

**Maria Heller, Tamás Kohut and Borbála Kriza:**  
**Eurosceptic discourse in Hungary before the 2009 EP campaign**  
**– on the basis of online media**

**Draft – do not cite!**

1. Hungarian EU membership and political debates on European integration

Throughout its history and especially after the collapse of the state-socialist regime, Hungary had a profound commitment to European - or rather “Western” - values, culture and civilization. This value-system had already served as a reference even during the periods when Hungary was under “Eastern” rule (Ottoman Empire, Soviet Union). Therefore, one of the major political expectations of the transformation of 1989-1990, was some kind of overture or approach to the EU and to Western Europe. This desire can be detected in discourses and slogans thematizing EU accession and EU integration. The idea of joining the European Union was unanimously supported by all leading democratic parties in post-communist Hungary. This consensus was underpinned by the widespread view that after years of oppression and occupation Hungarians “deserve the membership in the exclusive club” and the West should not be reluctant to secure it by facilitating the processes and covering the costs of accession (and being generous - via derogations - towards the fallacies of the Hungarian political and economic institutions). The public expectations related to membership were based, however, rather on economic grounds. Although political discourses of the 1990s tried to emphasise the political advantages of the accession: guarantees for solid democracy, participation in EU institutions, freedom of movement and disappearing borders etc., not surprisingly, the majority of the Hungarian society, deprived from consumption for long, imagined higher salaries, social security, a “Western” lifestyle, increased living standards with EU membership. While the accession procedure was about to conclude, public opinion became more realistic although the information and knowledge about the EU, its institutions and its functioning were extremely low.

With accession, the pronounced goal has been achieved and Europe as a catchword ceased to play a role in political vocabulary. Politicians could not use it anymore as a reference: *“We should behave in a democratic and civilized way, otherwise we will not be admitted to the EU”*, etc. On the other hand, as people did not experience any sudden changes, (rapid amelioration of their living standards) and the EU membership is not an everyday experience, public opinion became very soon uninterested or even disappointed about the EU.

Since EU has never been able to become a “user friendly” institution and failed to provide handy messages to its citizens about its advantages or its mere functioning, there is no reason why Hungarians (provincial and isolated as they may be - for language reasons among others) should feel less alienated from the EU than citizens of any other European country.

Recently this disillusionment and indifference were aggravated by domestic political turbulences in which the deep cleavage and evolving “cold war” between the two major political parties and the emerging political and financial crises distanced people

from all public affairs including European issues and increased general malaise and depression.

In this context, Euroscepticism has indisputably gained importance in the Hungarian public sphere during the last decade. The general grouchy atmosphere resulted from the fact that the customary Hungarian pessimistic public attitude was reinforced by the economic crisis of 2008 and the bitter struggle between political parties. The deep dividing lines between political orientations caused strong deception and turning away from politics among citizens. But the contentious political actors successfully mobilized a large layer of the population into political activism and in certain cases into street demonstrations with consequent street violence. On the basis of these antecedents, it was foreseeable that the 2009 EP election campaign would focus more on home political issues than on European topics. Even among the domestic issues, the most frequent discourses were overall criticisms on governmental policies or personal attacks on various politicians of the ruling Socialist Party (MSZP). As the campaign was taking shape, it became more and more evident, that most of the campaign events were general negative discourses against the rival political actors or groups. Campaign discourses were characterized by overall general statements. Real objective criticism was rare in the whole campaign, thus the EU and related topics were seldom mentioned in the debates.

National and EU statistics (Eurobarometer 68, 69, 70, 71) prove that popularity of the EU was decreasing in the Hungarian public opinion; therefore, a viable hypothesis about EU election campaign could foresee that questions concerning the benefits of the country's EU membership might be thematized on various fora (mainstream media and also Internet sites, blogs, etc.). Most of such questions or (negative) evaluations were constructed as part of interest-based discourses, where speakers tried to evaluate – often on a very personal basis – what benefits “we” have got from EU membership. It has to be reemphasized, however, that EU topics were not frequently debated during the campaign, and Eurosceptic views were even more seldom expressed except for certain special niches of the public sphere (extreme right-wing activist online media).

While already the EP campaign in 2004 mainly centered on the question: who will better represent Hungarian national interests in the EU, the 2009 campaign also put forward national interests, if any. (Recon model <sup>1</sup>). On the basis of the analyses of public discourses we can affirm that one of the main topics of Eurosceptic discourse tackled the same problem: Hungarian interests are not well enough represented in the EP, thus the country's membership was either seen as a problem or the importance of the whole EU was declared to be low.

The above mentioned Eurosceptic topic was regularly constructed especially in citizens' online media in a way that parties and their main politicians were contested and were evaluated by citizen debaters in relationship with their presumed capacities of representing the nation in the EU Parliament. These evaluations focused on some

---

<sup>1</sup> Eriksen, E.O. & Fossum, J.E. (2008) Reconstituting European Democracy. ARENA Working Paper 01/2008, ARENA - Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, January 2008.  
[http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2008/papers/wp08\\_01.pdf](http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2008/papers/wp08_01.pdf) (last access: 19 May 2010)

narrow topics; the most often treated questions were politicians' attitudes to Hungarian national values and interests. Thus, feelings of national identity, attitudes towards Hungarian minorities in neighbour countries were the main gauges of Eurosceptic evaluation and the main Eurosceptic topics thematized national sovereignty, the role of foreign and multinational capital in Hungarian economy and the fear of foreign ownership of (agricultural) land. In populist nationalist argumentation, as a general mistrust in supranational institutions, the EU was seen as a globalizing power which puts to danger national culture, national values and interests. Besides well-known Eurosceptic arguments (found in other countries, too) like too huge Euro-bureaucracy, typical "small country" arguments also emerged, blaming the supposedly greater influence and unequal treatment of the large member-states.

Most Eurosceptic discourses were produced by populist, nationalist speakers most of them from the right or even the extreme-right wing of the political arena. The very feeble extreme-left also held anti-EU discourses on the basis of anti-capitalism. Pro-European discourse was mainly produced by parties in the center and on the left. But it has to be pointed out that pro-European discourses were not ideological while their anti-EU counterparts were. Pro-European discourses mainly tackled concrete topics, discussing EU plans, ongoing policies, they attempted to point at EU-aided programmes and realizations throughout the country. But as the ruling Socialist Party has had a very bad and defensive communication policy ever since on power, these arguments were advanced in a rather shy manner, because even their own halo of activists and followers considered these discourses might seem to be sheer government propaganda.

## 2. EP elections in 2009

The European Parliamentary elections were held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2009. In the previous parliamentary session the Hungarian delegation consisted of 24 MEPs, but the present distribution of the European Parliamentary seats among the member-states decreased the number of Hungarian mandates to 22. The electoral system differs greatly from the general election procedure in vigour in the country: it is much more simplified, as it is a basic proportional voting system. The voters can cast a ballot only to party lists, and the whole country counts as one single constituency. Similarly to the national elections, a voting threshold percentage of 5% must be reached by any party in order to be entitled to get a mandate. Furthermore, as it is practised also at general elections, the parties or would-be candidates must collect twenty thousand signatures of registered voters prior to the election period. The list of supporting voters has to be presented to the National Election Committee, which then takes a decision about the given political party's participation in the elections.<sup>2</sup>

The turnout at the 2009 European Parliamentary elections (36.31%) was below the European average of 43%, and it also slightly underscored the turnout of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.valasztas.hu/en/ovb/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> For the following data and tables see:

**Table 1. Turnout – Definitive**

Election year	National turnout (%)	European turnout (%)
2004	38.5	45.47
2009	36.31	43

The main winner of the 2009 elections was FIDESZ, the right-wing nationalist-traditionalist party, which received the absolute majority of votes at 56.36% of all valid votes. The social-democratic MSZP, which won the national general elections three years before, (ahead of FIDESZ), came second at only 17.37%. The new far-right party, Jobbik, which was foreseen to fare around the 5% threshold before the elections, surprisingly took 14.77% of the votes. Indeed, it could be argued that besides FIDESZ the real winner of the EP-elections was Jobbik with its surprising breakthrough. After the EP elections, it became widely believed and discussed that Jobbik with all its extremism, racism and xenophobia would become a parliamentary party at the 2010 general elections<sup>4</sup>. The fourth party to be able to overcome the 5% limit was MDF, a conservative centre-right party. The long term decline of popularity of the liberal democrats (SZDSZ) led to a very bad score: for the first time since the transitions they received less than 5% of the total votes<sup>5</sup> and thus the most steadily pro-EU party won no seats in the European Parliament. Moreover, the newly formed green-left electoral alliance of the fresh parties of LMP-HP overtook the liberals at 2.61% against 2.16%.

---

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html)

<sup>4</sup> In 2010 Jobbik became the 3<sup>rd</sup> strongest party at the general elections with 47 seats in the 386-member Hungarian Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> SZDSZ, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the left-wing liberal and most solidly pro-European party, rooted in the democratic opposition during state-socialism, with its anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan values, defending human rights and tolerance, completely fell out also of the Hungarian political arena in 2010, not being able to reach the 5% threshold at the general elections.

**Table 2. Results by national party - Definitive results**

Political party	Percentage %
FIDESZ-KDNP	56.36
MSZP	17.37
JOBBIK	14.77
MDF	5.31
LMP-HP	2.61
SZDSZ	2.16
Munkáspárt	0.96
MCF ROMA Összefogás	0.46
Others	0
Total	100

In the actual European Parliament, FIDESZ is a member of the fraction of the European People's Party. Its overwhelming victory secured 14 seats of the national 22. MSZP received 4 mandates and will continue to work in the second largest group of the European Parliament, the social-democratic Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. Jobbik gained 3 seats and its MEPs are formally members of the non-inscrits, but they also joined the Alliance of European National Movements, together with the MEPs of the French National Front, the British National Party, the Belgian National Front, etc. MDF's sole MEP joined the Eurosceptic and anti-federalist European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

**Table 3. Distribution of mandates among EP groups<sup>6</sup>**

Parties <sup>7</sup>	%	Seats	EPP	S&D	ALDE	GREENS / EFA	ECR	GUE/ NGL	EFD	N-I
FIDESZ-KDNP	56.36	14	14							
MSZP	17.37	4		4						
JOBBIK	14.77	3								3
MDF	5.31	1					1			
LMP-HP	2.61	0								
SZDSZ	2.16	0								
Munkáspárt	0.96	0								
MCF ROMA Összefogás	0.46	0								
Others	0	0								
Total	100	22	14	4	0	0	1	0	0	

### 3. Euroscepticism as a topic of research and public debate

Social scientific literature in Hungary does rarely concentrate on the topic of Euroscepticism. This topic is more often discussed in research articles and books that treat the problem of national radicalism, emerging extremism or growing racism in the country. Research is being done by sociologists, jurists and political scientists but certain politicians, as well as civil servants or national and EU functionaries, experts in international relations also participate in the theoretical discourse about the question. It is also interesting to note that among the authors of social scientific literature taking up the question of Euroscepticism, the number of young researchers is high: it shows, in a certain sense, that the young generation (especially those getting a more international education or specializing in international studies) are more concerned by the EU and its relations with Hungary.

Sociological literature is mainly concerned with problems of values, the – often conflicting – relationship between national and European identity, public opinion and the structure of the public sphere. The most frequently treated topic of political

---

<sup>6</sup> EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats); S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament; ALDE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; GREENS/ EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group; GUE/ NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; EFD: Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group; NA: Non-attached

<sup>7</sup> FIDESZ: Alliance of Young Democrats, KDNP: Christian Democratic Peoples' Party, MSZP: Hungarian Socialist Party, Jobbik: Movement for a Better Hungary, MDF: Hungarian Democratic Forum, LMP - HP: Politics Can Be Different - Humanist Party, SZDSZ: Alliance of Free Democrats, Munkáspárt: Hungarian Workers' Party, MCF: Roma Alliance.

scientists is the deeply divided political arena not only between left and right but especially between the politico-ideological orientations of Westernizers and populist nationalists and lately of the quick emergence of national radicalism, seeking for their roots in earlier racist, fascist, xenophobic parties. Zoltan Lakner<sup>8</sup> underlies the fact that Hungary's EU membership was put into a negative political context of home politics by FIDESZ after their defeat in the 2002 parliamentary elections (Lakner 2004). Edit M. Zgut<sup>9</sup> (2009) analyses Eurosceptic discourses and finds that mainly small parties on the edges of the political arena, (none of them inside the Hungarian Parliament by the time of her research), hold Eurosceptic views (two communist parties: Magyar Kommunista Munkáspárt, Magyarországi Munkáspárt 2006, and two extreme right-wing parties: MIÉP and Jobbik<sup>10</sup>). She also points at the fact that after their stunning defeat at the 2002 national elections, "Eurorealistic" contents can be found in discourses of various FIDESZ politicians also, even in the highest ranks of this party.

Topics of the Hungarian EU-entry are discussed in a volume edited by István Hegedűs<sup>11</sup>: *A magyarok bemenetele* (The entrance of the Hungarians). The various chapters of the book analyze the EU enlargement from diverse points of view taking into consideration the opinions of the Hungarian public. Relying on statistics between 1982 and 2004, the authors come to the conclusion that Hungarian citizens have a positive attitude to the EU, in general. Some of the findings prove, however, that deepening cleavages between conflicting political standpoints result in radicalizing opinions some of which tend to refuse not only the political outcomes of the system-change but also the resulting European affiliation of the country. At the same time, with the unfulfilled hopes of economic welfare, public resentment against globalization is strengthening. In certain discourses the EU enlargement is depicted as a globalizing tendency. The book also tackles the problem of the democratic, emotional and informational deficits of the EU enlargement which result in the strong tendency of utilitarian evaluation of the country's membership by citizens. In the lack of sufficient information, their assessment of benefits and investments tend to be based mainly or exclusively on personal, individual gains and losses. The lack of information is also mentioned in an earlier article by Zsófia Szilágyi<sup>12</sup>, where the author reaches the pessimistic view that more information about the EU, its functioning and its everyday reality, the more Eurosceptic views emerge in every country.

---

<sup>8</sup> Lakner, Zoltan (2004) A magyar pártok és az Európai Unió. Az EU mint belpolitikai kérdés 1990-2004 között, in: Politikatudományi Szemle, 2004. 1-2.pp. 139-157.

<sup>9</sup> Zgut, Edit Magdolna (2008): Euroszkeptikus hangok a Házon kívül – kis pártok véleménye Magyarország uniós tagságáról és az Európai Unióról, in: Balogh, László (ed.) A vasfüggönyön túl II. Budapest: Artisi, pp. 73-99.

<sup>10</sup> Jobbik will be the only party to be able to win seats in 2009 at the EP elections and in 2010 at the national legislative elections, as explained earlier.

<sup>11</sup> Hegedűs, István (ed) (2006): *A magyarok bemenetele*. Budapest: DKMKA. BCE Politikatudományi Intézet.

<sup>12</sup> Szilágyi, Zsófia (2002): The rising tide of Euroscepticism.  
[http://www.soros.org/resources/articles\\_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301](http://www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301)  
 (last access: 12 August 2009)



#### 4. The 2009 European Parliamentary elections in the online media

Several analyses were conducted on the 2009 EP campaign in the Hungarian public sphere. In the following we are going to give a brief overview of the analysis done on online media material (part of RECON subproject on Euroscepticism, designed by Trenz et al<sup>13</sup>).

The main characteristic of the 2009 Hungarian EP-election campaign in the online media was first and foremost the overwhelming dominance of domestic party politics. Not only the topics, the general lines of argumentations and justifications remained within the context of Hungarian party politics but the actors who formed the issues of the debate were also above all Hungarian politicians. It is hardly surprising, however, that in a political contest in which only political parties are allowed to compete for European Parliamentary mandates, political actors vindicate a leading role for themselves. In order to get a clear picture on widely shared opinions about the European Parliament and EU policy, it was important to gather a sample of discourses being able to represent not only party politicians' opinions but also to grasp the views of various publics interested in politics. The sample of the research was gathered in such a way that politicians should not be over represented. (More details on data and methodology used will be provided in part 5.)

The dominance of political actors in the campaign could be explained mostly by two main factors. One is the peculiarities of the recent past of domestic politics. Besides the fact that in Hungary throughout the 1990s a vast majority supported the idea of joining the 'rich European club',<sup>14</sup> in the first years of the new millennium a novel form of political stability seemed to reign. As mentioned earlier, after the 2006 general elections, when for the first time in the ex-Communist block the governing left-wing coalition could re-win the elections, political stability started to be challenged by the opponents of the government. The Prime Minister's unfortunate speech aiming at increasing support for his reforms among fellow party representatives was leaked out and served as a pretext for the right wing to mobilize and delegitimize the government and all its reforms. Parallel to the political instability, an economic backdrop and later the impact of the global financial crisis created negative public atmosphere against the ruling coalition. Even the previously unquestionably popular European Union lost a lot of supporters.<sup>15</sup> In these circumstances, it is no surprise that the European

---

<sup>13</sup> Trenz, H.J. - de Wilde, P. (2008): Euro-scepticism: Mapping a new research field for RECON. Manuscript.

<sup>14</sup> In 2001 Hungarians were the third most supportive of the enlargement among the candidate countries. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/cceb/2001/aceb20011\\_summary.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/cceb/2001/aceb20011_summary.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> According to the newest, spring 2009 wave of the Eurobarometer only 32 % of the Hungarians agree that the EU membership of the country is a 'good thing' and only 36 % of the respondents believe that the country has benefited of the EU membership. With these results Hungary is among those countries evaluating the EU the most negatively. Source: EUROBAROMETER 71, Public opinion in the European Union, September 2009; [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71\\_std\\_part1.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71_std_part1.pdf)



Parliamentary elections, a momentum that is usually a second rate political issue<sup>16</sup>, became an event to cast a verdict on the government.

The other main issue that formed the context of the 2009 EP-elections campaign was the emergence of the far-right. The above mentioned scandal of the prime minister was followed by days of rioting in the capital (Autumn 2006), mostly by extreme-right supporters. The right-wing radicals using more and more outspoken racist language also aimed at making advantage of the unsolved social problems caused by the deprived state of the Roma population. It is also worth mentioning that nearly all political parties tried to seek votes by either playing on fears of the emergent far-right or by quietly using the discontent of the population for their own benefits, even if to different degrees.

### **i. Actors**

In the above described context, it was hardly surprising to see that European issues were excluded from the campaign topics of the political parties, and they neither had any elaborated strategies about them. As a consequence of overwhelmingly domestic political issues in the campaign, the actors of political parties had a great share of the public sphere.

The codebook of the present research<sup>17</sup> separates six categories of actors: journalists/bloggers, citizens, party actors, non-party state actors, non-state actors and others. There are, however, only two categories of actors present in the sample, namely citizens and politicians, plus, as a matter of fact, a third category ('other') was coded in one case. In more than half of the 35 messages, the actor was a political party actor (19 cases), and the more broadly defined category of citizens in 15 cases. Party actors are nearly always quite easy to identify while the category of citizens is much more heterogeneous as it may contain anyone from Europe-wide audiences to commentators. Furthermore, political party actors represented in the Hungarian online media are usually members of a small circle of familiar faces: the politicians in the spotlight are the selected few leading candidates, party chairmen, spokesmen and Hungarian MEPs.

The only case when an actor was coded into the category 'other' was when a journalist wrote of *'the supporters of the reform-treaty'*.<sup>18</sup> In this case it can be assumed from the reference – as it was meant as an opposition to the clearly termed group of Eurosceptic politicians – that even here the actors are in fact politicians.

---

<sup>16</sup> The turnout at the 2009 European Parliamentary elections at 36.31% was below the European average of 43%, and it also slightly underscored the turnout of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections; [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary\\_en\\_txt.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/elections2009/en/hungary_en_txt.html)

<sup>17</sup> De Wilde, P. – Trenz, H.J. – Michailidou, A.: Codebook for the analysis of evaluations of the EU polity's worth in online debates. <http://www.reconproject.eu/main.php/Codebook.pdf?fileitem=4472861>

<sup>18</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267\\_hely\\_a\\_neppartnak\\_159\\_a\\_szocialistaknak/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267_hely_a_neppartnak_159_a_szocialistaknak/)

**Table 4. Actor / Actor Scope**

		Actor Scope			Total
		National	Foreign	EU	
Actor	Citizen(s)	11	1	3	15
	Party Actor	12	5	2	19
	6	0	0	1	1
Total		23	6	6	35

About two-third of political actors and three-quarters of citizens included in the analysis have made their messages on a national level. The different distribution between the categories of the scope of actors means that there is almost the same number of political and civic actors on the national level (11 to 12). Of course this is hardly surprising as commentators are nearly always coded on the national level. This information only reinforces the main finding of this crosstab, namely that the Hungarian campaign was first and foremost occupied by Hungarian political actors.

## **ii. Issues**

The mainstream political parties focused on domestic political issues and seldom made evaluations on the European Union. These domestic issues were all addressing the then present state of Hungarian politics and economy. Membership in the EU was seldom contested and it was not compared to historical events, namely to the domination of Hungary by greater foreign powers, although this topic otherwise has a significant role in the Hungarian collective memory and public discourse.

The only issue that had a historical bearing was the relationship between Hungary and ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. The Treaty of Trianon, the peace treaty after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, that caused huge territorial and population losses to the country, is usually thematised by the far-right, but the support of ethnic Hungarians is a general political topic which has been part of the agenda of every government since the transition – although to different degrees. This problem constitutes a largely debated public topic that is reconstructed by each political group with different political, ideological or social aspects. This question is in direct relation with the problem of national identity and affects the country's relationships with its neighbouring countries. Right wing and central-right parties have long been accusing the liberal-socialist coalition of not doing enough for the ethnic Hungarians. There was, however, an initial consensus among parliamentary parties because both sides supported international minority protection laws which would protect the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. It was decided by the parliamentary parties before the European constitutional convent that Hungary should prioritise these minority protection laws.

In spite of this, in the autumn of 2004 the nationalist civil organization, World Federation of Hungarians successfully initiated a referendum on dual citizenship for ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries. The parliamentary opposition conservative parties supported the civil initiative, but the governing liberal-socialist coalition was against it. The referendum, which was finally unsuccessful, was held just

a few days before the detailed debate and voting on the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty Act. This raised the importance of the issue of Hungarian minorities living in the neighbouring countries and shadowed the topic of the EU and the Constitutional Treaty. In fact, the proposal about a statement of collective minority rights, which had been initiated by the opposition, was adopted by the governing parties. The Constitutional Treaty Act was adopted together with this modification to the resolution.

Despite the fact that the issue of ethnic Hungarians has been for years closely connected to European Union membership, it was not a main topic of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaign. Nonetheless, Viktor Orbán, the president of the main opposition party, FIDESZ, in a campaign event held together with ethnic Hungarian politicians from Slovakia, said that the EP elections would measure the weight of Hungarians in the forthcoming European Parliament meaning that if ethnic Hungarian politicians from neighbouring countries gain seats in the European Parliament, Hungarian national interests would get stronger representation through them. This caused an outrage among Slovakian politicians. The row between Hungary and Slovakia was followed for weeks in the media and therefore the message of Orbán was amplified to an extent which had an effect in the sample, as well, because a message in this speech was coded three times. The slightly hidden message of this claim shows that national interests as interpreted by right-wing forces in Hungary go beyond the country's geographical and political borders. Despite this fact, it cannot be regarded as a cosmopolitan standpoint, it is clearly an ethnic, primordial concept, characteristic of the nationalist populist movement, referring to the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of Greater Hungary. Although the fact that the speech of Orbán was a defining moment in the campaign, the issue of ethnic Hungarians did not become a dominant campaign issue.

As mentioned before, the main topics of the campaign were mostly about domestic politics. The state of national economy was much in the focus of every political party, and unsurprisingly every political side blamed the socialist government. It is hardly surprising though that the state of the economy became a main theme of the campaign. The economy, indeed, showed weaknesses for some time, especially after the global financial crisis when Hungary had to cut a deal with the IMF for a loan, which helped to refinance the huge debt. The issue of economy was mostly utilised for partisan interests. The main opposition party, FIDESZ, insisted on early general elections. This narrative depicted the European Parliamentary elections as a verdict on the government that could bring about the beginning of the end for the socialists.

The other main set of issues in the campaign was linked to the far-right. As it was argued before, the emergence of the far-right prompted the ruling socialists and especially the liberal party to create a campaign appealing against the extreme right dangers. This campaign message, however, was based on a truly worrying set of events. Among other actions, far-right groups could be linked to the first riots in the autumn of 2006, in establishing the military-like organisation, called Hungarian Guard, and there were several attacks on the Roma population, in 6 cases homicidal. The far-right Jobbik party mostly attacked the government but also more broadly the establishment. It accused the 'incomplete transitions' for the supposedly corrupt sell-out of Hungary that benefited 'foreign interests'. The political enemies in their

discourses, however, have not only been the elite and the whole establishment but first and foremost the Roma population, who in Jobbik's view live a criminal lifestyle. The main slogan of their campaign was 'Hungary belongs to the Hungarians' which of course should be interpreted as a xenophobic and also Eurosceptic call although it rather had a domestic purpose against Gypsies, Jews and foreigners in general.

### iii. Moments

The topics and events that shaped the representation of the EP-elections in the online media, as it was argued previously, were mainly rooted in domestic politics. In fact one could have the feeling that the single most common type of article or blog post was analysing the consequences of the EP-elections for the national political parties. News concerning the latest campaign events and information on the elections were also common. Foreign news tended to focus on tabloid news or, in a few cases, gave a deeper insight into Europe-wide political landscape. Only one topic seemed to have a greater significance, namely the growing popularity and electoral success of the European extreme-right. A remarkable percent of foreign news also dealt with this latter issue.

Some of the main Hungarian campaign events could also be linked to the major issue of the extreme right. Jobbik provoked several scandals with their extremist discourses, mobilized masses, marches by the Hungarian Guard in small Roma-inhabited villages, etc. The scandals of an alliance between a police trade union and the far-right Jobbik party belong here, as well as a Jobbik politician who accused the Roma minority party with cheating in the registration process for the elections. In a letter to a Hungarian-Jewish civic group based in the United States, the leading candidate of Jobbik, Krisztina Morvai, wrote the following obscene message: *'I would be glad if the so-called proud Hungarian Jews would go back to playing with their tiny little circumcised willies instead of vilifying me.'*<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the far-right scandals, there was only one event that had a truly significant effect on the debate, the aforementioned speech of Viktor Orbán concerning possible ethnic Hungarian MEPs.

## 5. Data and Method

### a. Websites

The website selection for the Hungarian sample followed the instructions provided in the research guidelines<sup>20</sup>. Therefore three professional journalism platforms and two independent blogs were selected at the national level, all of which are webpages involved in political news making. The selected media are publicly available with no required subscription. In order to map the public involvement in online political debates, the sample had to contain websites which had the option of commenting on

---

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.nol.hu/belfold/morvai\\_obszcen\\_levele\\_az\\_amerikai\\_zsidoknak](http://www.nol.hu/belfold/morvai_obszcen_levele_az_amerikai_zsidoknak)

<sup>20</sup> De Wilde, P. – Trenz, H.J. – Michailidou, A.: Codebook for the analysis of evaluations of the EU polity's worth in online debates.  
<http://www.reconproject.eu/main.php/Codebook.pdf?fileitem=4472861>

articles, or separate discussion forums. Last but not least the selected websites had to meet the criteria of achieving public legitimacy. Fulfilment of the latter requirement was achieved by choosing the most popular websites at national level, as it was indicated in the research concept. One of the hypotheses of the research states that ‘the more popular a website, the wider and larger is the audience that may access its discussion forum and, therefore, the higher the possibility that the opinions expressed on this forum may influence the opinions of mass audiences.’ (Michailidou, Trenz 2009<sup>21</sup>)

According to the sampling instructions the following professional journalist platforms and independent blogs were selected for the Hungarian sample:

1. *[origo]*
2. *Index*
3. *Figyelőnet*
4. *W – For a Better Magyarland*
5. *Reakció – polgári underground*<sup>22</sup>

**b. Threads**

In this project, two different textual units of analysis were coded. The first of these are generally referred to as *threads*. A thread is a single entry into one of the sampled websites, including the main entry of the journalist/blogger and all comments directly linked to this entry. In Bloglines, used for the data collection, each thread takes the form of a single ‘clipping’<sup>23</sup>.

As it was previously argued, by reading the texts of the selected online media one could have the impression that domestic party politics was the prime issue of the EP-election campaign. The variable listing the chief topics of the threads confirms this argument since out of 53 threads in 26 cases the subject of the article or discussion forum was ‘Domestic Party Politics’. The second most popular issue was Europe-wide party politics followed by other member states’ party politics. ‘National Economy’ was coded only once and the category ‘Other’ contains only 7 threads. On top of the fact that the campaign was basically only discussed in the wider context of politics, it is remarkable that under the time period of the European elections the categories explicitly about European issues are absolutely missing from the Hungarian sample. (See Table 5.)

**Table 5. Topic / Evaluations**

	Evaluations	Total
--	-------------	-------

<sup>21</sup> Michailidou, A. – Trenz, H.J. (2009): Mediating European integration: Online political communication in European Parliamentary election campaigns. Manuscript.

<sup>22</sup> Origo and Index: the two most read online news portals, Figyelőnet: Mainstream political-economic news portal, W and Reakció: two blogs.

<sup>23</sup> See Codebook

		Yes	No	
Topic	Domestic Party Politics	14	12	26
	Other Member State Party Politics	3	6	9
	European Party Politics	5	5	10
	National Economy	0	1	1
	Other	1	6	7
Total		23	30	53

When taking into consideration whether evaluations about the European integration belong to the threads, the dominance of the topics about party politics is even more outstanding. More than half of the 'Domestic Party Politics' threads contain a message on the EU, half of the 'European Party Politics' category cases include evaluations and there are also three cases from the 'Other Member State Party Politics' sub-group. That means that out of 23 articles in 22 times the articles' main theme is about party politics and half of that is about Hungarian internal politics. Therefore it could be said that party politics was the most important topic of the sample and that nearly all messages were coded under this latter category. Besides, more than half of the messages could be found in articles or discussion forums where the major issue was domestic party politics.

### c. Messages

A message is one or more evaluations on European integration made by a single (collective) actor in a single time and space<sup>24</sup>.

The qualitative research aimed at analysing three different evaluative dimensions in the messages:

1. "The 'Principle of Integration' is the widest, most fundamental and most general way of transmitting an opinion on European integration. It concerns the idea and/or act of cooperation among European member states in any form."<sup>25</sup>
2. "The category 'EU Polity' concerns the current institutional makeup of the European Union. It may be about any of its institutions – i.e. European Commission, European Parliament, Court of Justice etc. Secondly, it may be about decision-making rules – i.e. co-decision, open method of coordination, unanimity voting. Thirdly, it may be about competencies in certain policy fields – i.e. trade, foreign policy, justice and home affairs etc. Fourthly, it may be about the membership or constituencies of the EU. This last one includes individual member states, but also societal groups such as farmers, 'the poor', 'ordinary citizens', or big business."<sup>26</sup>
3. "The third and final category 'Project of Integration' concerns plans for future integration, as opposed to integration already achieved and represented in the current

---

<sup>24</sup> See Codebook

<sup>25</sup> See Codebook.

<sup>26</sup> See Codebook.

EU polity. The Project may concern institutional change, enlargement, pleas for a 'different' Europe or changes in the competencies of EU institutions."<sup>27</sup>

The categories 'EU polity' and 'Project of Integration' were analyzed with the help of three different aspects: "Level is about power and a more or less federal Union; scope is about issues and policy domains; and inclusiveness is about the relationship between the EU and people, whether grouped on nationality, religion, class or anything else."<sup>28</sup>

The total number of threads is 53 in the Hungarian sample, because three extra threads were added to accommodate the discussion forums of the websites where commenting on articles were not or rarely allowed on the given website. Out of the 53 threads there are only 23 in which Eurosceptic messages were coded. The number of messages is very low, in fact there are only 35. Therefore the number of messages does not even reach the number of threads, even though in theory one thread could contain more than one message. The messages could consist of the three dimensions (evaluations) measuring Euroscepticism defined in the research concept.

The total number of evaluations is not significantly higher (43) than the number of the messages (35), therefore it is obvious that there are very few cases in which a message contains more than one evaluation. . In fact the number of messages with more than one evaluation is only eight. Due to the fact that the variable 'Principle of Integration' was coded only three times, it is hardly surprising that there are no messages in the sample containing all the three possible types of evaluations. The crosstab of the three variables measuring evaluations on European integration clearly demonstrates the above mentioned conclusions. (See Table 6.)

---

<sup>27</sup> See Codebook.

<sup>28</sup> See Codebook.



**Table 6. EU Polity / Project of Integration / Principle of Integration**

Principle of Integration			Project of Integration					Total
			Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	
Positive	EU Polity	Scope - Negative					1	1
		N/A					2	2
	Total						3	3
N/A	EU Polity	Level - Positive	0	0	1	0	0	1
		Level - Negative	0	1	0	0	3	4
		Scope - Negative	0	0	1	0	2	3
		Inclusiveness - Positive	0	0	1	0	4	5
		Inclusiveness - Negative	0	0	0	3	9	12
		N/A	2	1	3	1	0	7
	Total		2	2	6	4	18	32

The dimension of ‘Principle of Integration’ was coded only 3 times. Even though this variable has two values, in our case all three evaluations are advocative towards the notion of European integration. Out of the three positive evaluations, in two cases, this was the only information available in the message. A statement made by the chairman of the Slovakian Party of Hungarian Coalition is a typical evaluation which welcomes the benefits of the process of European integration.<sup>29</sup> Pál Csáky, who commented on the diplomatic row between Hungary and Slovakia caused by the aforementioned campaign speech of Viktor Orbán, said that European Union can help to establish mutual respect and cohabitation among Hungarians and Slovaks.

There is only one example of welcoming the idea of European integration while making an evaluation on another dimension of the European Union. In a comment not related to the article the commentator criticises the Hungarian MEPs in a quite incoherent way saying that they are a shame for the country, thus implicating that otherwise European integration is an important process.<sup>30</sup>

The other part of the table shows us the cases where ‘Principle of Integration’ was not coded. There are only 7 cases in which each message contains two evaluations. Most of the messages with 2 evaluations are consistently negative.

The most typical subcategory of the messages with two negative evaluations about the European Union is where both on ‘EU Polity’ and ‘Project of Integration’ the message

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090525-uszitasnak-tartja-fico-orban-kampanybeszedet.html>

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090608-velemen-y-erdekes-idok-jonnek-az-europai-parlamentivalasztas-utan.html?cmnt\\_page=15](http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090608-velemen-y-erdekes-idok-jonnek-az-europai-parlamentivalasztas-utan.html?cmnt_page=15)

contains assessments in the variable value 'Inclusiveness – Negative'. Of course it is worth to note again that it is impossible to argue for any patterns in the sample, since the number of cases is so low. For instance, the latter category (which consists of two different and negatively evaluated dimensions of Euroscepticism) has only three cases. Instead of trying to sketch some broader generalisation, a few examples can be given in order to characterise the messages. A good example of the rejection of both the present form and the future projects of the European Union is a message by Geert Wilders, the Dutch far-right politician. Wilders and his party had an exceptional success at the European ballot. In an article on the European-wide electoral success of the far-right, a journalist of *Figyelő* quoted his views: *'Wilders, known of his anti-immigration views, promised on Thursday that Turkey would not join the European Union: 'Not in ten years, not in a million years.' (...) he made his primary aim to 'reclaim the Dutch money from Brussels and the blocking of the accession of Turkey into the European Union'...'*<sup>31</sup>

A message by Munkáspárt is another example fitting into this sub-category, as its leader campaigned against the EU and questioned Hungary's membership in a televised debate.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand the political mainstream made consistently positive messages which fact underpins our previous findings. The leading candidates of the conservative FIDESZ and social democratic MSZP both were supportive of the current status quo and of future ties with the EU. The only controversial or inconsistent message, i.e. one that has different orientations towards the EU was the one made by Gyula Thürmer, leader of the communist party Munkáspárt. He criticised the European Union saying that Hungary sold itself to the West, and affirmed that *'the stake of the elections is whether Hungary can strengthen its positions in the European Union, whether it can find a solution to the crises in which it uses the opportunities of the Hungarian economy...'* implying that there through the means of the European Parliamentary elections solutions could be found for the country's problems.<sup>33</sup>

Naturally with such a low number of cases these findings cannot even be generalised to the sample, let alone the whole campaign. Nevertheless, the fact that there was only one message in which an actor made positive and negative evaluations at the same time well illustrates the campaign where actors communicated with simple messages focusing only on lesser aspects of the EU.

## 6. General nature of the analysed online debate

When mentioned, the European Union appeared mostly in the context of policies but the entity of the EU or the principle of integration were seldom evaluated by the actors. The number of evaluations on European integration or the legitimacy of the European Union is in fact so low, that it does not reach the number of the articles, blogs and discussion forums in the sample.

---

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090605/szelsojobbaldali\\_eloretorest\\_hozhat\\_ep/](http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090605/szelsojobbaldali_eloretorest_hozhat_ep/)

<sup>32</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott\\_a\\_listavezetok\\_csonka\\_vitaja/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott_a_listavezetok_csonka_vitaja/)

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090519/szelsojobbal\\_ep\\_be/](http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090519/szelsojobbal_ep_be/)

The questioning of Hungary's membership or the very notion of European integration was to be found very rarely in the sample, which contains anyways very few evaluations on European integration. This is hardly surprising since all mainstream political parties were pro-European and did not engage in debates about this standpoint. Even the Eurosceptic parties, far-right Jobbik and communist Munkáspárt, seldom questioned Hungarian membership in the European Union. The main campaign slogan of Jobbik, *'Hungary belongs to the Hungarians'*, was directed against the Roma population and broadly against 'foreign interests', and usually it was not explicitly advocating against the EU although "competent" or partisan readers could also catch this connotation. It could also be argued that there were certain taboos in the political communication in Hungary. Opposing Hungary's EU membership, which is of mutual consensus among the political mainstream, might have been counter-productive even for a far-right party whose identity is partly based on an image of radical outsiders but seeks to send MEPs to the European Parliament. Even though it is quite clear that the far-right is wary of the European Union, the existence of the EU was seldom contested in the context of the EP campaign.

Concerning EU policies, most of the political party actors framed their arguments in reference to the importance of the EP-elections, e.g. that the EP-elections are important because of the given theme they mentioned, even if it was solely an internal political affair. On the contrary, European policies, institutions or the procedures and practices of the EP-elections were rarely discussed. The few exceptions include the foreign ownership of Hungarian land, the possibility of Europe-wide minority protection laws, Common Energy Policy and Common Agriculture Policy. Two parties, liberal SZDSZ and conservative MDF advocated for strengthened European educational programmes. The arguments against the far-right parties and groups were often justified with reference to the values of the European Union.

## 7. Dimensions of Euroscepticism

### **a. Principle of Integration**

The evaluations are categorised into three subgroups as mentioned above. The 'Principle of Integration', which measures the basic stance towards the idea of European integration, was hardly detected. From the 35 messages in only 3 cases was the statement of the actor clearly about the principle of integration. (See Table 7).

**Table 7. Principle of Integration**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	3	3,4	8,6	8,6
	N/A	32	36,4	91,4	100,0
	Total	35	39,8	100,0	
Missing	System	53	60,2		
Total		88	100,0		

In all of these cases the notion of European integration was welcomed by the actors. Naturally we cannot assume from such a low number of cases that the principle of integration was positively evaluated in the Hungarian EP-election campaign, on the whole. The fact, however, that it was not negatively described might let us suppose that explicitly opposing the 'European project' would have been counter-productive, at least regarding the established political parties. On the contrary, referring to the benefits of past or recent events concerning integration can be utilized to create a political identity for a party or to set the ideological borders of a political agenda. This strategy seems to have been the case when citing Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German minister of foreign affairs who said that *'Germany once again acknowledges the Hungarian nation for its role in the reunification of Germany. The German unification was the premonitory sign of the unification of Europe'*.<sup>34</sup> Another example of positive evaluation on the principle of integration also comes from a politician. The chairman of the ethnic Hungarian party in Slovakia, Pál Csáky refers to the European integration when speaking about Slovakian-Hungarian relations, stating that European integration means that *'the good Hungarian patriot and the good Slovakian patriot can go together, following the same way, the way of civilised European co-existence and mutual respect of one another'*.<sup>35</sup> In spite of these very few examples, the main observation here is that the actors in the sample hardly made any assessments on the principle of integration. Even if all 3 cases in this category were positive about the notion of European integration, we this result cannot be generalised.

### **b. EU Polity**

The 'EU Polity' subgroup contains evaluations on the present institutional arrangements of the European Union. This category is without question the most important in measuring Euroscepticism in Hungarian online media as it contains 26 evaluations out of the total 43 in our sample.<sup>36</sup> (See Table 8).

**Table 8. EU Polity**

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090602/nemetország\\_aggodik\\_orbanert/](http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090602/nemetország_aggodik_orbanert/)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090525-uszitasnak-tartja-fico-orban-kampanybeszedet.html>

<sup>36</sup> As one would expect the total number of evaluations is higher than the total number of messages, since in one message it is possible to evaluate at the same time in all the above mentioned three categories.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	1	1,1	2,9	2,9
	Level - Negative	4	4,5	11,4	14,3
	Scope - Negative	4	4,5	11,4	25,7
	Inclusiveness - Positive	5	5,7	14,3	40,0
	Inclusiveness - Negative	12	13,6	34,3	74,3
	N/A	9	10,2	25,7	100,0
	Total	35	39,8	100,0	
Missing	System	53	60,2		
Total		88	100,0		

The evaluations on the polity of the European Union are mostly negative. In fact the overwhelming majority of assessments are critical of the EU in this category, as 20 negative evaluations were made in contrast with only 6 positive ones. This is above all a consequence of the fact that the 'Inclusiveness - Negative' variable value contains 12 cases. A typical evaluation of the latter sub-category criticises the relation between the European Union and Hungary. In a comment after an article on the possible consequences of the EP-elections in the European Parliamentary politics, a reader described the status of Hungarian MEPs in the European Union as powerless. *'If the EP wants to help us, then it is going to happen, but if it would not, then it does not make any difference. Very little is going to be entrusted on the representatives elected by us. Like a drop in the ocean.'*<sup>37</sup> In other evaluations the actors are criticising the European Union for similar reasons and there is a sense of meaninglessness regarding EP-elections. The participation in the elections has supposedly no consequences at all since, as one commentator puts it: *'I think we shouldn't have entered the EU. [...] it has to be acknowledged that the dictate comes from above, and here it is only implemented.'*<sup>38</sup>

The most frequent assessments, however, only state that the voters throughout Europe are not interested in the elections and there is widespread apathy concerning the European Parliament. These evaluations were mostly coded as citizens having a negative stance towards the present European settings or as negative relation between the citizens and the EU. On the other hand, this argument was used by political actors as well. Lack of interest by European voters is used as an argument in completely contradictory discourses. 'Eurosceptic politicians' argued that the apathy of the voters towards the EU proves that the Lisbon Treaty should be stalled. But in the same article the journalist writes that the 'supporters of the reform-treaty' argue that the apathy of

<sup>37</sup> [Nagykoalíció felé: az EP-választás tetje, http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090602-az-epvalasztas-tetje.html?cmnt\\_page=1](http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090602-az-epvalasztas-tetje.html?cmnt_page=1)

<sup>38</sup> [http://w.blog.hu/2009/06/08/europai\\_ertelemben\\_vett\\_fasizmust](http://w.blog.hu/2009/06/08/europai_ertelemben_vett_fasizmust)

the voters means that the *'EU needs indeed a 'shake-up' that could be brought by nothing else than the Lisbon Treaty'*.<sup>39</sup>

As the above mentioned examples show most of the negative evaluations of the polity of the EU are criticising the status quo on a democratic or cultural ground, namely that the European Parliament lacks real powers or that decisions are made without the oversight of the voters. Besides these assessments, there were two statements that went further along and questioned the necessity of the European membership of Hungary. Two of the most popular radical political parties in Hungary, far-right Jobbik and communist Munkáspárt advocated against EU membership in the only televised political debate during the EP-election campaign. The journalist of *Index* reports that the leading candidate of Munkáspárt told the audience that *'the European membership brought nothing good to Hungary, therefore the question of staying in should be raised'*. At the same debate the candidate of extreme-right Jobbik said that *'Hungary's membership in the European Union ruined the country and brought success only to a small circle.'*<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, there were positive evaluations on the polity of the EU as well, and likewise these were made mainly by political actors. Out of the 6 positive assessments of the then present European settings 3, are connected to the ruling socialist party MSZP. A journalist of *[origo]* writes of the latter political party that they tried to communicate to the voters that the European membership had been a huge success as the country had received vast amounts of developmental resources.<sup>41</sup> This argumentation was repeated twice in the sample by the leading candidate of MSZP, Kinga Göncz. She was reported to say that if Hungary had not been a member state, it would not even be at the level where it was now.<sup>42</sup> At another occasion she was quoted to say that Hungary had not been alone in the crisis thanks to its membership in the EU, and she warned of the dangers of being out of the EU: *'We have seen how fast a highly developed country, Iceland, which is not a member state of the European Union, has collapsed.'*<sup>43</sup> Actually also a fourth message out of the total 6 can be interpreted as being positive concerning the ruling MSZP government. A commentator writes that *'Thank, thank God that we are part of the EU...'* because in his/her opinion the country's EU membership will hinder the presumably forthcoming right-wing government to abolish democratic establishment, e. g. general elections held every fourth year.<sup>44</sup>

Despite of the existing positive evaluations it could be summarised that the polity of the European Union is characterised mainly in a critical way. This criticism is mostly

---

<sup>39</sup>

[http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267\\_hely\\_a\\_neppartnak\\_159\\_a\\_szocialistaknak/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267_hely_a_neppartnak_159_a_szocialistaknak/)

<sup>40</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott\\_a\\_listavezetok\\_csonka\\_vitaja/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott_a_listavezetok_csonka_vitaja/)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090519-ep-valasztasok-mszp.html>

<sup>42</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott\\_a\\_listavezetok\\_csonka\\_vitaja/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott_a_listavezetok_csonka_vitaja/)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090525/minden\\_megy\\_tovabb\\_junius\\_8/](http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090525/minden_megy_tovabb_junius_8/)

<sup>44</sup> comment number 1213 at <http://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?t=9192316>

connected to the topic of the relation between Hungary and the European Union and it is made mostly by Hungarian political actors or by broadly defined citizens.

### c. Project of Integration

The variable 'Project of Integration' measures the evaluations about the future projects of the European Union. There were 14 evaluations coded into this category and most of them are supportive of the planned European integration, as there are 8 positive assessments against 6 negative ones. (See Table 9.)

**Table 9. Project of Integration**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	2	2,3	5,7	5,7
	Level - Negative	2	2,3	5,7	11,4
	Inclusiveness - Positive	6	6,8	17,1	28,6
	Inclusiveness - Negative	4	4,5	11,4	40,0
	N/A	21	23,9	60,0	100,0
	Total	35	39,8	100,0	
Missing	System	53	60,2		
Total		88	100,0		

The supportive messages were above all evaluating the future relation between Hungary and the EU. As already mentioned earlier, a speech by Viktor Orbán, the leader of the main conservative party FIDESZ, became an often debated event of the campaign because in a meeting held together with ethnic Hungarian politicians from Slovakia he encouraged ethnic Hungarians to vote for ethnic Hungarian candidates in their own country in order to increase the number of "Hungarian" MEPs and the weight of Hungarian interests in the EU. *'At the European Parliamentary elections it will be decided how many MEPs will represent the Hungarians of the Carpathian basin.'*<sup>45</sup> This remark, as mentioned before, became one of the main campaign events in Hungary, also sparking reactions from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Germany. Indeed, this speech, which was coded under 'Inclusiveness - Positive' got into the sample three times. The main message behind was repeated also by the leading candidate of FIDESZ. The status of this message, however, is very questionable that the methodology used in the present research could not tackle. A thoroughly designed discourse analysis would have detected the nationalist character of this remark, which, indeed, contradicts EU founding values with its hidden agenda of Greater-Hungary

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/20090602-a-csehek-is-nyugtalanok-orban-kijelentesei-miatt.html>

<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090525-uszitasnak-tartja-fico-orban-kampanybeszedet.html>

[http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090603/kitiltanak\\_orbant\\_szlovakiabol/](http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090603/kitiltanak_orbant_szlovakiabol/)



and the reunification of 15 million ethnic Hungarians. The reaction coming from Slovakian nationalist politicians is obviously understandable on the same nationalistic basis.

It is hardly surprising that mainstream political parties, seeking representation in the European Parliament, send positive messages about the EU on the eve of the EP-elections. The leading candidate of MSZP also mentioned the importance of the elections in the context of national interests. Kinga Göncz said that the turnout of the elections has a special importance as it determines the level of legitimacy of the Hungarian MEPs.<sup>46</sup> Ibolya Dávid, leading conservative politician said she wanted a strong European Union because only that makes it possible to strengthen Hungary economically.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, radical political parties had mostly a negative stance towards the future projects of the EU. As it was mentioned above at the variable 'Polity of the EU', the communist Munkáspárt openly questioned the future of the Hungarian membership. As it was assumed earlier, in Hungarian online media political extremism tends to be more newsworthy than the political mainstream. In any case, it is no wonder that the political views of the Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders got into the sample as his party had an exceptional success at the European elections. In the report on the emergence of the far-right, one journalist of *Figyelő* quoted his views on blocking Turkey's accession to the EU.<sup>48</sup>

In all of the categories that measured the evaluations about the EU, the assessments can briefly be summarised as typically criticising the polity of the European Union because of the asymmetric relation between Hungary and Brussels and because of the supposedly meaningless elections that serve only as a 'grave train' for politicians. Future projects are more welcomed but are also often opposed depending on the level of extremism of the political actors. The principle of integration was seldom debated in the Hungarian campaign.

## 8. Justifications

More than half of the 35 messages included some justification. The most frequent justification for the evaluations on the EU was democracy and economic prosperity with a close second position for cultural reasoning. These three categories dominate the debate since they add up to 17 cases out of the total of 21. From the point of view of the messages, it can be pointed out that one of the latter justifications was present at almost half of them. Additionally it should be mentioned that evaluations were also coded under the category of 'Necessity' three times and once under 'Safety'. (See Table 10.)

**Table 10. Justification of Worth**

---

<sup>46</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott\\_a\\_listavezetok\\_csonka\\_vitaja/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/befejezodott_a_listavezetok_csonka_vitaja/)

<sup>47</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/david\\_ibolya\\_aggodik\\_a\\_jobbik\\_miatt/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/david_ibolya_aggodik_a_jobbik_miatt/)

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090605/szelsojobbaldali\\_eloretorest\\_hozhat\\_ep/](http://www.fn.hu/kulfold/20090605/szelsojobbaldali_eloretorest_hozhat_ep/)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democracy	6	6,8	17,1	17,1
	Culture	5	5,7	14,3	31,4
	Necessity	3	3,4	8,6	40,0
	Economic Prosperity	6	6,8	17,1	57,1
	Safety	1	1,1	2,9	60,0
	N/A	14	15,9	40,0	100,0
	Total	35	39,8	100,0	
Missing	System	53	60,2		
Total		88	100,0		

Since the number of messages is very low in the sample and only around half of them contain justifications, it is impossible to discover any patterns with regard to the distribution of evaluations and justifications. Some observations, however, can be mentioned, e.g. the fact that justifications of necessity are sided only with negative evaluations.<sup>49</sup>

An obvious example here is the case of a commentator at the discussion forum site of [origo], who clearly justified the argument with 'Necessity'. The commentator writes that the European Union is *'hardly functional'* since the enlargement took place (probably meaning the accession of the ten Eastern European countries including Hungary). He argues that this failure is caused by the old members of the European Union because they supposedly *'lobby among each other and for themselves, excluding the new members!! In the long run, the EU is "doomed"'*<sup>50</sup> Apart from the justifications framed around some kind of necessity, reasoning with economic prosperity was also one of the most frequent dimensions of justifications.

The category of 'Economic Prosperity' is evenly divided between positive and negative assessments. A typical way of these justifications is when political actors refer to the importance of the European Parliamentary elections or generally to the European Union because they might serve Hungarian economic interests, the country can profit from its membership. One of the most characteristic representatives advancing economic reasoning was Lajos Bokros, the leading candidate of the small centre-right Hungarian Democratic Forum. Throughout the campaign he advocated for liberal economic reforms. On the last campaign event before the elections he was quoted to say that *'The strengthening of Europe is a common interest, and this is the right way in order to strengthen Hungary, as well.'*<sup>51</sup> Economic justifications were also used to try to advocate against the EU, of course. Gyula Thürmer, the chairman of communist Munkáspárt using a partly xenophobic, partly anti-capitalist argument, said that the

<sup>49</sup> The related crosstabs is not included due to the very low number of cell numbers.

<sup>50</sup> <http://forum.origo.hu/topik.jsp?id=271459&page=5>

<sup>51</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/david\\_ibolya\\_aggodik\\_a\\_jobbik\\_miatt/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/david_ibolya_aggodik_a_jobbik_miatt/)

main stake of the European Parliamentary elections was whether Hungary can strengthen its positions, or *'keep on selling out to foreigners.'*<sup>52</sup> He also blamed the European Union for the lack of opportunities for Hungarian firms in the common market.

Apart from economic reasoning, the most typical justification was framing the statements in the context of 'Democracy'. There were six cases found in our sample. Indeed, it is hard to say which group of actors or political side referred to 'democracy' more often. The examples range from disillusioned commentators to political platforms. On the one hand, citizens seem to like to blame politicians and the EU for lack of democracy or adequate representation. For instance, a commentator at the opinion section of [origo] talks of the failure of democratic representation in the European Parliament because the Hungarian MEPs are unsuccessful at their jobs: *'...these people, sitting in the European Parliament, cannot even explain the situation of Hungary. (...) One should not go there only to read newspapers and have a rest or a little nap after the late night parties.'*<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, politicians also advocate against the EU because of the often mentioned democratic deficit. As an example we can cite the case of the Swedish Pirate Party whose leader criticized the EU because it supposedly threatened the privacy of citizens in several cases.<sup>54</sup> But in other cases, political actors used arguments with references to democratic values in order to support a deeper European integration. In an article on European politics, promoters of the Reform Treaty were quoted as supporting the Lisbon Treaty on the basis of their hope that it brings changes in the political decision-making and by making the EU more 'democratic' will help to end the disillusionment of the voters.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090519/szelsojobbal\\_ep\\_be/](http://www.fn.hu/belfold/20090519/szelsojobbal_ep_be/)

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090602-az-epvalasztas-tetje.html?SYSquery=cmnt\\_page%3D1&cmnt\\_page=1](http://www.komment.hu/tartalom/20090602-az-epvalasztas-tetje.html?SYSquery=cmnt_page%3D1&cmnt_page=1)

<sup>54</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/bejuthat\\_az\\_europai\\_parlamentbe\\_a\\_sved\\_kaloz\\_part/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/bejuthat_az_europai_parlamentbe_a_sved_kaloz_part/)

<sup>55</sup> [http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267\\_hely\\_a\\_neppartnak\\_159\\_a\\_szocialistak\\_nak/](http://index.hu/kulfold/eu/2009/valasztas/2009/06/08/267_hely_a_neppartnak_159_a_szocialistak_nak/)

## **References:**

Beck, U., - Edgar, G. (2007): Cosmopolitan Europe. Cambridge: Polity Press.

De Wilde, P. – Trenz, H.J. – Michailidou, A.: Codebook for the analysis of evaluations of the EU polity's worth in online debates.

<http://www.reconproject.eu/main.php/Codebook.pdf?fileitem=4472861>

Eriksen, E.O. - Fossum, J.E. (2008): Reconstituting European Democracy. ARENA Working Paper 01/2008, ARENA - Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, January 2008.

[http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2008/papers/wp08\\_01.pdf](http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2008/papers/wp08_01.pdf)

Hegedűs István (ed.) (2006): A magyarok bemenetele. Budapest: DKMKA. BCE Politikatudományi Intézet.

Hooghe, L.- Marks, G. (2001): Multi-Level Governance and European Integration, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland.

Hooghe, L.- Marks, G. (2004): Does Identity or Economic Rationality Drive Public Opinion on European Integration? PSONline July 2004. [www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org)

Kopecky, P. – Mudde, C. (2002): The Two Sides of Euroscepticism Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe. European Union Politics. Retrieved from <http://eup.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/3/3/297>, (last access: 15 May 2010)

Lakner, Zoltan (2004): A magyar pártok és az Európai Unió. Az EU mint belpolitikai kérdés 1990-2004 között, in: Politikatudományi Szemle, 2004. 1-2. pp. 139-157.

Lengyel, György – Blaskó, Zsuzsa (2003): Kik félnek az európai integrációtól? In: Társadalmi Riport 2002, Társi.

Michailidou, Asimina – Trenz, Hans-Jörg (2009): Mediating European integration: Online political communication in European Parliamentary election campaigns. Manuscript.

Samu, Tamás Gergő (2008) : Euroszepticismus és reformszerződés. [http://dieip.hu/4.szam/2008\\_2\\_10.pdf](http://dieip.hu/4.szam/2008_2_10.pdf), (Last access: 13 July 2009)

Smith, A. (1992): National Identity and the Idea of European Unity, International Affairs 68 (1) p. 55–76.

Szczerbiak, Aleks - Taggart, Paul (2003): „Theorising party-based euroscepticism: Problems of definition, measurement and causality, Sussex European Institute WP no. 69 (08/03)

Szilagyi, Zsófia (2002): The rising tide of Euroscepticism.

[http://www.soros.org/resources/articles\\_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301](http://www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/articles/euroscepticism-accession-20020301), (last access: 12 August 2009)

Trenz, Hans-Jörg - de Wilde, Pieter (2008): Euro-scepticism: Mapping a new research field for RECON. Manuscript.

Zgut, Edit Magdolna (2008): Euroszkeptikus hangok a Házon kívül – kis pártok véleménye Magyarország úniós tagságáról és az Európai Unióról (2009) In: Balogh, László (ed.) A vasfüggönyön túl II. Budapest: Artisi, pp. 73-99.