-global/global dichotomy

We need to act globally and locally; global action can be made effective through nation-state action. (NSZ, 2021. 11. 30.)

The global-local dichotomy is strongly embedded in the discourse of responsibility within climate policy. While the global nature of climate issues often leads to the externalization of responsibility, the associated discourse frequently emphasizes local and regional roles without directly addressing the concept of responsibility.

The crucial role of local decision-making and actions associated with addressing climate issues is positively emphasized in almost all the analyzed articles when it appears, albeit with and without any specificities or actual examples. Pro-government news media highlight the necessity of developing unique, nation-specific energy policies tailored to each country's distinct characteristics. The narrative suggests that localized approaches are essentially linked to anti-globalization discourses, positing that the local cannot exist independently of opposition to global frameworks.

As the global character of energy policies cannot be overlooked, the discourses emphasize the necessity of enhancing international cooperation. However, the proposed solutions tend to favor bilateral agreements or alignments with nations that share a critical stance about Brussels' climate policies, such as the members of the Visegrád Group (V4) or France. In these debates, climate change is often treated as only a contextual issue, subject to the priorities of economic decision-making and international relations. This dynamic reflects the dominance of pragmatic political considerations over environmental needs, revealing the broader tension between ideology and practical realities in Hungary's approach to the climate crisis.

Counter-arguments also enhance the special characteristics of the country while calling attention to the importance of unified action in case of this global crisis. The general negative approach to anything "global" is part of the pro-governmental narrative that stresses that global action cannot exist without local/national level action[4]; that global is in opposition to local/national; that global forces and processes are "suspicious" (as in the governmental discourse, global refers to "the global elite," and that the leaders of Brussels are part of this group of people). "National" and "local" mean anti-global, which is definitely counter

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4 'Local' is sometimes the synonym of national, but in a V4 context, it also means Central-Eastern European.

to the intentions of the European Union, who only "exacerbate problems." In this global/anti-global discourse, the European Commission and its climate policy are sort of a global enemy that is systematically destroying "local" communities/nations' own energy sources; these processes make the different countries unequally vulnerable. Meanwhile, the issue of global dependence on nationally supported forms of energy sources – in the case of Hungary, nuclear energy or gas, for example – seems to be no more than an economic decision to keep energy costs as low as possible.

In this discourse, the importance of protecting "sacred land," or as Mikecz and colleagues put in their framework, "the idealization of the natural landscape," is present, connected to the political landscape of the region, referring to V4 countries and the Carpathian Basin.

> *If we cannot solve these issues globally, we will not be able to solve them at the European level either.* (RTL, 2021.11.6)

The general pro-governmental narrative maintains a negative stance toward anything "global," claiming that global initiatives are unachievable without actions at local and national levels. This narrative constructs a dichotomy where "global" is positioned as in opposition to "local/national," and global forces and processes are portrayed as "suspicious."

In the dominant pro-governmental media, local and national are interpreted as inherently anti-global, standing in opposition to the European Union's policies, which are blamed for "exacerbating problems." Within this global anti-global discourse, the European Commission and its climate policies are introduced as enemies contributing to the systematic degradation of local communities and solutions and undermining national energy autonomy and sovereignty.

Discourse on ideology vs reality

The issue of global dependence on certain energy sources—such as nuclear energy or natural gas—is interpreted not only as an economic decision intended to maintain low energy costs but as a solution built on reality, in contrast to an ideological approach. The categorization of green and renewable energy sources is also highly politicized at both national and international levels based on the main energy resources that countries use. Arguments on this matter concern the binary opposition of ideology vs reality.

[...] Last year, Europe was forced to face the prospect of climate and energy policy decisions driven by green ideology, politics, and lobbying interests backfiring and leading to a serious energy crisis. (Origo, 2022. 01. 06.)

The European and the Hungarian left led by "philos" cannot understand that energetics is not a question of philosophy or emotions, but stark reality. (MN, 2022. 03. 30.)

"Ideology," like "global" – they are also strongly related – is an expression with negative interpretations in governmental communication, connected to processes such as unification or standardization that oppose a specific or tangible reality. The EU's decisions on climate policies are interpreted as being aligned with the "green ideology" created in Brussels or the global elite that ignores the energy systems of the different nations. Ideology cannot deal with the specifics. However, this "ideology" also comes from a certain reality – in this discourse, the interest of the global elite –, which is increasing inequality (e.g., the proposal for energy taxation would affect more negatively countries like Hungary with unique energy policies, thus increasing the gap between the East and the West – a discourse which also has importance in right-wing political communication) (Mikecz et al., 2023). In contrast, decisions based on realities would better fit the different characteristics of countries. By the end of February, with the Russo-Ukrainian war, this debate became much louder, with discussion of the appropriateness of moral action based on Western ideologies – namely, involving the sanctions against Russia – which was evidently unequally harming the various EU countries. The oft-repeated statement of Hungarian governmental politicians that *"Hungary is on the side of the Hungarians"* strengthened this claim for an approach to energy policy based on economic reality. It also reflects the specific position of post-socialist countries in global energy policy.

According to this discourse, "green ideology" is based on the desire of the global elite to gain control over energy policy. Thus, it is a luxury of the rich/people in power and is far from addressing the growing needs of the poor. As inflation is strongly connected to energy policy, it has also become part of this discourse on ideology vs. reality. Inflation is caused by decisions made by the global elite, thus is artificially created.

So, if the Brussels bureaucrats did not artificially raise the price of energy, we would find a means of curbing the pace of price rises. (NSZ, 2022. 03. 27., based on an interview with Viktor Orbán on Kossuth Radio).

In the dominant pro-governmental discussions, the EU should prioritize addressing economic crises and war and supporting national governments to take responsibility for their own countries before focusing on the challenges of climate change.

During this period, discussions surrounding the climate crisis primarily arose regarding its economic domain concerning issues such as taxation and energy policies. The climate crisis, a global and ongoing concern, is often perceived as less tangible and pressing, diminishing its urgency in political agendas. Solutions and actions require long-term strategies and cannot be achieved through rapid political decision-making that mobilizes instant political support.

An interesting element arises in relation to the dichotomies of ideology versus reality, and universal versus particular values, as governmental communication simultaneously applies both dimensions. On one hand, decision-making is grounded in particular realities; on the other, it is justified by universal values. This dynamic is particularly evident in the contrast between the European Union's universal ideology and Hungary's claim to uphold universal values. In the discourse on climate change, the EU's universal values are framed through ideological narratives and moralization. In contrast, Hungary's approach is portrayed as rooted in pragmatic realities, emphasizing the protection of the nation, its position in the global energy policy, and the reinforcement of familial welfare.

Discourse on the EU's weaknesses and legitimacy

Although Hungary is often criticized for having a political system that is backsliding from democracy into autocracy, its position in the EU is still strong, and as a result, the EU functions as a "regime[-]legitimizing factor for Hungary, which compels us to describe the current political system of Hungary as an externally constrained hybrid regime" (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018, p. 1174). At the same time, Hungary strongly criticizes the democratic system of the EU, calling attention to the federalistic approach to the EU, disfavoring the role of the nations as independent actors.

Regarding climate protection, the allegedly real cause behind the new plan for environmental taxation is to extend Brussels's power institutionally and economically.

The primary driving force behind the new environmental tax on households is not climate protection, but an extension of Brussels' powers. The environmental impact of the proposed centralized regulatory instrument is small, but it could provide the European institutions with new powers and [...] revenue streams. (Origo.hu, 2021. 07. 26. and M1, 2021. 12. 21.)

The Hungarian government criticizes the European Commission for being anti-democratic in regard to several decision-making processes.

Let's be honest, the sanctions were not imposed in a democratic way. The sanctions were decided by Brussels bureaucrats and European elites. The European people were not consulted. (2021. 09. 26., speech of Viktor Orbán before addressing the agenda in Parliament, represented on several news sites)

and a few weeks later:

European democracy is being put at risk by those who are driving up the price of electricity and gas. These plans must therefore be withdrawn and rethought. (Origo, 2021. 10. 22.)

Again, the changes in energy prices are interpreted as being the result of the actions of an elite group, which accusation is part of the externalization of responsibility. However, in this section, the focus is on democracy.

An interesting contrast is that while the EU is criticized for being anti-democratic, its democratic nature is represented as of the main sources of its weakness. The constant aim of finding common ground on every issue with all EU Member States, which requires flexibility and the ability to renegotiate anything, hinders rapid action.

The characteristic of the European Union, which perhaps makes the Orbán government less afraid that the country will sooner or later find itself in a difficult situation, is that it likes to renegotiate things. So, when a member state says I've changed my mind, I'm going to change it, it says let's sit down, let's renegotiate the terms. (MN, 2022. 01. 24.)

The discourse on this weakness was present in both pro-governmental and government-critical websites' discourses. The opposition point of view is that this system makes possible the emergence of actors such as Viktor Orbán and

the Polish leader of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, who are called the builders of authoritarian systems.

The complexity of the decision-making process is also debated, as it makes rapid action impossible in urgent cases. In contrast to this overly bureaucratic, too-complex mechanism, the federal structure of the United States seems to be perceived more positively. At the same time, the Federal EU concept is constantly criticized by referring to the cultural richness of the region and the importance of national sovereignty.

The source of this weakness is, therefore, the anti-democratic attempts of the EU to simplify decision-making processes with issues such as climate change, which supposedly affects all EU countries. Meanwhile, this complexity of decision-making processes is also criticized. It is interpreted as a sign of the decreasing legitimacy of the EU in discussing issues that affect differently the Member States. According to the governmental communication, the EU must be reformed. However, the way it should be done is not elaborated in the discourses present on the news sites.

RESULTS

In the analyzed corpus, articles rarely represent the explicit opinion of the newspaper or the journalist. Instead, their messages predominantly depend on quoting political speeches or expert opinions without providing additional interpretations. The topic of climate change rarely appeared as the primary focus; rather, it was framed in the context of broader issues such as economic challenges, European Union regulations, or the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

It was an independent subject only in the cases of reporting about events such as COP26 in Glasgow or the Planet Budapest Summit.

The results further reveal that the topic of climate change, or environmental topics in general, are not represented independently in media coverage. They are intertwined with dominant governmental discourses on families, energy policy, economic performance, or scientific progress. For example, when inflation, new taxation policies, or rising energy prices become the center of political communication and thus the news media, climate-related topics become incorporated into pre-existing dominant governmental narratives. Consequently, during such periods, the number of articles addressing climate change increases, as does the presence of this topic on pro-governmental websites.

Positions and actors

Since climate change has recently attracted substantial attention in the Hungarian public sphere, discussions regarding the present and the potential future of climate policy – despite explicit political statements – have essentially featured experts' opinions. However, these experts are not entirely independent of politics either. As previously noted, the strategy of politicizing scientific issues (Bolsen & Druckman, 2015) is quite common concerning climate-change-related issues, and the disagreement between liberal and conservative political approaches is becoming ever more visible (Pepermans & Maeseele, 2016). Following the 2010 elections, the Hungarian government established various state-aligned research institutes and networks. This network of researchers supports governmental strategies across several fields, including climate change. Related to our case, it emphasizes the key role of nuclear energy over renewable sources, framing it as a reflection of "reality." This narrative opposes "green ideologies" and the "forced greening" advocated by the idealistic European elite, including Hungary's political opposition, who support the development of green energy sources. Both political groups deploy researchers who communicate in align with their opinions through the news media. In the case of the political opposition, the experts represented are also political actors – e.g., Benedek Jávor – further emphasizing the connection between science and politics.

Apart from this small group of experts, the dominant actors in the discourses are politicians from two distinct groups: 1) actors directly related to the topic, such as the State Secretary for Energy and Climate Policy, Attila Steiner; members of the Green party Politics Can Be Different (LMP); and internationally, Frans Timmermans, who led the climate policy of the EU; 2) actors in leading positions in the national and international landscape such as Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian PM, Judit Varga, the minister for foreign affairs at the time, and on the international level, Angela Merkel. Viktor Orbán is a leading/heroic figure when it comes to energy policy and overhead reduction, as it is said that "he is the one who personally invented the policy of overhead reduction" (2022.02.09., Szilárd Németh, Fidesz politician), one of the most dominant topics concerning climate change.

Institutions also play a significant role as actors, including the Hungarian government, the European Commission, and often generalized entities such as "Brussels" or the "bureaucrats of Brussels." Aligned with previous research results, Brussels is referred to as a faceless, independent entity "ruled by those who want to replace an alliance of free nations with a European empire…," aiming to gain imperial power (Csehi & Zgut, 2021). As Krastev described it,

the Hungarian government "uses Brussels as a rhetorical punching bag while benefiting from its financial largess" (Krastev, 2018, p. 3). The Hungarian government acts as an outsider, as someone far away from this faceless entity; meanwhile, Hungarian politicians discuss and vote as members of this community.

Language

The polarization between pro-governmental and non-governmental discourses can also be grasped in the linguistic choices. Pro-governmental experts and politicians tend to favor using expressions such as *environmental protection*, *energy policy*, or *energy crisis*, whereas experts with opposing political perspectives commonly use expressions like climate change, climate crisis, or *climate protection.* Notably, the term "climate" in any form is associated with negative connotations within pro-governmental communication. Furthermore, the use of "war" rhetoric, a typical characteristic of the Hungarian government's political communication (Szabó & Szabó, 2022), is commonly associated with this topic, particularly in the context of the governmental overhead reduction scheme discussed at national and international levels.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The topic of climate change is associated with no specific, inherent discursive framework, nor was it taken too seriously before the national elections in April 2022. However, it is deployed to support and strengthen other major discourses, such as the discourse of responsibility, the discourse of protection, the discourse about the weakness of the European Union, and political discourses of major importance in the Hungarian public sphere. These results are partly in line with those of Mikecz and his colleagues (2023), who claim that the narratives that are used concerning the climate crisis and climate movement rather follow the Hungarian government's general discourses and communication strategies than the discursive patterns of populism globally. Mikecz's results also discuss how this discourse fits the climate-nationalist approach. Our results, however, show that it is rather a climate-conservative approach that is deployed to reinforce the claim that "current new environmentally conscious technological innovations can

address the changes and that there is a role for the national and EU levels to play, but only to the extent that this is done at minimum cost to nation-state economies and national sovereignty" (Vihma et al., 2020). This conservative perspective highlights the importance of local solutions – local can mean cooperation between V4 countries as well – and criticizes the urge to act globally, calling this a left-liberal approach (Antal, 2021, p. 221), associated with claims that liberal actors want to expropriate the issue of climate change (Featherstone, 2013; Båtstrand, 2015).

In looking at the discursive approach to the current European integration process of the government and the political opposition, we can see both sides lack any real pro-EU discourse. Previous research shows that Hungarian political communication tends to personalize the EU and Brussels as an opponent or a bully but not as an ally. At the same time, Central-Eastern Europe is a positive character (Benczes & Szabó, 2020; Szabó & Szabó, 2022). In the case of climate change, this bully-ally dichotomy should be difficult to use. However, by transforming this issue into one of pure energy policy by enhancing the elements of overhead costs and protecting families, Brussels can easily be castigated as a bully or, even more, an incompetent and ideologically guided elite.

The discussions surrounding climate change also highlight the nation's geopolitical positioning between East and West. This dual alignment is characterized by a pragmatic approach to the East and ideologically driven affiliations with the West.

When looking at these discourses of Europeanization using a pragmatic and value-based or identity framework (Toshkov et al., 2014), the political opposition's discourses seem to be pragmatic by enhancing the positive role of the EU in supporting and framing the fight against climate change within the context of the values of the European Union. However, on the pro-governmental news sites, it is interpreted as an ideological stance favoring "green ideology." The governmental discourse is more complicated because it constantly uses both pragmatic and identity frameworks. The discussion of decision-making processes concerning climate change is governed by pragmatic questions – who is responsible? how should we act? – but explained and masked using an identity approach based on values, such as the role and protection of families and the importance of national sovereignty.

The results indicate that discourses surrounding climate change continue to be mainly associated with economic and political themes rather than part of an independent discursive framework. However, it is evident that the former topic is becoming increasingly important, suggesting that it will be valuable to monitor shifts in its framing over the coming years.

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