

Master in Advanced European and International Studies

Applied European Policy and Governance Studies

Normative Power Europe And the Cost of Inaction

How the Lack of Democratic Consolidation and Institutional Supervision
From the EU birthed the Hungarian Democratic Backsliding

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2022-2023

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor and Director of the CIFE, Matthias Waechter, for his advice during the framing and writing of this thesis. His inputs and the exchanges we have had have given me numerous opportunities to expand my understanding of the functioning and role of the EU in defending the rule of law and fundamental rights. His insight on the historical and political dynamics at play has enlightened me on explanations of the current European backsliding that I could have never thought of otherwise.

For her help in guiding us through the writing of the thesis, and discussing which methodology would be best applied to which argument, I want to thank Susann Heinecke-Kuhn, our programme Director. Her guidance has been a welcomed help at multiple steps of the thesis writing and defence preparation.

A special thank also to all the CIFE's lecturers, professional guests, alumni, and staff, who have taught us and shared with us their knowledge and experience all year long. The CIFE has given me the tools to pursue my dream of working for and with the EU institutions. When I decided to specialise in European affairs more than four years ago, still in the middle of a Bachelor in International Relations, I would have never imagined being selected for a traineeship at the Council of the European Union. The CIFE has undeniably played a key role in this development, for which I cannot thank it enough.

I would also like to thank my classmates, my friends, with whom I have shared this year and all related experiences. They have been a source of inspiration and support, both professionally and humanly. This year would not have been the same without them, and I hope to share many more experience with them within the EU bubble.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my parents and family, who have continuously accompanied and supported me in my studies and professional project. I would not be here without the unswerving support they have given me. Mom, Dad, Everyone, I promise, this third Master's degree is the last!

Abstract

Over the past fifteen years, the EU has faced a growing phenomenon of democratic backsliding in numerous of its Member-States, in particular Hungary and Poland. Most researches have concentrated specifically on the decline of the rule of law as an indicator of democratic backsliding, and have focused on decline occurring at the national level. But few have integrated in their approach an evaluation of the role of the EU in fostering democratisation and preventing backsliding, and the place the civil society occupies in this democratising system. This thesis addresses this dual issue by sustaining two interrelated arguments.

Firstly, it defends that the Hungarian democratic backsliding originated partly from popular discontent with early post-accession democratic performance. Associated to a visible lack of internalisation of European and democratic norms, it led to the facilitation of return to a hybrid if not semi-authoritarian government. As such, Hungary transitioned to democracy thanks to the EU's diffusion of norms, but the regime never consolidated.

Secondly, the thesis defends that the EU 's framework of rule of law enforcement and monitoring is lacking: although the EU does have instruments for sanctioning Member-States infringing EU legislation and norms, it has none or close to none for preventing a decline from its early stage.

To defend these arguments, the thesis relies principally on two quantitative analyses grounded in existing data: on the one hand, a comparison of democracy indexes, to qualify the nature of the Hungarian backsliding; and on the other hand, an in-depth analysis of social surveys aimed at determining whether European norms and values were properly internalised after Hungary's adhesion.

This thesis's results could be further replicated to other Member-States of the EU for comparison of its findings. The recommendations it raises also bear implications and guidelines for future enlargement of the European Union.

Content

Introduction	1
Literature review. From Democratic transition and consolidation to backsliding theories and the issue of the EU's normative role	4
<i>Defining major concepts</i>	4
'Democracy' and 'regime change' as starting points	4
Distinguishing Democratic 'Transition' and 'Consolidation'	7
<i>Democratic transition and consolidation processes, externally-induced democratisation, and Europeanisation</i>	9
Steps towards democratic transition and consolidation: different approaches.....	9
The externalisation of the democratisation process and Europeanisation.....	12
<i>Unsustainable democracy? The concept of democratic backsliding, the case of Hungary, and the need for further research</i>	15
Chapter I Quantifying democratic backsliding and identifying key sectorial changes	18
<i>Hypothesis, methodology, and chosen indicators</i>	18
<i>Results, analysis, and discussion on Hungary's progressive democratic decline: has the rule of law issue hidden other democratic lacks?</i>	21
Free and fair elections and the minimal definition of democracy: is Hungary not a democracy anymore?	22
The place of the rule of law decline in the Hungarian backsliding.....	25
The reduction of media independence	26
The paradox of democratic support and cross-variable regression: a socially accepted or acceptable decline?.....	27
Chapter II Internalisation, societal attitudes, and the way towards (de-)democratisation. 30	
<i>Hypothesis, methodology, and expectations</i>	30
<i>Results and Quantitative Analysis</i>	33
Democratic regime preference	33
Satisfaction with democracy	34
On the desirability of a democratic regime	38
Communal attitudes	42
Interpersonal trust, solidarity, and democracy	43
Democratic consolidation through trust in institutions	45
Emancipative attitudes	48
The dynamics of civic mass actions.....	49
Tolerance of non-conforming groups, towards internalisation of democratic norms? ...	54

<i>Discussion and possible domestic explanations for the lack of internalisation</i>	57
From 2006 to 2010, Gyurcsány’s governance and the MSZP’s corruption scandals	57
Orbán’s take-over and the limitations of civic organisations’ freedom of action	59
Chapter III Redefining the EU’s role post-accession: from guide to watchdog	62
<i>The Copenhagen Criteria, the slow birth of pre-accession conditionality and the issue of supervision and accountability</i>	62
<i>Control after adhesion or laissez-faire? Lessons from the Austrian experience</i>	64
The Haider Affair and the need for prevention: comparison of two cases.....	64
The lack of EU action, a result of past errors and a source for future mistakes	66
<i>EU democratic backsliding management revisited: recommendations for a preventive rather than reactive mechanism</i>	69
The over-reliance on institutional and reactive components, or how the EU keeps missing the point.....	69
The strengthening of civil society, an innovative systemic solution to democratic backsliding management?	72
Conclusion	75
References	77
Annex - Sources of the Tables’ Data	A
Table II-01.....	A
Table II-05.....	B
Table II-06.....	C
Table II-07.....	D
Table II-08.....	E
Table II-09.....	F

List of Tables and Figures

<i>Figure 0-01. Different Processes of Transition</i>	10
<i>Figure 0-02. Convergence and Conditionality Processes</i>	14
<i>Figure 0-03. Three conceptual dimensions of democracy based on Jee et al (2022, p. 760)</i>	16
<i>Figure 1-01. Dimensions, partial regimes and criteria of embedded democracy based on Merkel (2004)</i>	19
<i>Table I-01. De-democratisation in Hungary (BTI)</i>	23
<i>Table I-02. De-democratisation in Hungary (Freedom House)</i>	24
<i>Table II-01. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %). “Important that government is strong and ensures safety” & “How satisfied with the way democracy works in country.” (ESS)</i>	35
<i>Table II-02. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %). “Political system: having a democratic system” (WVS)</i>	38
<i>Table II-03. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %). “Political system: having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” (WVS)</i>	39
<i>Table II-04. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %). “Political system: having the army rule” (WVS)</i>	40
<i>Table II-05. Communal attitudes in Hungary (in %). “Most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful” and “Have you volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation or civic association in the past 12 months?.” (ESS)</i>	44
<i>Table II-06. Communal attitudes in Hungary (in %). “Trust in the police”, “Trust in politicians” and “Trust in the Hungarian Parliament.” (ESS)</i>	47
<i>Table II-07. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %). “Interest in politics” and “Participation in lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months.” (ESS)</i>	50
<i>Figure II-01. Interest in Politics of the Hungarian population (2002-2020)</i>	51
<i>Table II-08. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %). “Have you boycotted certain products in the last 12 months?” and “Have you signed a petition in the past 12 months?.” (ESS)</i>	52
<i>Table II-09. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %). “Gays and lesbians free to live their life as they wish” and “Immigrants make country worse or better place to live.” (ESS)</i>	54

For reading clarity and the sake of the demonstration, no table was included in the annex. References for the Figures will be included directly below the figure. For larger tables that are aggregation of numerous sets of data, like the ESS-based ones of *Chapter II*, the sources will be given in the Annex.

Introduction

The 24th of May 2023, the European Parliament decided that it would vote on a resolution concerning the Hungarian breach of law and humanitarian rights, with possible consequences being the incentivisation of the Council to suspend Hungary's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, normally scheduled for the second semester of 2024. This decision, hitherto unseen in the EU, originates from the institution's "questions [concerning] how Hungary will be able to credibly fulfil this task in 2024, in view of its non-compliance with EU law and the values enshrined in Article 2" (European Parliament, 2023a, §11). Voted on Thursday, 1st of June 2023, the motion passed with 442 favourable votes, 144 against and 33 abstentions (European Parliament, 2023b).

This non-respect of the norms and values of the EU has been growingly witnessable since 2010, when, obtaining a supermajority of two-thirds of the National Assembly, Viktor Orbán returned to the position of Hungarian Prime Minister he had lost after the 2002 elections, this time with the legal capacity of modify the constitution. Since then, for some observers, Hungary has become one of the "most extreme case of democratic backsliding over the last decade" (Maerz, et al., 2020, pp. 915-916; also Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała, 2019, p. 1140).

This contrasts sharply with earlier observations that claimed that the Eastern and Central European countries (ECE) were experiencing a "rapid democratic consolidation" in the 2000s (Merkel, 2008, cited in Ágh, 2016, p. 277). In 2002, Hungary was even considered by Thomas Carothers as one of the leaders of the democratic transitioning countries in the world (Carothers, 2002, p. 9), after it followed a successful path of democratisation for almost two decades (Körösenyi, Illés, & Gyulai, 2020). And thirteen years before, in 1989, Viktor Orbán himself had been a major actor and proponent of the country's post-communist transition towards democracy (Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015).

This regression, even labelled a U-turn by some (Kornai J. , 2015a), is then especially surprising, as democratic institutions were supposed to provide "a guarantee against the

erosion of democracy in ECE” (Ágh, 2016, p. 277). Yet, it proved ineffective, in what some like Herman (2016) deemed was a domestic context of lacking civil society and integrated democratic norms. Moreover, it occurred a few years after the integration of the country in the European Union.

How, then, could Hungary have regressed in its democratisation process? Was the country’s adherence to the EU not supposed to prevent such decline? What were truly the democratisation role and capacities of the EU integration criteria?

These interrogations lead to the formulation of the following research question: to what extent does the EU’s action or lack thereof in the democratic consolidation and backsliding prevention of its candidate- then member-states frame their domestic democratic evolution?

This thesis sustains two major arguments. Firstly, this paper defends that the Hungarian democratic backsliding was essentially based on popular discontent with pre-backsliding democratic performance that, coupled to and enhanced by a visible lack of internalisation of European and democratic norms, led to the facilitation of return to less democratic or openly autocratic forms of ruling. This implies that, in regards to Hungary, the country indeed transitioned to democracy thanks to the EU’s diffusion of norms, but this never translated into democratic consolidation. Secondly, the thesis also argues that the EU ‘s democratic support was lacking in the early phases of the backsliding: although the EU does have mechanisms and instruments for sanctioning Member-States infringing EU legislation and norms, it has none or close to none for preventing a decline from its early stage. In a context of recent approbation of new EU candidates, revisiting the EU’s approach to candidacy and democratic consolidation post-adhesion will be a key aspect of upcoming integration negotiations.

This thesis’s first section expands on a non-exhaustive cross-field *literature review* covering regime change theory, distinction between democratic transition and consolidation, the concept of normative power EU and the externalisation of democratic incentivisation, and approaches to democratic backsliding. To support its arguments, this thesis is then divided into three chapters.

Chapter I concentrates on qualifying the Hungarian democratic backsliding and the current regime through a quantitative comparison of a set of distinct indexes. The purpose is to determine which sectors were the ones where democratic decline first manifested, and which were the ones that experienced the strongest decline. Overall, this chapter studies the validity of a hypothesis claiming that

the Hungarian democratic backsliding was initiated and is principally stimulated by a decline of the country's commitment to the rule of law concomitant to a restriction of the electoral regime.

Drawing upon the results from chapter I, *Chapter II* analyses through survey-based quantitative analysis whether European norms and values were properly internalised in the Hungarian civil society upon, during and after accession to the EU. In doing so, it focuses specifically on the issue of social capital formation and norms internalisation. The intent of this chapter is to verify the hypothesis according to which

European and democratic norms, behaviours, and values were poorly internalised, what translated an absence of democratic consolidation and effective Europeanisation, and facilitated a return to a domestic illiberal regime.

This chapter also discusses the political context surrounding this domestic process of internalisation to assess whether internal political dynamics could have influenced the internationalisation and, consequently, the consolidation process.

Chapter III evaluates the EU's instruments to prevent democratic decline. It draws on three sections. The first one relies on an observation assessing the role of conditionality in fostering democratisation in EU candidate countries. The second one compares the Hungarian decline to the Austrian affair of 2000, concluding the latter had long-lasting consequences including the absence of EU follow-up strategy or scheme for most candidate-then-Member States, what impeded or temporalized the relevance of integration conditionality. Finally, the third section formulates recommendations to strengthen the EU's prevention mechanism, reinforce and facilitate its role as guardians of the treaties and possibly create a basis for a role of democratic watchdog.

Literature review

From Democratic transition and consolidation to backsliding theories and the issue of the EU's normative role

Defining major concepts

'Democracy' and 'regime change' as starting points

An often-used starting point in attempts to understand democratic regime change is to clarify what is considered as 'democracy,' with recent scholars having generally preferred referring to it as a procedure rather than a source of authority or purpose (Huntington, 1991, pp. 5-6; Beetham, 1994, p. 158; Plasser, Ulram, & Waldrauch, 1998, pp. 6-7). The notion of procedural democracy was first evocated in Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. It distinguished the classical theory of democracy focusing on 'the will of the people' and the 'common good' – respectively source and purpose of a democratic regime – from another proposal of democratic approach he advanced. His new definition stated the “democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote” (Schumpeter, 1976, p. 269).

Based on Schumpeter's definition, Samuel Huntington summarised a democratic political system as one whose “most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (Huntington, 1991, p. 7). A restriction on any of these criteria – non-access to vote for a part of the population, pressure over the

opposition or manipulation of the ballot – directly reveals the non-democratic character of a regime. The primary strength of this definition is its apparent empirical employability. In a late chapter of his book, Huntington relied on the changeover to an electoral system to propose a ‘test’ to determine whether a regime was a consolidated democracy or not: if an elected party loses an election and turns over power peacefully to the next winners, then the system passes the ‘two turnovers’ test and is a consolidated democracy (Huntington, 1991, p. 267).

However, if electoral institutions do illustrate a regime’s potentially democratic nature, miscellaneous limits with the reliance on this simple procedural formulation have been largely recognised. Beetham particularly observed three inherent problems with this definition. Firstly, it lacks an explanatory approach to what makes these institutions democratic, instead limiting itself to stating that free and fair elections make a regime democratic. Moreover, all attention being given to electoral process means ignoring other key aspects of democracy, most notably “the control by those elected over non-elected powers (...) [or] their accountability and responsiveness to the public between elections” (Beetham, 1994, pp. 158-159). Lastly, the reliance on a unique criterion such as free elections biases observation and leads to undemocratic features of presupposed democratic regimes to be overlooked.

Another general criticism of the electoral definition of democracy is that the test might not be applicable to all democratic regimes. Taking Sweden as an example, Friedman (2011, pp. 34-35) showed that the ‘two turnover’ test would have qualified it as a non-consolidated democracy since the same coalition stayed in power for decades in the twentieth century. Over time, the acknowledgement of the lacks of the electoral definition of democracy spread amongst scholars (O’Donnell, 1994; Schedler, 1998; Levitsky & Way, 2002).

Instead of relying solely on free elections to determine whether a country is democratic, Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch proposed an extended understanding of democracy and democratization within regime change research grounded in a mix of

Munck's (1995, cited in Plasser et al., 1998, p. 4) concept of regime and Dahl's (1971) revisited procedural definition of democracy. Starting from Munck's (1995, pp. 4-5) contribution to defining regime change, they distinguished two different regime dimensions: the formal and the behavioural. The first one is itself divided between "the type of actors who are allowed to gain access to principal governmental positions; the methods of access to such positions; and the rules followed in the making of publicly binding decisions." Secondly, the behavioural dimension concerns the linkages between the rules and the actors, and underlines the necessity for actors to themselves recognise the legitimacy of the rules as the base and framework in which they plan their political strategies.

Dahl (1971) emphasised the importance of a regime's polyarchy for a regime to function as a democracy. Democracy would need two additional elements. Firstly, competition: citizens must be able to choose alternatives and political preferences in regards to the institutions that govern them. Moreover, competition entails that the executive is also constrained to meet the expectations of a majority of the electorate that select it (Doorenspleet, 2012, p. 281). Secondly, inclusiveness: participation of the electorate in the selection must be unrestricted. Overall, from these two elements, Dahl proposed a list of eight minimal criteria for a functioning democracy, amongst which three rights and two freedoms. The rights encompass the prerogatives to vote, to be elected, and the permission of political leaders to "compete for support and votes" (Dahl, 1971, p. 3, cited in Baviskar & Malone, 2004, p. 4). The freedoms are that of association and expression. Finally, the last three criteria impose to a democracy the reliance on free and fair elections, "alternative sources of information" and "institutions that depend on votes and other expressions of preference" (Dahl, 1971, p. 3, cited in Baviskar & Malone, 2004, p. 4).

Plasser et al. (1998) expanded on these two definitions to propose a conceptualisation of regime change towards democracy. Adding on to Munck's regime definition, they highlighted that an attitudinal dimension based on the "acceptance of democratic procedures" must be added to the behavioural one in the specific context of a democratic regime. From this base, they then identified four intra-regime relations dimensions: intra-social relations; influence of society over government; influence of government over society; and influence of government over institutions. Then, using Dahl's polyarchy concept, Plasser et al. (1998, p. 7) formulated a definition of democracy resting upon four

main criteria. The first is a pluralist, competitive environment for the selection of political leaders in institutions. The second relies on a vertical accountability ensured by “competitive, regular, fair, free and universal elections by secret ballot.” The third requirement is that pluralism be not restricted, notably thanks to political and civil rights and the safeguard of the rule of law. Lastly, inspired by a few additional authors (Valenzuela, 1990; Lawson, 1993, p. 201), Plasser et al. (1998, p. 8) also added horizontal accountability through clear separation and balancing of powers between democratic powers (the executive, judiciary, and legislative ones notably) and between state, regime, and government as a component of a democracy.

Interestingly, this definition remains a “minimal” definition of democracy, as opposed to maximal ones that would also consider additional elements like social services and economic equality (Baviskar & Malone, 2004, p. 4). In this thesis, the abovementioned extended minimal-definition of democracy, relying on Munck (1995), Dahl (1971), and Plasser et al.’s (1998) mixed approach, is the one that will be used to define democracy. Any divergence from it will then be considered as a manifestation of democratic backsliding.

Distinguishing Democratic ‘Transition’ and ‘Consolidation’

Even with a proper definition of democracy, the differences between the concepts of democratic transition and consolidation can nonetheless be sources of confusion. Plasser et al. (1998, p. 6) noticed that O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 6) first employed the term ‘transition’ to refer simply to the interlude between two distinct regimes. Six years later, O’Donnell (1992, p. 18) narrowed it down to the specific moment a democratic government is established, claiming that consolidation is needed to secure a complete mutation to democracy. Other authors have explicitly integrated consolidation or akin concepts to their process models as the last phase of transition, primary examples being Rustow (1970) and Di Palma (1990, cited in Plasser et al., 1998, p. 52).

By the late 1990s however, authors seemed to have reached a consensus that the process of consolidation begins once the transition to democracy is acquired “with the

inauguration of a new government at the first free and fair elections since the end of the pre-democratic regime” (Beetham, 1994, p. 159). Some however still recognised that processes of transition and consolidation do not follow a linear or temporal dynamic, but rather a sort of “analytical sequence” (Merkel, 1996, p. 40), meaning that transition and consolidation processes can possibly overlap each other (Plasser et al., 1998, p. 10).

In this view, an electoral definition would not be sufficient to describe a consolidated democracy, but it would seem enough as a basis from which consolidation can take place. As exposed by Beetham (1994), Plasser et al. (1998) and others, transition could then be summarised as the mechanisms that established “the formal, minimal criteria of democratic regime” (Plasser et al., 1998, p. 8) – i.e., free elections, basic freedoms and universal suffrage all enshrined in a constitution grounding democratic institutions. Democratic consolidation’s purpose would then be to complete the regime change through the internalisation and stabilization of these mechanisms. This would happen through the “deepening” of socially and societally incorporated behavioural and attitudinal practices (Diamond, 1995, cited in Plasser et al., 1998, p. 52), itself dually centred around two dynamics of “positive” and “negative” consolidations (Pridham, 1995, p. 168): the stabilisation of behaviours and attitudes compatible with basic criteria of democracy and the “marginalisation or elimination” of incompatible ones (Plasser et al., 1998, p. 8).

With such understandings of transition and consolidation, it would seem possible for both processes to follow a linear evolution, as well as partially overlap – Collier and Levitsky (1995) gave the example of Poland in 1989, where only partially competitive elections took place. Nevertheless, consolidation needs to respect the legacy of the transition, and principally the minimal democratic criteria it set forth, like those explored by Dahl (1971). This position was most clearly articulated by Linz, who claimed the consolidated democracy should never be questioned by any major political actor considering the possibility of alternatives or of vetoing initiatives taken by leaders democratically elected: “democracy must be seen as the ‘only game in town’.” (Linz, 1990, pp. 5 and 157-158; see also Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. 48-49; and Diamond, 1999, p. 65).

Democratic transition and consolidation processes, externally-induced democratisation, and Europeanisation

Steps towards democratic transition and consolidation: different approaches

If there is a certain consensus amongst a large set of democratization theoreticians that defends that the mode of democratic transition influences the regime change's success and the perennity of the consolidation (Stradiotto & Guo, 2010, p. 7), there is nonetheless no such consensus on the modes of transition experienced by authoritarian states. Alfred Stepan (1986) for instance identified at least ten distinct paths to democratization for non-democratic regimes. Furthermore, the effects of the diversification of these modes of transition have also been largely debated, between those arguing that the modes of transition themselves have a direct effect on the type and lasting of the post-transition regime (Munck & Leff, 1997), and others that argued that the previous regime's type influences the construction of the new one – some notably claiming that this underlines the need to build the 'state' before the 'democracy' (O'Donnell, 1993).

A first strand in transition theory linked democratic regime change to societal development. Lipset (1959, 1960) for instance linked economic development and regime stabilisation to the funding of democratic regimes. This theory relied on the postulate that economic development leads to reduction of inequalities and poverty, what then enhances a more educated civil society (Beetham, 1994, p. 166). This view has been supported by authors defending both a causal relationship (Muller, 1988) or a correlative one (Hadenius, 1995) between inequalities reduction and democratisation. Others have then emphasised the importance of education (Rowen, 1995; see also Roeder, Fish, & Hanson, 2002, p. 130).

Beetham (1994), gathering miscellaneous hypotheses from the literature, classified them depending on their focus to stress out how some corresponded rather to transition or consolidation, and which base they relied on to explain the regime change processes. In regards to transition, he formulated the “oversimplified” figure hereunder figure (*Figure 0.01*). Amongst the questions that relate to the transitory phase of democratisation, he

highlighted the question of who owned the transition process itself: national elites, opposing forces, the military...

Figure 0-01. Different Processes of Transition

	External imposition	Transformation (initiated within authoritarian regime)	Replacement (initiated from society and opposition)
Reforma (gradual negotiated change)			
Ruptura (rapid breakthrough)			

Source: Beetham, 1994, p. 163; himself based on Stepan, 1986; Huntington, 1991; Linz, 1990; Ethier, 1990.

For consolidation, Beetham distinguished three major approaches founded on plural hypotheses. One, the ‘modernization’ approach, considers democratic consolidation as emerging from a favourable socio-economic system, either as a market economy, stable economic development (Lipset, 1959; Hadenius, 1995; Epstein et al., 2006), or class agency (Przeworski, 1986). Another one concentrates on the creation of a democracy based on a society which already has its own political culture, either as a religion or a culture. Lastly, another approach perceives political institutions as the key component of consolidation, arguing that specific institutional layouts facilitate the settling of a democratic regime (for instance, parliamentary systems instead of presidential ones, or proportional electoral systems over pluralist ones).

Amongst the first to disengage from the modernization approach based on socio-economic structural changes, Rustow (1970) considered that socio-economic components explained the stabilisation of democracy rather than its inauguration. He developed a four-phases ideal type of democratic transition: background, preparation, decision, and

habituation. The first condition he identified is a pre-existent and tacitly agreed-on “national identity” referring to the sense of belonging of most citizens to a specific political community (Rustow, 1970, p. 350). No democratic system can ensure the immutability of its own community boundaries without this unity allowing for a continuous citizenry.

The second, “preparatory” phase involves an extended “family feud” over the fundamental issues of the society that has democracy as its “fortuitous byproduct” (Rustow, 1970, p. 353), which ensues from the rise of a new elite in the community, and opposes forces that are representative of local social classes. The acknowledgment by political elites of both the struggle and community’s unity will “decide” and motivate leaders to attempt institutionalising a democratic procedure that embodies this conciliation. However, alternatives such as autocracy can be established on the same foundations laid by political struggles within a conscious political community. Hence, this non-universal agreement must be then “transmitted to the professional politicians and to the citizenry at large.” (Rustow, 1970, p. 357). Democracy being an institutional frame for resolving conflicts within social groups that relies on multiparty debate, its survival as a regime is highly dependent on its effectiveness in conciliating opposing social interests.

The last phase of Rustow’s model is thus “habituation”: initial democratic successes might strengthen a community’s reliance on democratic procedures, whereas unresolved political issues can damage their relevancy and fatally delegitimize if not disintegrate them. The habituation occurs in three successive transmission processes. The first one has politicians and citizens witnessing the positive results from pluralism and democratic resolution of some issues in the first years/decades of the new regime. This will then reaffirm the politicians’ belief in democratic practices. Finally, the population will internalise the links between their elective powers and the designation of their national representatives, further developing and societally institutionalising democratic practices. Although he included it in his ‘transition’ process, Rustow’s habituation phase could be better assimilated as being part of a consolidation process of democracy since it translates behavioural and attitudinal changes in the elite’s and citizenry’s minds. Interpreted as such, his proposition of a democratic transition process hence also included guidelines regarding democratic consolidation.

Similarly, other authors have supported the argument that democratic norms need to be societally internalised for the new democratic regime to last. This internalisation means the creation of a specific political culture or active civil society oriented towards the safeguard of democracy as the preferred regime system (Hanson, 2001, p. 129; Ágh, 2016, pp. 277-278). Larry Diamond (1994, p. 15) referred to consolidation as the normalisation of democratic politics through “the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and other functions that civil society performs.” In *The Sources of Democratic Consolidation*, Gerard Alexander (2002, p. 7) defended the similar argument that “people are neither born nor made democrats but rather choose democracy.” Kaldor and Vejvoda (1999, cited Kubicek, 2004) even distinguished between procedural and substantive democracies: the former concentrating on rules and institutions, the latter on “civil society, free media, social pluralism, observance of human rights.”

Linking this back to Beetham’s (1994, p. 163) figure (*Figure 0.01*), one could question the ownership of the consolidation process. Indeed, Beetham insisted on the fact that scholars most generally debated the ownership of the democratisation process in the transition phase, or to say it differently: ‘who initiated the shift towards democracy?’ Yet, as has been exposed, the processes of transition and consolidation can follow or overlap with each other. Even if the perspective of externally stimulated democratisation processes remained sidelined in most of the literature on democratic regime change – Rustow (1970, p. 346), for instance, claimed that “to examine the logic of transformation *within* political systems, we may leave aside countries where a major impetus came from abroad” – consolidation schemes could nonetheless theoretically be externally induced. In this context, how should one understand consolidation in a regional (or European) context?

The externalisation of the democratisation process and Europeanisation

Pevehouse (2002, p. 611) argued that newborn democratic regimes may use their membership to international organisations to consolidate their domestic reforms, while said organisations could also attempt at democratising their members. The role of regional

organisations specifically can be assessed through their manifested will to set, will to implement and capacity to enforce conditions to membership (Pevehouse, 2002, p. 615). In comparison to Bull's (1982) military and Duchêne's (1973) civilian powers, this influence in the EU's case is often referred to as Europeanisation or 'normative power Europe' (Pace, 2007, p. 1042). The EU's normative power is seen as a "power over opinion" (Carr, 1962, p. 108) which allows it to reshape the receiver's concept of normality through ideology (Galtung, 1973, p. 33) and the inculcation of European norms (Manners, 2002, p. 239-240).

Said norms were both included in the first European treaties and progressively developed alongside the European integration. Manners (2002, p. 242) identified five 'core' norms constituting the EU's *acquis communautaire et politique*: peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. He also added to these four 'minor' norms: social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance.

Paul Kubicek (2004) distinguished various categories of regional democratisation processes applicable to the EU specifically, amongst which convergence and conditionality. Convergence is understood as the attraction of transitioning regimes to established democracies' examples and models. It occurs either as an instrumentalization or an idealisation: the first refers to the transitioning country's elites attempts to adapt to models set by successful democracies in their own domestic system; the second relies on socialisation, internalisation of democratic norms, and learning, notably through transnational networks and exchanges.

The second process, conditionality, could be perceived as a branch of convergence, one where the instrumental adaptation of the transitioning countries is expressively overseen or explicitly demanded by the regional organisation (Kubicek, 2004). It links membership benefits to the commitment to rules or realisation of specific reforms. In the EU, this process has been particularly observable after the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria in 1993, some even observing that it turned the EU into a dual entity acting both as "aid donor and club owner" (Grabbe, 2006, p. 35).

Figure 0-02. Convergence and Conditionality Processes

Convergence <i>Spread of norms</i>	Conditionality <i>Instrumental calculation leads to policy shift</i>
<u>Cultural match</u> External norms resonate with preexisting ones.	<u>Sizable carrots</u> Strong incentives offered by external promoter.
<u>Novelty of environment vs. Nationalism</u> New elites/states welcome new norms vs. nationalism rejects outside influence	<u>Real sticks</u> Capacity of the external promoter to enforce sanctions.
<u>Status of persuader</u> High positive status of the external promoter.	<u>Lack of alternatives</u> Targeted states cannot turn to others for support.
<u>Spillover</u> Rhetoric of support for norm will build momentum for policy shift.	<u>Gray zone democracies</u> Risk of partial diffusion of policy in hybrid systems or partial democracies.
<u>Transnational networks</u> External promoters need allies (governmental or not) in the target country.	<u>Transnational networks</u> External promoters need allies (governmental or not) in the target country.
<u>Soft tactics preferred</u> Softer tactics rather than pressure.	

Source: Kubicek, 2004, p. 21.

With convergence being summarised as the “spread of norms” and conditionality the “instrumental calculation [that] leads to policy shift” (Kubicek, 2004), and based on the overall hereinabove literature review, it could be possible to consider that conditionality would be best applied as a transition-focused process for transitioning candidate-countries, while convergence could be interpreted as a more consolidation-oriented framework.

One of the objectives of this thesis is thus to assess empirically the will, capacity, and effectiveness of the EU to guide/stimulate its Member-States’ democratisation process.

How does the EU concretely transfer its democratic norms to candidate-then-Member-States countries, and how effective is this transfer? Is the EU's democratic incentivisation strictly restrained to the procedural side of democratisation, or does it also encompass its substantive side and support the development of a civil society? If the latter is neglected, what could be the consequences after a candidate-country's adhesion?

Unsustainable democracy? The concept of democratic backsliding, the case of Hungary, and the need for further research

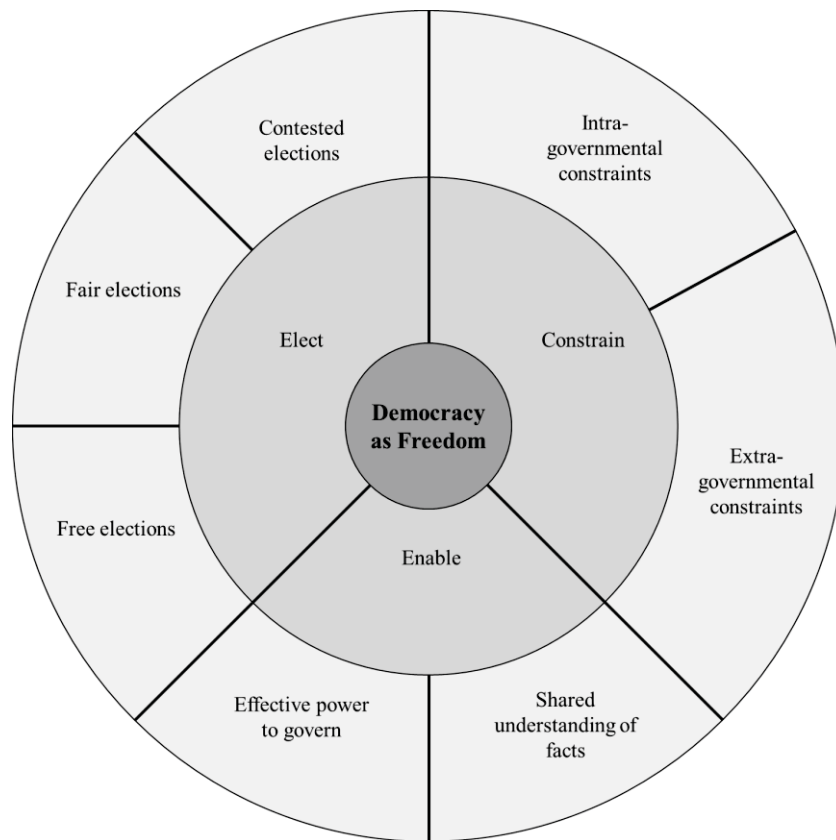
Theoretically, that transitioned regimes can face difficulties, and sometimes purely not succeed in, maintaining their new democratic form is not new, and the question of consolidation comes together with the issue of democratic backsliding. Huntington (1991) defended this point through the metaphor of a democratization wave that was necessarily or most often followed by a de-democratization period. Most authors have linked backsliding to the inversion of the democratisation process, and illustrated it through infringement of the rule of law or the independence of the judiciary (Scheppelle, 2013; Müller, 2015). Nevertheless, Jee et al. (2022, p. 755) noticed that the literature on democratic backsliding incorporated diverging and even contradictory interpretations, which they argued originated from “inconsistencies in the measurement of democratic backsliding and the underlying conceptualization of democracy.” Hence, this literature review relies on its prior identification of conditions and processes of consolidation to parallelly highlights factors that could trigger or enhance regression.

Jee et al. (2022, pp. 759-760) identified three freedoms where democracy can regress. The freedoms are that of choice (citizens are involved in the selection of their leaders and policies), from tyranny (individual rights are protected against potential majority or oligarchic rule), and equality (all citizens have the same rights). Democratic backsliding would thus manifest through any rule negatively impacting any of these three freedoms. As such, regression can happen in three areas: the “elect” arena where free and fair elections could be restricted, thus impacting Schumpeter's (1976) procedural and Dahl's (1971) polyarchic versions of democracy; the “constrain” arena would be impacted by ‘intra-governmental’ policies decreasing the people's capacity to hold their

representatives accountable or by the government’s sections themselves to control one another, and ‘extra-governmental’ ones allowing a government to control foreign-owned media outlets or to force pro-government propaganda on state-owned ones; and the “enable” arena which concerns both the effective power to govern of the instituted representatives, and the equality of all citizens in access to information.

This thesis has one major theoretical objective or contribution to the literature: assessing the causal or at least correlative linkages between EU-led consolidation post-adhesion and processes of de-democratisation experienced by some Member-States. Prior to the study of the EU’s legal basis and instruments for management of democratic consolidation and backsliding, this thesis will elaborate on the case of the Hungarian democratic decline, attempting to identify what decline processes occurred.

Figure 0-03. Three conceptual dimensions of democracy based on Jee et al (2022, p. 760)



The reliance on Hungary as a case-study is legitimated by its experience of democratic backsliding. If using the basic Schumpeterian/Huntingtonian definition of democracy (which positions free and fair electoral elections as symbolising the establishment of minimal standards for a democratic regime), one could estimate the birth of modern Hungarian democracy in 1990, when the first elections of the current system took place. The transition could also be considered completed in 1994 when the second post-communist government took over without the regime being questioned (Tökés, 1996, p. 79). On this basis, when it applied for membership and subsequently became a member of the European union, the Hungarian democracy was in its consolidation phase. Furthermore, although Hungary's regime change was initiated by the regime in place, that kept power until the elections happened (Linz, 1990, p. 156), its democratic transition was perceived as occurring in a broader European integration perspective, the accession being seen as the "crowning of the so-called 'transition project'." (Andor, 2000, p. 2). As underlined by Pietrzyk-Reeves (2008, pp. 84-85), Hungary was amongst the post-communist states that had experienced the most advanced democratization process according to a Freedom House index surveying years from 2004 to 2006, following the immediate adhesion of the country to the EU.

And yet, in what Diamond (2021, pp. 26 and 40) nicknamed a possible "third reverse wave" of de-democratisation, Hungary was the first EU Member-State where a democratic decline was visible. Therefore, Hungary constitutes a case-in-point to confront simultaneously democratic consolidation, Europeanisation, and democratic backsliding.

Chapter I

Quantifying democratic backsliding and identifying key sectorial changes

Hypothesis, methodology, and chosen indicators

The classification of the Hungarian democratic backsliding has proven considerably difficult since the country's regression began (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1482). Denominations have ranged from highly pessimistic evaluations – Hungary as a “semi-dictatorship” (Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013, p. 9), an “electoral autocracy” (Ágh, 2016, p. 280) or a “semi-authoritarianism” (Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 20) – to more optimistic ones simply talking about democratic “deconsolidation” (Brusis, 2016, p. 266) or of a selective or diminished democracy (Varga & Freyberg-Inan, 2012, p. 353).

Even dating the start of the decline has proven challenging. For instance, Herman (2016, p. 252) claimed that the turning point was the 2010 elections (implying that the decline occurred as soon as Orbán took over), while others (Rupnik, 2007, p. 18; Bernhard, 2021, p. 597) estimated that it took place from 2006/7, when Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party rejected the results of the 2006 election and organised street demonstrations against the legitimacy of the elected government. Inversely, the EU institutions themselves only formally referred to potential infringements of the rule of law from 2012 onwards, with official positions taken by then EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding (European Commission, 2012, 2013). Preceding resolutions had however already been adopted by the European Parliament in regards to sectorial breach of EU law in Hungary, for instance in regards to constitutional revisions or new media laws (European Parliament, 2011a, 2011b).

Jee et al.'s (2022) three dimensions exposed in the literature review were partially based on Merkel's (2004) own tridimensional concept of democracy, relying on vertical legitimacy; liberal constitutionalism and rule of law (horizontal legitimacy); and agenda control or effective government. From these three democratic components, an approach to identifying democratic regression through five models of partially democratic regimes can be formulated: the electoral system, political rights and participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the government's effective power to govern (see *Figure 1-01*). The advantage of Merkel's (2004) typology compared to Jee et al.'s (2022) is that it offers a classification of the type of defective democracy observed: exclusive democracy for breach of electoral and political rights; illiberal democracy for civil rights; delegative democracy for horizontal accountability; and tutelary democracy for the effective power to govern.

Figure 1-01. Dimensions, partial regimes and criteria of embedded democracy based on Merkel (2004)

- | | |
|------|--|
| I. | Dimension of vertical legitimacy |
| A. | Electoral regime |
| | (1) Elected officials |
| | (2) Inclusive suffrage |
| | (3) Right to candidacy |
| | (4) Correctly organized, free and fair elections |
| B. | Political rights |
| | (5) Press freedom |
| | (6) Freedom of association |
| II. | Dimension of liberal constitutionalism and rule of law |
| C. | Civil rights |
| | (7) Individual liberties from violations of own rights by state/private agents |
| | (8) Equality before the law |
| D. | Horizontal accountability |
| | (9) Horizontal separation of powers |
| III. | Dimension of effective agenda control |
| E. | Effective power to rule |
| | (10) Elected officials with the effective right to rule |

In this chapter, both Jee et al.'s (2022) arenas- and Merkel's (2004) partial regimes-typologies will be used. Considering that, similarly to EU institutions, multiple scholars have considerably insisted on the rule of law as being the main visible symptom of the Hungarian backsliding (see Pech & Scheppele, 2017; Gora & de Wilde, 2022, p. 343), the hypothesis presently evaluated is that

the Hungarian democratic backsliding was initiated and is principally stimulated by a decline of the country's commitment to the rule of law concomitant to a restriction of the electoral regime.

Concerning the methodology, observing the lack of consensus in research on democratic backsliding, Jee et al. (2022) identified three challenges to the measurement of democratic backsliding. The first one is the choice of indicator: which one is used, and on which definition of democracy does the researcher rely? The second one is the "magnitude of change," which refers to the threshold or types of dynamic that are considered relevant to infer a regime transformation from the data. Lastly, a third challenge comes from the determination of a "time horizon" to analyse backsliding: can backsliding be evaluated on a year-to-year basis, or would a 5- or 10-year period be more appropriate?

Drawing upon Jee et al.'s (2022) recommendations, which underline the necessity for the researcher to properly expose his base method before engaging in any analysis, this chapter's methodology is detailed hereunder. In regards to the indicators chosen, the chapter relies on the minimal procedural definition of democracy lengthily described in the literature review, and on a comparative quantitative analysis of two democratic indicators: the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), and Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* Report. The purpose of using plural indicators is to assess whether they hold similar observations of the timing, scope, dynamics, and form of the Hungarian decline. This is necessary as the rapid overview of the academic literature and institutional press releases/official statements abovementioned already showed that scholars and politicians have assumed different positions concerning the beginning of the decline (see and compare Herman, 2016; Rupnik, 2007; European Commission, 2012).

To account for these possible differences between indicators and understand the "magnitude of change" in Hungary, all indicators are deconstructed in sub-components,

allowing to observe changes in specific categories of democratic consolidation. Furthermore, the corresponding interpretation of backsliding will be based on the following guidelines: any change of 0.5 point in the BTI, and 0.01 (for democracy score and percentage) and 0.25 (for all other sub-components) in the Freedom House index.

Lastly, categorial shifts will naturally be considered in the interpretation. The BTI's categories range from "democracies in consolidation" (8-10), "defective democracies" (6-8), "highly defective democracies" (<6), "moderate autocracies" (≥ 4), and "hard-line autocracies" (<4) (Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2022, pp. 10-11). The *Nations in Transit* Report's categories are divided between "consolidated democracies" (5.01-7.00), "semi-consolidated democracies" (4.01-5.00), "transitional or hybrid regimes" (3.01-4.00), "semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes" (2.01-3.00), and "consolidated authoritarian regimes" (1.00-2.00). There is also a difference between 6.01-7.00-rated democracies and 5.01-6.00 in that, despite both encompassing characteristics of a liberal democracy, challenges concerning corruption remain visible in the latter.

For the "time horizon", special attention will also be given to periodic dynamic: for both studied indexes, a 4/6-year change evaluation of decline will be used, corresponding to the evolution between election years (2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018). The accent will also be put on continuous decreases over successive years (stagnation included if not stabilised or positively reversed after two years).

The expectations regarding the results of the analysis would be that the decline originated from a regression of the rule of law and restrictions on Dahl's free and fair elections democratic criteria, and then spread to most if not all arenas of freedom identified by Jee et al (2022) or Merkel's (2004) three dimensions.

Results, analysis, and discussion on Hungary's progressive democratic decline: has the rule of law issue hidden other democratic lacks?

The first general observation from the BTI is that all variables started to considerably decrease after 2010, when Orbán was elected for a second mandate. Freedom House showed a comparable trend in terms of the steadiness and accelerating

character of the decline. The main difference between the two indicators is that the declassification from consolidated to semi-consolidated democracy occurred in 2015 according to Freedom House, when the BTI estimates it a year earlier. In the BTI, out of the five categories forming the democratic status of Hungary, three had already experienced a declassification in 2012 – rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration – while it only happened in 2016 for the remaining two – stateness and political participation.

Free and fair elections and the minimal definition of democracy: is Hungary not a democracy anymore?

When applying Merkel's (2004) partial regimes' framework, a striking observation from the BTI shows that, although the overall declassification of Hungary occurred in 2014, the declassification in the 'free and fair elections' category only occurred in 2016 (despite a first decline to 9.0 in 2012 and 2014). The restriction on elections only occurred mid-term under the third Orbán government (2014-2018).

This could imply that, according to the BTI, democratic backsliding in Hungary did not start from the 'electoral regime' dimension that Dahl (1971) and Schumpeter (1976) identified as the principal pillar of a procedural, minimal version of democracy, but from (an)other component(s). Comparably, the government's 'effective power to govern' has remained globally unaffected by the change in other variables, implying that both Merkel's (2004) eponym category and Jee et al's (2022) "enable" democratic arena might have not been concerned by the decline, at least not directly.

Nevertheless, 'free and fair elections' have gradually declined, notably due to Orbán's tactics and institutional revisions. From before the 2014 elections, the Fidesz has authorised 'near-abroad Hungarians' to vote in Hungarian elections. In doing so, the party managed to secure a pool of 450,000 voters, of which an average of 95% have constantly voted for Fidesz in all subsequent elections (Scheppele, 2022, pp. 55-56). Lastly, in 2021, Fidesz has authorised 'voter tourism,' meaning the right to register to vote in any national constituency, and not just the district one lives in (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022,

p. 6). In parallel, having compiled a database of around 150,000 pro-Fidesz voters since 2010, which the party could ‘inject’ in any district where the ballots repartition would be more contested (Scheppelle, 2022, p. 55).

Table I-01. De-democratisation in Hungary (BTI)

	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
Ranking Democracy Status	4	7	10	17	21	25	32	41	48
SI Democracy Status	9,40	9,35	9,25	8,35	7,95	7,60	7,15	6,80	6,35
Stateness	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,8	9,5	9,5	9,3	9,3	8,8
- Monopoly of the use of force	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0
- State identity	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	9,0	9,0	10,0	10,0
- No interference of religious dogmas	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	9,0	9,0	8,0	8,0	7,0
- Basic administration	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	8,0
Political Participation	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	8,8	7,5	7,5	7,0	6,3
- Free and fair elections	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	9,0	7,0	7,0	6,0	6,0
- Effective power to govern	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0
- Association / assembly rights	10,0	10,0	10,0	9,0	9,0	7,0	7,0	7,0	6,0
- Freedom of expression	10,0	10,0	10,0	8,0	7,0	6,0	6,0	5,0	4,0
Rule of Law	9,0	9,3	9,0	7,8	7,3	6,5	6,0	5,8	5,3
- Separation of powers	10,0	10,0	10,0	7,0	6,0	5,0	5,0	5,0	4,0
- Independent judiciary	9,0	9,0	9,0	8,0	7,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0
- Prosecution of office abuse	8,0	8,0	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	6,0	5,0	5,0
- Civil rights	9,0	10,0	9,0	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	7,0	6,0
Stability of Democratic Institutions	9,5	9,0	8,5	7,5	7,5	7,5	6,5	5,5	5,0
- Performance of democratic institutions	9,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	7,0	7,0	6,0	6,0	5,0
- Commitment to democratic institutions	10,0	10,0	9,0	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	5,0	5,0
Political and Social Integration	8,5	8,5	8,8	7,8	6,8	7,0	6,5	6,5	6,5
- Party system	9,0	9,0	10,0	9,0	7,0	7,0	7,0	6,0	6,0
- Interest groups	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	7,0	7,0	6,0	6,0	6,0
- Approval of democracy	9,0	9,0	9,0	8,0	7,0	8,0	7,0	8,0	8,0
- Social capital	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0	6,0

Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2023.

Table I-02. De-democratisation in Hungary (Freedom House)

Year	National Democratic Governance	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	Local Democratic Governance
2005	6,00	6,75	6,75	5,50	5,75
2006	6,00	6,75	6,75	5,50	5,75
2007	5,75	6,25	6,50	5,50	5,75
2008	5,75	6,25	6,50	5,50	5,75
2009	5,50	6,25	6,25	5,50	5,50
2010	5,50	6,25	6,25	5,25	5,50
2011	5,00	6,25	6,00	4,75	5,50
2012	4,50	5,75	6,00	4,50	5,50
2013	4,50	5,75	5,75	4,50	5,25
2014	4,25	5,75	5,75	4,50	5,25
2015	4,25	5,25	5,50	4,25	5,00
2016	4,00	5,25	5,50	4,25	5,00
2017	3,75	5,00	5,25	3,75	5,00
2018	3,50	4,75	5,00	3,50	5,00
2019	3,25	4,50	4,50	3,25	5,00
2020	3,25	4,25	4,50	3,25	4,75
2021	3,00	4,25	4,25	3,25	4,25
2022	3,00	4,25	4,25	3,00	4,25

Year	Judicial Framework and Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score	Democracy Percentage	Regime Classification
2005	6,25	5,25	6,04	83,93	CD
2006	6,25	5,00	6,00	83,33	CD
2007	6,25	5,00	5,86	80,95	CD
2008	6,25	5,00	5,86	80,95	CD
2009	6,25	4,75	5,71	78,57	CD
2010	6,00	4,50	5,61	76,79	CD
2011	5,75	4,50	5,39	73,21	CD
2012	5,25	4,50	5,14	69,05	CD
2013	5,50	4,50	5,11	68,45	CD
2014	5,50	4,25	5,04	67,26	CD
2015	5,25	4,25	4,82	63,69	SCD
2016	5,00	4,00	4,71	61,90	SCD
2017	5,00	3,50	4,46	57,74	SCD
2018	5,00	3,25	4,29	54,76	SCD
2019	4,75	3,25	4,07	51,19	SCD
2020	4,75	3,00	3,96	49,40	T/H
2021	4,25	2,75	3,71	45,24	T/H
2022	4,25	2,75	3,68	44,64	T/H

Source: Freedom House, 2023a.

The place of the rule of law decline in the Hungarian backsliding

Interestingly, corruption in the *Nations in Transit* Report was already low in 2005, and immediately began decreasing. In 2006, it was already at semi-consolidated democracy level, what could imply that the Hungarian governments preceding Orbán's already showed strong levels of corruption. Corruption then slightly further decreased under Orbán's 2010-2014 mandate, and the decline considerably accelerated from 2015 onward, decreasing by 0.25 point almost continuously every year. In 2016, it reached transitional/hybrid regime level and, in 2020, semi-consolidated authoritarian regime level.

Amongst the variables studied by the BTI, one shows however an incomparable decline at the very beginning of Orbán's mandate: between 2010 and 2012, the separation of powers in Hungary decreased from 10.0 to 7.0 points, signifying that in this variable alone the country shifted from a perfect trajectory towards democratisation, to an average-defective democracy, in two-years-time. The *Nations in Transit* Report showed a similar pattern. The 'national democratic governance,' which covers the "democratic character of the governmental system and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches" (Freedom House, 2023b), only experienced a 0.50-point decline from 6.00 to 5.50 points between 2005 and 2009, and stayed in the 'democracy in consolidation' category. In contrast, in the sole year following Orbán's election, it experienced a comparable 0.50-point decline to 5.00 (and thus shifted to the 'semi-consolidated democracy' category). Similarly, the 'Judicial Framework and Independence' category experienced a sharp decrease under the second Orbán government: from a stable 9.0, it decreased to 8.0 in 2012, 7.0 in 2014, and 6.0 in 2016, where it has then stabilised until now.

This sharp decrease can be explained by the increase and transformation of policy- and law-making in Hungary under Orbán's ruling. Between 2010 and 2014, almost twice the number of laws passed in Orbán's 1998-2002 mandate (460) were voted, amounting to a total of 859 laws (Kornai, 2015b, p. 302). This was also many more than the previous government, which totaled 585 laws. One major issue was the proceeding of this rapid law-making: over-using its supermajority, the government managed to legislate with an

unconditional support of the Parliament, which consequently lost its role of controlling the government (Pap, 2017). 365 laws were passed in the first 20 months, to which were added 12 amendments to the constitution and 50 individual constitutional provisions in the first year alone (Bánkuti, Halmai, & Scheppele, 2012, p. 139).

The declining separation of powers also manifested through the swift revision of judges nomination process (Dávid-Barrett, 2023), as the Fidesz is now able to nominate seven of the fifteen judges of the Constitutional Court. The *actio popularis* jurisdiction that allowed ‘any’ citizen to challenge a law’s constitutionality, and thus exercise a potential control of the government’s law-making initiative, has been replaced to a more limited model (Bánkuti, Halmai, & Scheppele, 2012, pp. 140-142).

The reduction of media independence

The media were of the first targets of the Orbán government after 2010. Constantly stable at 5.50 from 2005 to 2009 in the Freedom House *Nations in Transit* Report, it declined to 5.25 in 2010 and rapidly passed the semi-consolidated threshold at 4.75 in 2011, then pursuing its decrease until it reached the ‘transitional or hybrid regime’ classification in 2017, and the semi-consolidated authoritarian regime in 2022.

The BTI shows a very similar trend to the evolution of the freedom of expression in Hungary since 2006. Including measurement of individuals and legal entities’ freedom of expression, state censorship practices, and limited plurality of the media due to unfavourable media laws, this variable was constantly at 10.0 in 2006, 2008, and 2010. In 2012, it had decreased to 8.0, and then uninterruptedly dropped until reaching the moderate autocracies threshold in 2022. This year, it was the lowest-measured variable (4.0), alongside the separation of powers.

This translates the instrumentalization or ‘colonisation’ of the media tactic that the government started employing as of 2010, which consisted of monopolising “media resources such as airtime, frequencies, positions and money” and redistributing them to

government-affiliated or -supportive institutions and individuals (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013). The colonisation also concerned the institutions in charge of media supervision. All members of the Media Council were now nominated by a Fidesz-only commission in the National Assembly, and the president of the National Media and Telecommunication Authority (NMTA) – which controls and supervises every domestic activity related to printing, broadcasting, and offering internet media services – is now directly appointed by the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1487).

In parallel, one of the last opposition radio channels, Klubrádió, saw its exploitation licence frequently suspended (Bozóki, 2011, p. 653), and it last aired in 2021. Reporter Sans Frontières estimated in 2022 that Fidesz had took control, since 2010, of up to 80% of the country's media (Reporter Sans Frontières, n.d.). Overall, this led to a tightening of the freedom of information (Gürkan & Tomini, 2020), and impacted the “enabling” arena identified by Jee et al (2022).

The paradox of democratic support and cross-variable regression: a socially accepted or acceptable decline?

The results of this quantitative analysis show that, when applying Merkel's (2004) typology, Hungary experienced a backsliding that brought it closer to an exclusive, illiberal, delegative, and tutelary democracy. Chronologically, the decline first concerned participation rights (including freedom of the media), the rule of law, corruption, and separation of power, thus concerning the exclusive, delegative and tutelary democracy. The addition of the illiberal character occurred in two steps. The first, considering corruption as a symptom of illiberalism, preceded Orbán's 2010 re-election, though it was greatly accelerated after 2010 and became the worst measured variable in the *Nations in Transit* Report, clearly classifying Hungary as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime. The second was after civil rights started declining sharply in 2018 according to the BTI. All these measurements, if they do translate changes and manifestations of decline in Hungary, do not however explain why or how the shift to backsliding occurred. Bogaards noticed for instance that Merkel's typology only permitted to classify Hungary as a

diffusely defective democracy, but not exactly as a strictly exclusive, illiberal, delegative or tutelary one as not all criteria's threshold have been reached (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1492). Most attempts to explain the origin of the regression itself have focused on Orbán's election in 2010, and claimed that it was mostly the person himself that led to this declining dynamic in the first place.

Numerous observations have for instance argued that the backsliding was first and foremost a phenomenon of state-capture, with Orbán launching a “process of autocratisation” in Hungary in 2010 as he returned to power (Pirro & Della Porta, 2021, p. 447). This process, sometimes seen as highly ‘personalised,’ could have been foreseeable even before his return: some, including Orbán's biograph Debreczeni in 2009, had warned that he would probably attempt to secure his power after regaining it (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1491). Others have observed that his “revolutionary rhetoric” had already imprinted most of his public speeches since 1989 (Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015). Nevertheless, the Fidesz's party programme made no reference to change to the Constitution after the elections. Furthermore, even if this personalisation of the state capture were to be a major explanation for the decline in some areas, most notably the rule of law, it would however not solve the issue of the propagation of the backsliding, and the apparent ease with which it happened.

One additional explanation lies in the acceptance of this phenomenon by the population. Despite these transformations, the approval of democracy as a regime – understood as the citizens' approval of democratic norms and procedures – remained relatively stable, except for two occurrences of below-consolidated-democracy level in 2014 and 2018. This approval is usually measured through the aggregation of three distinct sub-indicators: the approval of democracy as a system and the citizens' preference for democracy in comparison to other forms of regimes; the approval of its performance, through the measurement of the satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic regime in place; and the approval of the institutions themselves (like the Parliament or the police), with an evaluation of how trusted they are by the population (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022b, p. 24). Due to how stable the approval of democracy variable has remained, one

question arising from this quantitative analysis regards the population's acceptance of this progressive transformation of the Hungarian system.

Merkel (2004, p. 53) noted that the absence or insufficiency of consolidated interpersonal trust in a regime usually tends to hinder the institutionalisation of interest groups, civil society organisations and a proper political party system. This absence also obstructs the establishment of a proper civic culture which is commonly expected to support or reinforce fragile institutions (Almond & Verba, 1963), and has even started being considered as vital for democratic institutions to survive or endure in times of contestation and crises (Claassen, 2020).

Hungary's social capital – defined by the BTI as interpersonal trust between citizens and capacity of self-organisation and -constitution of civil organisations – was already barely meeting the 'consolidating-democracy threshold' of 8.0 points under the pre-2010 governments. After Orbán's return in 2010, this social capital declined to 7.0 then 6.0 until 2022. From these observations, it could be inferred that there was neither a solidified civic culture and social capital in Hungary prior to Orbán's return, but also that the democratic and European norms and values that ground this culture had not been internalised. If verified, this could represent an explanation for the apparently easy decline experienced by Hungary.

Hence, this thesis now turns to the study of norms internalisation and an analysis of the state of the civil society in Hungary to attempt explaining what could have facilitated the decline in the other aforementioned democratic components.

Chapter II

Internalisation, societal attitudes, and the way towards (de-)democratisation

Hypothesis, methodology, and expectations

This chapter concentrates on evaluating the degree of internalisation of – or, as Rustow (1970) called it, habituation to – EU democratic values and norms in the Hungarian political culture, and the role of this internalisation in the overall stability of Viktor Orbán’s illiberal democratic regime since his election in 2010. According to Welzel (2007, pp. 399-403), three dimensions of mass attitudes towards democracy characterise a shift of a population’s political culture to democracy: “democratic regime preference”; “communal attitudes”; and “emancipative attitudes.”

Democratic regime preference refers to the desire to live in a country democratically governed. However, the credibility of measurements evaluating this desire relies on the parallel analysis of the rejection of authoritarian practices. Only when citizens reject undemocratic alternatives, can the regime be considered consolidated (Klingemann, 1999, pp. 31-33; Welzel, 2007, p. 401).

Communal attitudes participate in the creation of a common, social capital that facilitates the birth of social movements. These attitudes manifest themselves through diverse dynamics, from participation in charity associations to strong interpersonal trust (Levi & Stoker, 2000, p. 494), and create a sort of “culture of trust” (Sztompka, 1998, p. 21). This then further solidifies confidence in democratic institutions (Welzel, 2007, p. 401) and, consequently, the popular demand for a democratic regime.

Finally, emancipative attitudes, or ‘self-expression’ (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008), are an essential component of democratic regimes, as these can only be functional once the elites’ power is transferred back to the people through the enhancement of their political participatory resources, means and will. Said self-expression is linked to the development in the citizens’ mindset and cultural habits of a set of values factually observable once they “have participatory orientations toward society and politics; support gender equality; are relatively tolerant of foreigners, homosexuals, and other out-groups; and rank high on interpersonal trust.” (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008, p. 129). As these values are also reflected in the European Union Treaties, in article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016) and in the EU Charter on Human Rights (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012), notably in its title III, their usage as a basic for measurement of democratic internalisation and Europeanisation in Hungary is deemed here relevant.

Hence, the hypothesis explored in this chapter evaluates whether

European and democratic norms, behaviours, and values were poorly internalised, what translated an absence of democratic consolidation and effective Europeanisation, and facilitated a return to a domestic illiberal regime.

To measure the internalisation of these values and behaviours in the Hungarian population’s mentality, the analysis is supported by existing statistics research based on quantitative *survey data* (Newman, 2014, pp. 48-49) gathered biannually from the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2002 to 2020. They collected the answers of the Hungarian population to questions related to values traditionally associated to the European Union’s model of democracy. Similar research had been conducted by Toomey (2015), but only focused on the years from 2002 to 2012. Hence, it did not consider the potential evolution of these measures from the European Parliament’s resolution (2015a) on the situation in Hungary onward.

The questions asked are classified according to the three hereinabove categories developed by Welzel (2007). The first category analyses the democratic regime

preference of the population. However, the ESS had barely any question reflecting clearly democratic preference or rejection of authoritarianism. Therefore, acknowledging this limit, the present study chose to rely exceptionally for the study of the first category on a combination of both relevant ESS and World Values Survey (WVS) questions (World Values Survey, n.d.). The WVS is an analytical tool, developed by scholars directed by Ronald Inglehart, that Welzel had notably used as the basis of his study on the impact of mass attitudes on democracy (2007). However, the WVS itself presents, as currently made available online, two flaws: firstly, it does not allow for yearly or biyearly measurement of values, instead relying on periods covering a five-year long timeframe; secondly, the dataset does not include data for Hungary for some of its periods, most notably 2010-2014 which is paradoxically pivotal for this study as being the first years of the Orbán government post-EU accession. For these reasons, the analysis of the first category here exceptionally rests upon survey answers to the following questions. From the ESS: “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [Hungary]?” and “How important it is to her/him that the government ensures her/his safety against all threats” (*Table II-01*). From the WVS, and solely for the hereunder indicated 1994-1999, 2005-2009, and 2017-2022 periods: “Having a democratic political system” (*Table II-02*), “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” (*Table II-03*), and “Having the army rule” (*Table II-04*).

The second category evaluates communal attitudes through the measurement of trust in the institutions, trust in other people and involvement or ties with solidarity or non-profit associations. Trust in other people is measured by answers to the question “would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?” whereas solidarity is quantified by answers to “have you volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation or civic association?” (*Table II-05*). Confidence in institutions is evaluated by the trust in four domestic institutional entities or agents: “politicians,” “police,” “legal system,” and “parliament” (*Table II-06*).

The third category assesses answers linked to emancipative attitudes, and can be further divided in two sets of questions. Firstly, questions related to people’s engagement with politics and participatory power/willingness in civic public actions: “How interested would you say you are in politics;” “[During the last 12 months, have you] taken part in a lawful public demonstration?;” “[...] signed a petition?;” “[...] boycotted certain

products?” (*Tables II-07 and II-08*). Secondly, questions evaluating their “tolerance of nonconforming people” (Welzel, 2007, p. 401) and tolerance: “Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish” and “Is Hungary made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?” (*Table II-09*).

The preconceived assumptions would be that a weak internalisation of democratic norms would manifest itself in the measurements of all three categories, though in distinct manner depending on the observed category. The first category would show weak commitment to democracy through low results to “having a democratic system,” and inversely high positive responses to “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” and “Having the army rule.” A lack of solidarity would then be embodied by low participation in voluntary associations and confidence in state institutions. Lastly, weak self-expression would show low empirical results in all associated social surveys, that could be even chronologically decreasing from 2009-2010 when the country started operating its turn to illiberalism.

Results and Quantitative Analysis

Democratic regime preference

For most authors writing on democratic transition, “consolidation cannot occur if the democratic regime lacks popular legitimacy, or if democracy is seen as more imperfect than its alternatives” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 392; see also Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 5-6; and Diamond, 1999, p. 175). Under Linz and Stepan’s (1996) theoretical definition of democracy, three dimensions of consolidation can be identified: the behavioural, attitudinal, and constitutional ones. Popular legitimacy can be seen as originating mostly from the second dimension, the attitudinal one: once a majority of the population sees democracy as the most efficient way of being governed, a regime can be considered consolidated from an attitudinal perspective. This relationship between support and stability makes democratic viability dependent upon the satisfaction citizens have with the way it works (Kornberg, 1990).

The satisfaction criterion (or satisfaction approach) is usually used as a key question in measuring this support and popular legitimacy of the regime (Hobolt, 2012, p. 91). In most quantitative research, from Eurobarometer to Afrobarometer surveys, this satisfaction is calculated as the apparent efficiency of the democratic government as perceived by the population. The perception itself is generally simply calculated through answers to a question typically being “generally, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country?” (Doorenspleet, 2012, p. 283; also Kornberg & Clarke, 1994, p. 552).

The study of the democratic regime preference category will thus be divided into two subsections. The first one focuses on applying the satisfaction approach to estimate whether a lack of satisfaction with democracy was witnessable in Hungary during a given and identifiable period of its integration. The second views satisfaction as a limited indicator of democratic norms internalisation and will thus expand measurement to the idealist approach and include other variables linked to direct quantification of the desirability of democracy as a regime.

Satisfaction with democracy

Before the accession, in 2002, the shares of satisfied and unsatisfied Hungarian citizens were approximatively equal: respectively 34,7 and 39,1%. The undecided share was then relatively high, amounting to more than a quarter (26,2%) of all respondents. For the three survey rounds that followed the country’s adhesion to the EU in 2004, satisfaction with democracy decreased drastically. The periodic average of satisfaction for the first years of EU membership was almost twice as low as before accession, measured at 19,27% as opposed to 34,7%. In 2008, for the first time in the covered period, the share of the population satisfied with democracy was even lower than the undecided part (measured at 12,1% against 15,2%). This dynamic came alongside a growing biannual rejection of democracy. More than half (53,2%) of the population was unsatisfied with the conduct of democracy in Hungary in 2004, almost two thirds in 2006 (63%) and nearly three quarters in 2008 (72,7%).

Table II-01. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %). “Important that government is strong and ensures safety” & “How satisfied with the way democracy works in country.” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession		Period	
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	ESS Round		Year	
2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002	Dissatisfied		Year	
39,5	48,4	39,4	54,1	47,7	46	72,7	63	53,2	39,1	Dissatisfied		Year	
14,2	14,2	18,3	15,6	17,2	22,6	15,2	17,1	21,2	26,2	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied		Year	
46,4	37,5	42,3	30,4	35,2	31,3	12,1	20	25,7	34,7	Satisfied		Year	
45,85										Average Dissatisfied		How satisfied with the way democracy works in country	
17,02										Average Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied		Year	
37,18										Average Satisfied		Year	
97,5	92,8	97	96,1	97,1	97,3	96,1	95,4	95,5	96,3	Agree		Year	
2,5	7,1	3	3,9	2,9	2,8	4	4,7	4,4	3,8	Disagree		Year	
96,3										Average "Agree"		Important that government is strong and ensures safety	
3,7										Average "Disagree"		Year	

Following Orbán's return as Prime minister in 2010, this declining trend in democratic support seemingly reversed or, rather, dissatisfied and satisfied opinions gradually balanced each other. This period's dissatisfied average regressed from almost two thirds of the responding population (62,7%) to less than half (45,85%). Two of the latest rounds, 2016 and 2020, even showed that the major part of the population was satisfied with the way democracy is exercised in Hungary. Moreover, the undecided share decreased to a periodic average of 17,02%, implying that less people have troubles gauging their satisfaction.

Another question interrogates whether it is "important that government is strong and ensures safety." The rationale behind the use of this question here is to evaluate whether citizens "still harbour nostalgia for strong government" and "nondemocratic alternatives" (Bratton, 2004, p. 150).

Interestingly, the average of answers remained high over the entire period covered: between 92,8% (2018) and 97,5% (2022) of respondents agreeing with the statement. More specifically, the first post-accession years experienced a decrease in support of a strong government. The results remained high, but were all lower than the lowest result of pre-accession and Orbán government years, with the exception of 2018.

The average of the Orbán government period, 96,3%, is the same as the pre-accession period, but the calculus is influenced by the extreme decrease of 2018. Apart from this specific year, one year (2014) was measured at 96,1%, whereas all the others were above 97%. These results indicate a considerable stronger and more regular support of the Hungarian population to the idea that their government needs to be strong.

When analysing the answers given to the two ESS questions, "Is it important that the government is strong and ensures safety" and "How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country," the Hungarian population thus showed its constant support of a strong leadership, alongside a clear discontentment of the current domestic state of democracy which paradoxically improved during the period identified as undemocratising.

Does this imply that democracy is rejected by the Hungarian population? Not necessarily. This satisfaction regarding the performance of the democratic regime – and the satisfaction approach in itself – has flaws (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 306), for instance the fact that it does not really imply neither a support of democracy itself nor a rejection of authoritarianism. Instead, these measures simply translate whether the Hungarian population is satisfied or not with the way democracy is conducted and the way the country is led. When differentiating regime stability between established democracies and democratising regimes, Mishler and Rose observed that the replaceability of the regime diverged from one system to the other (2001, p. 304). For the former, civic contestation or distrust of government can happen, but few citizens only would wish for the fundamental replacement of the entire regime, and even less would call for the establishment of a non-democratic system. Contrarily, in the case of still consolidating regimes, “the transition may be reversed or progress toward democracy may simply stop, resulting in a permanently incomplete or ‘broken-back’ democracy” (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 304).

Hence, “dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy does not necessarily imply dissatisfaction with democracy as such [...]. Or, to put it the other way around, a respondent may acknowledge the way a democratic regime is working at the moment, but nevertheless be prepared to support a non-democratic alternative in times of trouble” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 396), which is especially what this paper suspects is happening in Hungary. There is thus a clear distinction to make between democratic ‘support’ and ‘satisfaction.’ Satisfaction alone is not enough to infer that a regime has consolidated in the masses and is now widely supported by the citizens (Diamond, 1999, p. 169; Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 304), especially as the consolidation of one particular democratic criteria, like free elections, does not prevent other violations from occurring, like rule of law or lack of political accountability (Rose, Shin, & Munro, 1999).

The same critique can be applied to the logic behind the use of “Having a strong government.” Do respondents clearly associate a “strong government” with an authoritarian one when formulating their answers? For instance, do they link it to interrogations like “having the army rule?”

Consequently, it becomes essential to analyse responses to a distinct set of questions that address “explicitly” the preference or ‘desirability’ of a democratic regime, as opposed to an authoritarian one (Linde & Ekman, 2003, pp. 397-398). This paper does so by relying on the World Values Survey to expand the scope of its questions to less subjective and more practical indicators.

On the desirability of a democratic regime

Table II-02. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %) – “Political system: having a democratic system.” (WVS)

Base=3,176; Weighted results	Chronology of EVS-WVS waves			
	1994-1998	2005-2009	2017-2022	TOTAL
Very good	46,3	43,9	57,8	51,1
Fairly good	37,1	43	30,3	35,7
Fairly bad	6,5	6,1	4,4	5,3
Very bad	1,8	1,7	2,3	2
No answer	8,3	0,1	1,7	2,5
Don't know	0	5,2	3,6	3,3
(N)	650	1007	1519	3176

The first observation regarding the population preference for a democratic regime shows that Hungarians generally have a major desire for democracy, which has grown alongside a rejection of authoritarianism. Bratton and Mattes (2001, p. 447) claim “popular support for a political regime is the essence of its consolidation.” In Hungary, the idea of having a democratic regime has been consistently supported by more than 80% of the population since the mid-1990s, whereas democratic rejection has decreased from 8,3% to 6,7% between 1994 and 2022.

More importantly, the share of the population having a “very positive” perception of democracy has largely exceeded the one having a “fairly positive” view on it. Between 2017 and 2022, it was even the majoritarian opinion, with 57,8% of the total of responses. Interestingly, the indecisiveness of the population has vastly decreased: from 8,3% of

surveyed people not formulating any answer in 1994-1998, the results measured in the “no answer” category fell drastically to 0,1% in 2005-2009, before growing slightly to 1,7% in 2017-2022. Inversely, the “don’t know” answer rose from 0% to 5,2% between 1994-1998 and 2005-2009, and more recently fell to 3,6 between 2017 and 2022.

This analysis infers two possible dynamics. On one hand, the share of the population that used to not give any answer has shifted to state they simply do not know which answer to give. On the other, the category that benefitted the most of these public opinion shifts was the “very good” one, implying that the overall population growingly has a positive image of democracy, and that the population already convinced of the benefits of democracy shows an even stronger support for it.

Table II-03. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %) – “Political system: having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.” (WVS)

Base= 3,176; Weighted results	Chronology of EVS-WVS waves			
	1994-1998	2005-2009	2017-2022	TOTAL
Very good	5,8	7,6	4,1	5,6
Fairly good	11,2	18,1	17	16,2
Bad	25,8	26	32,1	28,9
Very bad	48,3	41,9	41,6	43,1
No answer	8,8	0	1,6	2,6
Don ´t know	0	6,4	3,5	3,7
(N)	650	1007	1519	3176

In parallel to this growing support of democracy, rejection of authoritarianism was also strong. For all surveyed years, respondents have majorly and constantly regarded the potentiality of having a national political leader above the laws, who could rule without constraint from either the parliament or elections, as a bad scenario for national governance: from 1994 to 2022, approximately 60 to 70% rejected the idea. Nonetheless, the results curiously decreased during the first years of accession, between 2005 and 2009, to reach 67,9% when the two other periods were both above 70%. Over time, the

distribution of answers between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ perceptions of a strong leader went from a 17-74,1% repartition in 1994 to a 21,1-73,7% one in 2022.

Concurrently to this first dynamic, a sort of reconciliation to the centres is visible. Both the “very good” and “very bad” categories decreased between 1994 and 2022, while the “fairly good” and “fairly bad” ones increased in support: respectively, from 5,8% to 4,1%, 48,3% to 41,6%, 11,2% to 17% and 25,8% to 32,1%. Moreover, a third dynamic affected ‘uncertain categories’ (the “no answer” and “don’t know” answers), which remained considerably low over the studied period. A shift was visible, principally from the “no answer” to the “don’t know,” as the “no answer” decreased from 8,8% (1994-1999) to 0% (2005-2009) and 1,6% (2017-2022). The “don’t know” gained 6,4 points of percentage between 1994-1999 (0%) and 2005-2009 (6,4%), and eventually regressed to 3,5% in 2017-2022.

These three dynamics show that the certitude of the Hungarian population regarding its rejection of a strong, authoritarian “free-to-act” leader was clear, but not constant. A considerable part of the population – more than one person out of twenty – remains uncertain, and the unambiguous “very” categories lost a non-negligeable share of their support in favour of centrist, possibly more prone to bad-good-shifts positions. Similarly to the previous table, this indicates a general desire for democracy, which is however not solidified in the political culture of the population.

Table II-04. Democratic regime preference in Hungary (in %) – “Political system: having the army rule.” (WVS)

Base=3,176; Weighted results	Chronology of EVS-WVS waves			
	1994-1998	2005-2009	2017-2022	TOTAL
Very good	1,7	1,6	1,7	1,7
Fairly good	2,9	5,7	4,9	4,7
Fairly bad	15,7	18,7	29,2	23,1
Very bad	73,4	70,7	59,1	65,7
No answer	6,3	0	1,7	2,1
Don't know	0	3,4	3,4	2,7
(N)	650	1007	1519	3176

Lastly, the surveys showed a strong rejection of the idea that the army could rule the country, even in the case of a defective government. Regardless of the studied period, rejection of army rule has always been around 88%: 89,1% in 1994-1998; 89,4% in 2005-2009; and 88,3 in 2017-2022.

However, a decreasing dynamic in the rejection of this idea is noticeable: though amounting to more than 70% of votes between 1994-1998 and 2005-2009, the share of the “very” strong rejection only reached 59,1 in 2017-2022. The simple rejection (“fairly bad”) inversely rose, possibly implying that the population became more doubtful of the inherent negativity of the perspective of a military rule, or that it grew to possibly accept such rule in comparison to given circumstances that this sole table do not enlighten or specify.

Thirdly, the ‘very good’ category has remained constantly low over the three rounds of survey, hypothesising that a part of Hungarian population has either internalised acceptance of army rule as a regime possibility (which could be explained by a longitudinal study assessing whether the respondents forming this category are always the same), or that this is the ‘natural share’ of the Hungarian population that will always accept it. In either case, it can be accepted here that ~1,7% of the Hungarian population stays persuaded that the army could rule the country.

Finally, the absence of change between “fairly bad” and “very bad” between 1994-1998 and 2005-2009 supposes that another category benefitted from the decrease of the “no answer” category. From the tables, it would seem that both the “don’t know” and the “fairly good” categories were the one to benefit from it. Another interpretation could be an upward rolling shift: the rise in “fairly good” could come from a decrease in “fairly bad”, invisible on the table as compensated by the otherwise visible decrease in “very good.” Either way, the strong rejection of an army rule has remained mostly constant, but less intense, over time.

The overall conclusion on the analysis of these first four tables tends to indicate that, regarding Welzel’s (2007) first category, an undeniably strong preference for a democratic regime can be witnessed in Hungary. However, this preference has not

solidified, neither as an ideal nor in the satisfaction of the citizens with their regime. Contrarily to the case of a fully democratised or solidified regime, return (or the acceptance of a possible return) to authoritarianism remains visible in the results of the WVS and ESS in Hungary.

Communal attitudes

In contrast to satisfaction or idealist approaches, the cultural approach considers that indirect measurements of democratisation account for better evaluation of consolidation than the sole direct reference to the abstract concept of ‘democracy’ itself. Such indirect assessment rests upon the postulate that any democracy relies on the existence of a civic culture that translates citizens’ basic values, most particularly trust and tolerance amongst themselves and in the regime (Mishler & Rose, 2001, p. 306). Two elements of democracy are analysed here.

Firstly, interpersonal trust and principles of solidarity. Welzel (2007) recognized a dual character to the interpersonal trust criteria, which could be either perceived as belonging to the communal or the emancipative attitudes category. One view perceives trust as enhancing values of reciprocity (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1992, p. 177), thus making it a communal trait, whereas another view sees it as a “fundamental belief in human potentialities” (Lasswell, 1951, p. 502, cited in Welzel, 2007, p. 402) that is instead directly linked to emancipative attitudinal dynamics. The latter is the choice retained by Welzel.

However, this paper does not follow Welzel’s position and instead associate interpersonal trust to “communal attitudes.” The rationale behind this choice originates from the distinction operated between three types of trust enumerated by Braun and Trüdinger (2023, p. 46): ‘personal’ trust for inter-individual trust, ‘social’ trust for larger groups like that of neighbours, and ‘political’ trust towards institutions. In a democratising society, personal and social trusts can relate to the creation of a social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1992, pp. 170-177) or “generalised trust” (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008) which Welzel (2007, p. 400) himself classified as part of the communal attitudes category.

Therefore, in this paper, both personal and social trusts are assessed in this chapter's subsection on communal attitudes rather than on emancipative attitudes.

Secondly, rather than assessing consolidation through quantification of the discontentment with democracy, itself calculated through measurement of the citizens' satisfaction with the performance of the government, the cultural approach would evaluate the degree of trust put by the citizens in the institutions themselves: the 'political trust' mentioned by Braun and Trüdinger (2023). This logic relies on the belief that "without commitments by citizens, government cannot gain obedience from citizens" (Hardin, 1998, p. 10). Simultaneously, a strong political trust makes it easier for citizens to accept reforms (Gabriel & Trüdinger, 2011).

Interpersonal trust, solidarity, and democracy

Interpersonal trust is understood as "a psychological state that involves the intention to accept vulnerability in social interactions, under conditions of social risk and interdependence." (Spadaro et al., 2020). To identify this degree of acceptance, answers to the question "most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful" are noted from 0 to 10. Notes from 0 to 4 are gathered under the "careful" tag, whereas notes from 6 to 10 are collected under the "trustful" one. Answered notes at 5 are presented in the "neither careful nor trustful" column.

In Hungary, over a period of twenty years, interpersonal trust has remained low despite some improvements, as the population feeling trustful towards co-citizens rose from a quarter of the total population between 2002 and 2008 to over a third between 2010 and 2020. The share claiming to be distrustful regressed of almost ten percentage points, whereas the share of undecided people decreased, representing in 2020 one respondent out of five instead of one out of four. If a declining trend is observable between 2010 and 2020, the year 2014 nonetheless stands out from the others. For the first time since 2008 (and the only time out of four to happen under Orbán's government), more than half the population states feeling mistrustful towards other people.

Table II-05. Communal attitudes in Hungary (in %) – “Most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful” and “Have you volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation or civic association in the past 12 months?” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession			Period		
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	ESS Round		Year			
2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002						
40,8	39	45,4	52,2	41,3	43,3	53,2	46,3	52,8	51,7	Careful		Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful			
18,9	17,4	21	18,4	19,3	25,2	21,7	22,7	23,1	25,3	Neither careful nor trustful					
40,2	43,7	33,7	29,5	39,4	31,5	25,1	31	24,1	23	Trustful					
43,67										50,77		51,7			
20,03										22,50		25,3			
36,33										26,73		23			
3,9	3,3	4,1	3	3,1	6,3	5,8	1,2	1,7	3	Yes		Have you volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation or civic association?			
96,1	96,7	95,9	97	96,9	93,7	94,2	98,8	98,3	97	No					
3,95										2,90		3		Average "Yes"	
96,05										97,10		97		Average "No"	

The membership of Hungarians to voluntary organisations can be observed in parallel to this trust dynamic. Indeed, in social and political theory, interpersonal trust and voluntary organisations' activities are considered closely related, the former being an essential component of the social capital birthing the latter (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995; Newton, 2001), if not its most important element (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 441). In measuring voluntary participation, the question “have you volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation or civic association?” is made up of two questions from the ESS.

Initially, the data was meant to rely on the question “Have you volunteered for a not-for-profit or charitable organisation in the past 12 months?” However, upon closer examination, this question was only asked in 2020. For all preceding years, the ESS instead relied on answers to the question “During the last 12 months, have you worked in another organisation or association?” This question's “another” excludes working for political parties or pressure groups, as participation in these have been answered in a preceding question of the survey. As these two different questions were never found at the same time in any survey, it is assumed here that the organisations and associations referred to are civic associations or non-for-profit organisations, and that the 2020 question is the replacement of the other in the surveys' series.

The analysis of the gathered data infers that formation of an active civil society in Hungary was laborious if not unsuccessful. Participation in voluntary associations' activities remained in a 2-percentage points frame for all periodic average, from 2 to 4 %. However, within that frame, participation did not stabilise. Indeed, it fluctuated from an almost inexistant participation at 1,2 and 1,7% in 2006 and 2004, to periodical peaks at 5,8%, 6,3% and 4,1% in 2008, 2010, and 2016.

Democratic consolidation through trust in institutions

Trust in institutions can be distinguished between trust in “state” or “regulatory” institutions on the one hand, and trust in “political” or “representative/implementing” institutions (Welzel, 2007; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 444), respectively trust in the police for the former, and trust in politicians and domestic parliament for the latter (Braun & Trüdinger, 2023, p. 50). Similarly to the question on interpersonal trust, trust in

democratic domestic institutions is measured by notes ranging from 1 to 10, from “no trust at all” to “complete trust.”

Regarding distrust in the police, two distinct phases can be distinguished: from 2002 to 2014, and from 2016 onwards. During the first period, distrust stabilised at a periodic average of 42/43%, whereas almost four respondents out of ten (38%) claimed trusting the state’s police. The sole exception was 2008, when more than half of the population was distrustful of the police.

The other period was the declining distrust from 2016 to 2020, when gradually less than 20% of the population claimed not trusting the police. Concurrently to this dynamic, trust in the police similarly averaged at 40% in the “first period”, with the same exception in 2008, trust plunging to just below a third of respondents. It then grew back to around two thirds of the surveyed sample from 2016 to 2020. The share of the population being undecided stayed approximatively the same over the twenty years covered by the ESS rounds, though it decreased from 2-percentage points from 2002 to 2020. Overall, one respondent out of five felt neither trustful nor mistrustful towards the Hungarian police.

The two other institutions and political actors studied, the parliament and politicians (considered in general as a socio-political group), ranked seemingly lower in trust than the national police services. The two notably displayed almost identical dynamics of evolution over the ten rounds of survey.

Trust in politicians was low before accession, with half of the population not trusting them, a quarter of it being indecisive and only one respondent out of five trusting them. In the three following rounds, from 2004 to 2008, this trust further drastically declined: losing 12-percentage points to fall to 8,7% in 2004, it then fell below one citizen out of twenty in 2008. Indecisiveness similarly fell to 7,8%, while distrust peaked at 87,4%, meaning that almost nine respondents out of ten mistrusted politicians.

Table II-06. Communal attitudes in Hungary (in %) – “Trust in the police,” “Trust in politicians,” and “Trust in the Hungarian Parliament.” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession			Period	
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	ESS Round		Year		
2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002	2002		2002		
19,4	18,9	20,4	35,8	33,6	36,3	52,4	39,5	37,6	42	Can't be trusted				
16,7	15,4	13,4	16,5	20,2	19,9	18,3	16,9	20	19,7	Neither careful nor trustful				
63,8	65,7	66,2	47,4	46,3	43,8	29,2	43,6	42,3	38,4	Complete trust				
27,40										43,17	Average Can't be trusted		Trust in the police	
17,02										18,40	Average Neither careful nor trustful			
55,53										38,37	Average Complete trust			
49,9	54,3	59,2	71	66,1	69,2	87,4	78	78,6	56	Can't be trusted				
20,3	17,8	15,5	11,8	13,8	15,7	7,8	13,7	12,6	23,9	Neither careful nor trustful				
29,9	28	25,3	17,1	20,2	15	4,8	8,4	8,7	20,2	Complete trust				
61,62										81,33	Average Can't be trusted		Trust in politicians	
15,82										11,37	Average Neither careful nor trustful			
22,58										7,30	Average Complete trust			
42	44,4	45,4	57,4	56,5	50,3	75,7	66,3	62,1	36,4	Can't be trusted				
19,6	17	19,3	16	17,1	21,4	15,3	16,9	19,1	26,2	Neither careful nor trustful				
38,3	38,4	35,2	26,6	26,5	28,2	9,1	16,8	18,8	37,5	Complete trust				
49,33										68,03	Average Can't be trusted		Trust in the Hungarian Parliament	
18,40										17,10	Average Neither careful nor trustful			
32,20										14,90	Average Complete trust			

From 2010 onwards, the dynamic inversed and trust grew back to pre-accession level, although distrust remained higher. Out of the six rounds under Orbán's governance, the first three showed stabilisation of distrust at two thirds of the population. During the last three rounds, however, distrust considerably shrunk back to half of the population. As such, the rebuilding of a national trust in politicians can be qualified of slow, and mostly happened under Orbán's governance.

The same dynamic was witnessable in regards to trust in the national parliament. Before the accession, popular trust was relatively balanced between a quarter of the population being undecided, and over a third being either trustful or distrustful. During the first years of adhesion, this changed as two thirds of the population mistrusted the parliament in 2004 and 2006, and three-quarters in 2008. In 2008, trust was even below indecisiveness (9% against 15%).

As for trust in politicians, the Hungarian trust in the parliament started increasing after Orbán's election in 2010, reaching a quarter of the total population. After 2016, it reached a citizen out of three, and was back to pre-adhesion levels. In parallel, mistrust continuously declined to fall at 42% in 2020, only 6-percentage points higher than in 2002.

The observation of these dynamics shows that institutional trust in Hungary was far from consolidated, and could be considered statistically fragile. As these results were also witnessable in regards to interpersonal trust and values of solidarity (through the measurement of participation in voluntary organisations' activities), the formation of a generalized trust can be said to be lacking in Hungary and, therefore, so can the internalisation of democratic norms.

Emancipative attitudes

The last category used for measurements of norms internalisation in Hungary concerns the emancipative attitudes, or self-expression. For Welzel and Inglehart (2005, cited in Welzel, 2007, p. 401), democracy comes together with a "human empowerment"

comprising the reinforcement of the “people’s self-governance”, their active participation in “civic mass actions,” the “tolerance of non-conforming people” and interpersonal trust. As it has already been mentioned above, the present analysis chose to associate the latter with communal attitudes. As such, at least three criteria remain to evaluate the level of Hungarian emancipative attitudes.

The first, human empowerment, is measured through the facilitation of people’s self-governance, for instance through the promotion of freedom of speech or how much say citizens have in their government’s actions. The second element observes the emergence of civic mass actions. A considered-typical feature of democracy is the diversity of its political participation and the ability of this type of regime to allow its citizens to engage in politically meaningful activities aside from the ones deemed directly or strictly political. These forms of public participation include “boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and other types of demonstrations” (Kornberg & Clarke, 1994, p. 541), and their measurement can reflect the proper internalisation of a democratic culture in a society. Lastly, tolerance towards certain groups of “nonconforming” people is measured by answers to questions concerning local minorities or foreigners.

Due to the limitations of the ESS, which does not cover all these questions, the present analysis concentrates mostly on measurement of participation in civic mass action and tolerance of non-conforming people to evaluate Hungarian emancipative attitudes. It focuses on three types of civil actions (demonstrations, boycotts, and petitions) and two specific groups (gay and lesbian people, and immigrants).

The dynamics of civic mass actions

Interest in politics is measured by answers ranging from ‘very interested,’ ‘quite interested’ ‘hardly interested’ to ‘not interested at all.’ ‘Very interested’ and ‘quite interested’ data are then merged under the ‘interested’ heading, whereas ‘hardly interested’ and ‘not interested at all’ results are summed up in the ‘not interested’ column.

Table II-07. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %) – “Interest in politics” and “Participation in lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months.” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession			Period				
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Year		Interest in Politics					
2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002	Interested	Not Interested	Average "Interested"	Average "Not Interested"	Yes	No	Average "Yes"	Average "No"
26,5	26	30,9	26,4	26	37,2	36,9	42	37	44,5	44,5	55,5	44,5	55,5	3,7	96,3	3,7	96,3
73,5	74	69	73,6	74	62,8	63,1	58	62,9	38,63	38,63	63,1	63,63	62,9	3,7	96,3	3,7	96,3
28,83												44,5					
71,15												55,5					
1,3	2,8	2,5	3,4	3,7	2,8	2,2	4,1	1,7	3,7	Yes	No	Taken part in lawful public demonstration last 12 months		Yes	No	Average "Yes"	Average "No"
98,7	97,2	97,5	96,6	96,3	97,2	97,8	95,9	98,3	3,7	3,7	96,3	2,67	98,3	3,7	96,3	3,7	96,3
2,75												3,7					
97,25												96,3					

The statistics convey a strong decreasing tendency of Hungarians' interest in politics from 2002 to 2020. Prior to the country's accession to the EU, almost half the population (44,5%) claimed being interested in politics. In 2004, immediately after the country's effective European integration, this interest dropped to 37%, and remained substantially lower over the first three rounds of the post-accession period compared to its candidacy years: the overall periodic average was 38,63%, 6-percentage points below 2002.

This tendency continued under the Orbán government. The periodic average of interested people fell to 28,83%, against 71,15% of respondents stating they are not interested in politics between 2010 and 2020. This is a 10-percentage points difference compared to the post-accession period, and a 16-points difference compared to pre-accession. From 2012 onward, except for 2016, the average of those surveyed has even stagnated at approximatively 26%.

Figure II-01. Interest in Politics of the Hungarian population (2002-2020)

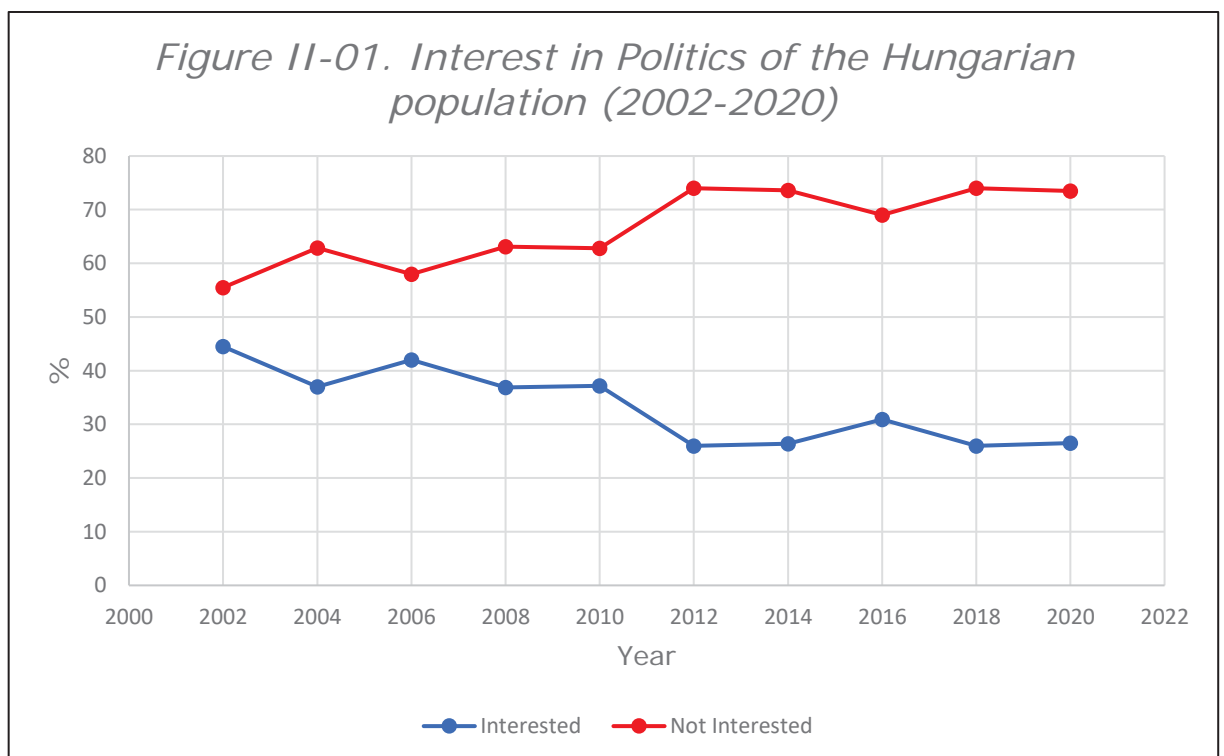


Table II-08. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %) – “Have you boycotted certain products in the last 12 months?” and “Have you signed a petition in the last 12 months?” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession		Period			
10		9	8	7	6	5	4			3	2	1		ESS Round	
2020		2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008			2006	2004	2002		Year	
2,2		3,7	2,6	2,8	3,6	6,1	5,4			4,6	5	4,7		Boycotted certain products last 12 months	
97,8		96,3	97,4	97,2	96,4	93,9	94,6			95,4	95	95,3		Yes	
		3,5					5,00					4,7		Average "Yes"	
		96,5					95,00					95,3		Average "No"	
3,4		4,2	4,3	5,1	3	2,8	7			5,8	5,8	4,1		Yes	
96,6		95,8	95,7	94,9	97	97,2	93			94,2	94,2	95,9		No	
		3,8					6,20					4,1		Signed petition last 12 months	
		96,2					93,80					95,9		Average "No"	

Participation in lawful public demonstration, boycotting a product and signing a petition in the last 12 months are calculated by the percentage of respondents answering ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Over the ten rounds of survey, the results have remained stable and considerably low for all measured variables.

Participation in a demonstration was measured at 3,7% before accession and below 3% on both post-accession and Orbán government periods. One noticeable peak was 2006, when four respondents out of a hundred claimed taking part in demonstrations. The dynamic was however a declining one from 2012 onward. In 2020, at the latest measured round, it reached an unprecedented peak at 1,3%, meaning just a single citizen out of a hundred was engaging in public demonstration.

Boycott as a societal practice also considerably decreased from the first years of the 2010 Orbán government onward. With one person out of twenty taking part in boycotts between 2002 and 2008, the rate of participation in this kind of civic actions was already low during the pre- and post-accession periods. If 2010 was the year with the highest results, measured at 6,1%, the trend for following years was a sharp decline: less than three persons per hundred stated taking parts in boycotts between 2012 and 2020.

Finally, the signature of petitions has followed an almost identical dynamic. Relatively weak in 2002 with only 4,1% of respondents making use of this channel of political action and representation, the number of respondents resorting to petitions rose to a periodic average of 6,2% over Gyurcsány’s ruling period, reaching an all-period peak of 7% in the last year of his mandate. It then inversely progressively regressed to an average of 3,8% during Orbán’s government.

This triangular comparison of boycott, demonstration, and petition practices in Hungary highlights the considerable lack of internalisation of mass civic actions in the country’s political culture. Consequently, this weak mobilisation of non-political ways of intervening in domestic politics implies that classical liberal practices of democracy have not become the norm in Hungary.

Tolerance of non-conforming groups, towards internalisation of democratic norms?

Table II-09. Internalisation of values associated to liberal democracy in Hungary (in %) – “Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish” and “Immigrants make country worse or better place to live” (ESS)

Orbán Government										Pre-accession			Period				
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	ESS Round		Year					
2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002	Agree		Year					
47,5	34,9	36,7	49	46	48,3	45,3	47,7	51,1	48,9	Agree		Year					
28,7	29,6	23	25	25,6	27,8	23,6	25,1	20,9	22,3	Neither Agree nor Disagree		Year					
23,8	35,6	40,3	26	28,4	23,9	31,1	27,2	28	28,8	Disagree		Year					
43,73										48,03		48,9		Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish			
26,62										23,20		22,3		Average Agree		Year	
29,67										28,77		28,8		Average Neither Agree nor Disagree		Year	
48,8	55,6	59,4	50,3	39,7	45,7	55	52,5	46,3	45,9	Worse		Year					
32,6	26,4	27,3	32	36,1	37	29,1	29,1	35,1	39	Neither Worse nor Better		Year					
18,7	18	13,3	17,7	24,2	17,4	16	18,4	18,4	15	Better		Year					
49,92										51,27		45,9		Immigrants make country worse or better place to live			
31,90										31,10		39		Average Worse		Year	
18,22										17,60		15		Average Neither Worse nor Better		Year	
														Average Better		Year	

Lastly, when considering recognition of non-conforming groups, the dynamics seem to be slightly different as for other collected variables. Interestingly, the acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ people's right to live their life as they wish has remained high in Hungary, despite a peak decrease in the 2016 and 2018 surveys. Almost half of the population (between 43,73% and 48,9% on average) continuously supported their rights and freedoms, against a quarter (22,3% to 26,62%) being undecided and less than a third (28,77% to 29,67%) unsupportive.

The dynamics of indecisiveness show an increase under Orbán's rule, in parallel to a slight but visible growth of rejection. The volatility of such rejection of freedoms for homosexual people, which oscillates of 5-percentage points between every round of ESS following Orbán's election in 2010 (so every two years), is however particularly surprising. Previous studies have shown that acceptance of homosexuals in European societies are usually strongly related to the existence of legislation allowing of forbidding, for instance, same-sex adoption (Takács, Szalma, & Bartus, 2016).

In Hungary, the governmental stance publicly disavows provisions in favour of gay and lesbian people, despite the implementation of a non-discriminatory act in 2003 (Takács & Szalma, 2019, pp. 76-77). The BTI index even collected evidence of multiple occasions when the Fidesz government framed its political discourse or policy-making in a way identifying LGBTQ+ individuals as "public enemies" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022a, p. 7). The most visible transcription of this governmental restriction was the 2013 revision of Hungary's Fundamental Law, which defined family as uniquely composed of a man and a woman.

The non-alignment of the Hungarian population with its government on sexuality-related matters could thus illustrate the internalisation of tolerance-based values peculiar to liberal democracies. As sexual minority rights are enshrined in EU law (Jędrzejowska-Schiffauer & Łączak, 2022), this popular support could even be interpreted as translating an indirect or unconscious support of Hungarians for EU provisions in favour of non-discriminatory measures.

In regards to tolerance towards immigrants, the surveys' results proved to be less positive. Indecisiveness widely decreased between the pre-adhesion and the two following periods, from 39% of the population to an average of 31%. This shift was, apparently, in favour of rejection, as it rose from 45,9% to 51,27% of the total of respondents between pre- and post-accession. Despite regressing under Orbán's government, rejection stayed relatively high, representing close to a respondent out of two.

Tolerance and welcoming rose from 15% to more than 18% of the surveyed population. The only sharply recessing year was 2016, when acceptance fell to less than a sixth of all respondents. This, in parallel to a stark rise in rejection in 2016 and 2018 when well-over than half the population considered immigrants made Hungary a worse place to live in, could be explained by the 'migrants crisis' of 2015.

Overall, the analysis of these variables translates a decline in political participation in Hungary and a lack of internalisation of the democratic values Welzel and Inglehart identified as characteristic of democratised regimes. Apart from democratic regime preference (with the desirability of a democratic regime as an ideal) and tolerance towards homosexual individuals, all variables measured were generally low, be it communal attitudes (through generalized trust) or self-emancipation (through mass civic actions or practices and norms of solidarity and tolerance).

The general melioration of the survey's results under Orbán's government, from 2010 onwards, also correlates directly with the evolution of the satisfaction in governance. As such, the quantitative analysis implies that Hungarians do not dissociate their country's governors from their institutions, and the dissatisfaction measured is reflected on both ruling leaders and established institutions. As studies have shown that consolidated democracies generally show "a significant gap between trust in institutions [...] and trust in particular members" (Norris, 1999), this non-differentiation can be perceived as a characteristic of unconsolidated or transitioning regimes (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

These specific trends of non-differentiation of trust between implementing institutions and political/representing bodies, alongside the low level of most of other

variables studied, hint towards a general lack of creation of a political culture and internalisation of liberal democratic norms. It can be suggested that democracy had not been consolidated in Hungary upon its accession, and that the country then proceeded in further de-democratising as no institutional or civilian threshold had been seemingly established to prevent any backslide. This further relates to the observation made early in the analysis of Welzel's first category: despite the general desire for liberal democracy, the possibility of a return to an undemocratic regime is not ruled out by citizens.

Discussion and possible domestic explanations for the lack of internalisation

From 2006 to 2010, Gyurcsány's governance and the MSZP's corruption scandals

Regarding the post-accession period, an interpretation for most of the variables and dynamics studied, from the curious trend in interest in politics (*Table II-07*) to the particularly strong lack of generalised trust during the post-adhesion period (*Tables II-05 and 06*), could be that they emanate from the perceived corruption level and lack of performance of the government. When analysing a population's institutional trust, Kostadinova and Kmetty (2019, p. 571) showed that "anger with dishonest public officials heightens one's motivation to participate in politics."

From 2002 to 2010, the main ruling party was the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) led successively by Péter Medgyessy from 2002 to 2004, by Ferenc Gyurcsány from 2004 to 2009, and by Gordon Bajnai from 2009 until the 2010 elections. This party was, with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz, one of the two dominating parties in Hungary, as the two shared approximately 85% of all votes (Bíró Nagy & Róna, 2012).

In May 2006, shortly after the April election, Prime Minister Gyurcsány pronounced a private speech to his party's members, the *Őszöd* speech, claiming that no concrete achievements had been reached by his party during the previous mandate. The speech was leaked in September and had a considerable negative impact on the public support to the government. Thousands of protesters notably gathered, calling for Gyurcsány's resignation (Hungary PM: we lied to win election, 2006). This first scandal was followed

by others that further aggravated trust in institutions in Hungary, for instance János Zuschlag's scandal. Member of the MSZP, he was arrested in 2008 for embezzlement of state subsidies, and later condemned to 8.5 years in jail (Gulyas, 2010).

These successive scandals' effects lasted even after Gyurcsány's resignation and replacement by Bajnai. Even strong supporters of MSZP considered it more corrupt in 2010 than the average of the Hungarian population in 2006 (Bíró Nagy & Róna, 2012, pp. 14-15). As such, the higher political interest in the pre- and post-accession periods (compared to post-2010) could be explained by the lack of institutional trust in these periods.

Similarly, said peak in institutional distrust – most strongly observed in 2008, and concerning simultaneously the popular mistrust in the police, politicians, and parliaments – could be interpreted as the original motivation behind the surge in mass civic actions between 2006 and 2010. Multiple researches have argued that lack of interpersonal and institutional trust and collective action are negatively related: low levels of the former enhancing desire for the latter (Oliver, 1984; Bernát, Kertész, & Tóth, 2016).

Multiple waves of protest erupted after 2006 and intensified throughout Gyurcsány's second mandate. In 2006 and 2008 particularly, miscellaneous demonstrations were organised against the ruling MSZP government, and were reflected in the surveys (especially demonstrations, with a 2-percentage points increase in 2006, an all-time peak in the ten rounds of survey – *Table II-07*). These demonstrations, which occasionally gathered up to 20,000 protestors, were supported by the Fidesz, while the popularity of Gyurcsány's governance plunged (Hungarian far-right, police clash in Budapest, 2008).

Finally, it is theoretically accepted that “perceptions of high-level corruption make people less likely to trust their fellow citizens” (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005, p. 54). Such acknowledgement farther underlines the links between the categories of individual trust, interest in politics, institutional trust, and the events that occurred in Hungary between 2002 and 2010.

Eventually, this correlation between interpersonal and institutional trusts seems, in Hungary's case, to have effectively affected the perception of democracy's functioning

and core features. For many scholars (Feldman, 1983; Keele, 2005; Letki & Evans, 2005), “the legitimacy and durability of democratic systems [...] depend in large parts on the extent to which the electorate trusts the government to do what is right and perceives the government as efficient and fair.” (Domański & Pokropek, 2021, p. 89). The quantitative data analysed in this chapter proved that democratic norms were not internalised in a political culture and that democracy was not, contrarily to established democracies that generally experience a decrease in institutional trust after their consolidation (Norris, 1999), consolidated enough to withstand a growth in generalised distrust. In Hungary, citizens were ready to welcome illiberal, perhaps undemocratic changes if liberal democracy proved ineffective or unfair.

Orbán’s take-over and the limitations of civic organisations’ freedom of action

Could this imply, however, that the shift towards illiberalism was directly operated by the masses, or that they expressed clearly their will to change the system and engage in illiberalism? This interpretation would be in line with another theoretical stance that would argue, contrarily to Oliver (1984) or Bernát et al. (2016), that the low figures in generalised trust and participation in voluntary organisations are closely and positively correlated, meaning that low generalised trust leads to low civic participation and vice-versa (Howard, 2002). Statistically, this would fit the correlation between *Tables II-05-06* and *07-08*, with rising trust simultaneous to declining participation. Nonetheless, the present paper does not support this interpretation, mostly because of the political measures that were implemented under Orbán’s government.

Participation in para-political organisations and associations has often been historically evaluated as regionally low in Eastern Europe (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007), despite arguments sustaining that such lack of social capacity of action could weaken transitioning democracies and hinder consolidation (Howard, 2002, p. 158). Without free access to associations, demonstrations, and other means of non-directly political representation, the risk, it is argued, was that citizens would not be able to internalise basic “civil skills” (Howard, 2002) essential to the consolidation of democracy and the leverage of sheer political institutions.

Under Orbán's rule, freedom to organise civic mass actions greatly regressed, but demonstrations still frequently occurred, from early protests against the revised constitution in 2012 (Karasz & Eddy, 2012), to "anti-Orbán" protests in 2018 denouncing a "slave law" (Beswick, Palfi, & Bock, 2018) enforced by a regime perceived as corrupt (Hungary: Tens of thousands march in Budapest, 2018), or the more recent Teachers' revolt in 2022 (Large Demonstration In Budapest, 2022). The explanation behind the lower participation rates from 2010 onwards should thus be found elsewhere than in the acceptance of the regime's conduct, probably more logically in the containing measures adopted by Orbán's super-majority government. For instance, a phenomenon of "nationalisation" of the civil society passed by the creation of a Civil Unity Forum that financed principally pro-government associations, and the National Civil Fund (whose original purpose is to monitor and support NGOs) was turned into the National Cooperation Fund and similarly concentrated its financial aid to pro-government entities (Ágh, 2015, p. 12). This was organised alongside surprise state audit raids of numerous NGOs to inspect their fundings and their links to foreign agencies or donors (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 240).

Hence, it could be argued that, although the low level of norms internalisation in Hungary until 2010 resulted from an unconscious oversight in the democratisation that proceeded alongside the EU accession procedure, the absence of internalisation after the 2010 election was due to a voluntary and conscious restraining process settled by the Orbán government. Proof would be the impact the Orbán government measures had on restriction or containment of freedom of para-political civic actions, compared to the effect pre-2010 demonstrations had on party politics (the latter, as it has been explained, having even led to the resignation of a Prime Minister).

This last recognition highlights another interpretation of events that followed Fidesz's electoral victory in 2010. Contrarily to this paper's presupposed assumption, the quantitative analysis of the ESS results showed that desirability of democracy in Hungary was high, indicating a seemingly internalised regime preference (*Tables II-01 to 04*). This is also consistent with the BTI values observed in chapter I (*Table I-01*). Therefore, it would be more credible to consider that the Hungarian population does have an

attachment to democracy but that its conception of democracy may greatly diverge compared to what is held as standards by the rest of European Member-States (especially Western ones). This is, for instance, the logic defended by the Hungarian elites, as highlighted by an exchange between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Viktor Orbán in 2015 when the former told the latter she “can’t understand what is meant by illiberal when it comes to democracy” and was responded that “not all democracies have to be liberal” (Halasz, 2015).

Eventually, the events of 2006-2010 abovementioned might have reinforced the population’s perception that illiberalism is needed to gradually reach liberal democracy without risking the establishment of corrupt models, or simply that illiberalism altogether is a better model. This could explain the growing trust in institutions from 2010 onwards (*Table II-06*). Either way, this highlights the lack of internalisation as a primary source of the Hungarian democratic backsliding, and a fundamental target of action for EU measures to resolve the current decline and stimulate the renewal of Hungary’s democratisation process.

Chapter III

Redefining the EU's role post-accession: **from guide to watchdog**

From the previous chapter's in-depth quantitative analysis of Hungarian EU norms internalisation, it becomes clear that, after the country's accession to the EU, nothing at the EU level concretely blocked any regime regression. This raises the question of whether a mechanism or instrument had been established to supervise the proper continuation of democratisation. This chapter relies on a non-exhaustive collection and analysis of the legal basis, instruments, and mechanisms that the EU possesses to prevent democratic erosion in its Member-States, and assess what could be lacking or identify areas of improvement.

The Copenhagen Criteria, the slow birth of pre-accession conditionality, and the issue of supervision and accountability.

The EU 'core norms' of democracy, rule of law, and respect of human rights were first explicitly mentioned in the 1973 Copenhagen declaration on European identity (Manners, 2002, p. 241). Nonetheless, the fact that only democratic states would be allowed to adhere to the EU was made clear from the start of the European project, when the European Communities published in 1962 the Birkelbach Report which rejected a Spanish membership bid over the non-democratic character of the regime (Birkelbach, 1961, Art. 25; see also Kubicek, 2004). Two years later, this approach, not yet a condition (Smith, 1998), was reinstated in the EU-Turkey Association Agreement of 1964.

The treaty of Maastricht was the first one to officialise the democratic character of EU Member-States (Möllers & Schneider, 2018, p. 39). Its article F, paragraph one mentioned

that “the Union shall respect the national identities of its Member States, whose systems of government are founded on the principles of democracy.” (Official Journal of the European Communities, 1992). It was rapidly followed by the Copenhagen criteria from the 1993 eponym summit, which enshrined the notion of conditionality as the basis of new adhesions. These criteria are based on three pillars: “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;” “a functioning market economy;” and “the ability to take on the obligations of membership” (EUR-Lex, n.d.).

In parallel, other development and aid programmes were progressively established with similar democratic conditionality as their backbone. The PHARE (Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy, created in 1989), which was dedicated to Poland and Hungary before being expanded to other ECE countries, was initially conditioned to the respect market-developing measures. After a first revision, a new budget line was developed from 1992 to 1997 with, additionally, democratisation as a condition (Grabbe, 2006, p. 8).

The treaty of Amsterdam partially turned these principles into primary law, its article F describing them as the basis on which the Union is founded (Official Journal of the European Communities, 1997, p. 8). Consequently, once these Copenhagen principles were almost “constitutionalised” (Möllers & Schneider, 2018, p. 40) and became the conditional standards of not only new candidates but also the EU itself, the issue of supervision over the proper application of these principles then gradually emerged. Article F.1 (usually referred to as article 7 TEU, especially following the revisions from the treaty of Nice in 2001 (Nentwich & Falkner, 1997, Table I, p. 1)) instituted the capacity of the EU to sanction Member-States deviating from the rule of law and other European political standards. In the Amsterdam treaty, this specific tool divided in two phases allowed the Council, deciding unanimously, to judge whether a Member-States had committed an infringement of EU principles. In the case it did, the Council would then be allowed to vote, by qualified majority, to suspend this state’s membership rights.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of this legal tool can be questioned. The former President of the European Commission (2004-2014) José Manuel Durão Barroso nicknamed it the “nuclear option,” in opposition to the EU’s ‘soft power’ and the

alternative of political persuasion (Cenevska, 2020, p. 7). This could translate a generalised political unwillingness to rely on Article 7 (Closa Montero, Kochenov, & Weiler, 2014, p. 7). Since the creation of this framework, has the EU opted for a soft or hard approach to supervising and controlling its members' potential deviation from the rule of law and democratic norms? And what does it translate about the EU's inherent initiative and will to monitor and sanction its members?

Control after adhesion or laissez-faire? Lessons from the Austrian experience.

The Haider Affair and the need for prevention: comparison of two cases

Whether the EU can and should have a preventive competence in managing backsliding can be questioned. Naturally, one could expect that to ensure the Copenhagen criteria are being respected even after adhesion, the EU would have either a legal mechanism or a political authority able to oversee the domestic development of its members, or at least the newest ones.

One reason it might not have been inclined to immediately voice its view concerning the second Orbán government's ruling in 2010 can be linked back to the integration that preceded the Big Bang enlargement of 2004. In 2000, five years after becoming a Member, Austria experienced a similar domestic situation to that of Hungary, to which the EU reacted vehemently. This first external 'preventive' intervention was motivated by the possible inclusion of the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) of Jörg Haider in a ruling coalition with the Conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). In the parliamentary elections of 1999, the FPÖ gained around 27% of the ballots (Schlippak & Treib, 2017, p. 356), and the ÖVP, considering as increasingly improbable the successful of a negotiation for a Grand coalition with other parties, exposed its intention to ally with the FPÖ.

In reaction, all fourteen other member states pressed for countermeasures from the EU. This eventually culminated on January 31st 2000 in a common decision presented by the Portuguese presidency of the EU that supported three sanctions: the first was that the "governments of XIV Member States will not promote or accept any bilateral official at

political level with an Austrian Government integrating the FPÖ;” secondly, they would not support candidates from Austria to positions in international organisations; lastly meetings with Austrian ambassadors would now be limited to technical meetings (Portuguese Presidency, 2000). As soon as the coalition was officialised, these political sanctions became effective (Van de Steeg, 2006, p. 613).

Both Austrian elites and population then rapidly expressed their discontentment and disagreement with these sanctions. Some officials, including Haider, claimed that there existed no legal basis for this procedure in the EU Treaties, that the rationale was “clearly moral” (Freeman, 2002, p. 110) and the sanctions “outrageous” since directed against a legally and democratically-elected government, and that the fourteen countries were thus purely breaching Austria’s national sovereignty (Schlippak & Treib, 2017, p. 357) – their main argument observing that the EU had not relied on its newly born article 7 (article F.1) created by the Amsterdam Treaty, but on sheer political measures (Scheppel & Pech, 2018). Following the strong public rejection of these sanctions and the unexpected support to the government, the President of the European Court of Human Rights, Luzius Wildhaber, was tasked with the creation of a three-persons panel, the “wise men,” to assess the Austrian legal situation. Their conclusion was that Austria upheld European values, despite the FPÖ’s radical elements and right-wing populist orientation, and that the sanctions had proven counterproductive.

The sanctions were lifted in September 2000 (Freeman, 2002), and both the Austrian government and the “wise men” panel requested for an additional, ‘preventive’ paragraph to be included in the provisions of article 7 (Möllers & Schneider, 2018, p. 43). This ‘preventive arm’ was added in the treaty of Nice of 2001 as a first paragraph to article 7 (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2001).

The comparison between Orbán’s post-2010 ruling and the Austrian case can shed light on why the EU has seemingly struggled with the adoption of a proper stance regarding the Hungarian democratic backsliding. Two factors particularly illustrate this parallel: the rhetoric used by the leaders and their electoral legitimacy.

Firstly, both party leaders have been described as using a strong Eurosceptic rhetoric in their public speeches. Until 1999, Haider's FPÖ was commonly associated to "anti-elite, xenophobic, and Eurosceptic strategies" (Fallend & Heinisch, 2016, p. 234). Several anti-Semitic records have been attributed to Haider himself, though he and the FPÖ gradually changed their rhetoric in view of the Austrian European accession of 1995 and the elections of 1999 (Bunzl, 2005, p. 503). The anti-immigration, xenophobic narrative however kept impregnating the party's discourses, notably concerning Turkey's accession to the EU. Orbán's rhetoric was comparably marked by a national sovereignty-focused narrative which, depending on the occasion, turned to Euroscepticism and contestation of a 'Brussels-based illegitimate authority.' (Sükösd, 2018; Coman & Leconte, 2019). In doing so, he openly defended that the EU was directly and illegitimately interfering with Hungarian domestic politics.

Secondly, comparably to the FPÖ, the Fidesz arrived in power legally through "free and fair elections" in 2010. It reached a super-majority of two-thirds of the National Assembly (the Parliament in Hungary is unicameral) through the ballots that allowed it to modify unilaterally the constitution. The procedure of the subsequent modifications of the constitution was, then, considered legal, and the decrease in the rule of law was more a consequence of the content of these changes than the means through which these changes happened in the first place: "all the anti-democratic actions of the second Orbán government were strictly made 'legal,' turning the rule of law into the 'law of the rule' or 'rule by law.'" (Ágh, 2016, p. 280).

The lack of EU action, a result of past errors and a source for future mistakes

In line with the observations on the Austrian case, it could be inferred that the delayed reaction of the EU against Hungary's starting decline in 2010 was based on a calculation of the political cost of such intervention. One of the problematic legacies of the Austrian affair is that the EU has seemingly become shier.

Austria's reaction in 2000 was deemed legitimate not because the EU had taken action against its government, but because it had done so before the alleged problematic FPÖ had adopted any fundamentally undemocratic measure (Müller, 2013, p. 13). From this,

most actors involved in the ‘Haider case’ seemed to have concluded that “as long as there are not ‘serious and persistent’ violations of democratic principles and human rights [...] one should avoid interfering in the domestic politics of EU partners” (Leconte, 2005, pp. 636-637).

Yet, the EU has dramatically grown reluctant to rely on its own legal instruments to prevent backsliding, and so despite the Hungarian case being an example of systematic/persistent infringement to the rule of law and European values (Scheppelle & Pech, 2018). In 2011, the European Parliament formulated plural resolutions destined to the Councils and Commission underlining deviating measures being taken in Hungary (2011a, 2011b). The first strong reactions of the EU however originated from 2012 and 2013 through statement of EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding during the Plenary debate of the European Parliament (European Commission, 2012, 2013). In a resolution on the situation in Hungary in June 2015 and a follow-up in December, the European Parliament already called for the Commission to activate the monitoring arm of Article 7, noting that a European Citizens’ Initiative had also been registered on this matter (European Parliament, 2015b).

Eventually, it was only in September 2018 that the ‘preventive arm’ of article 7.1 was triggered against Hungary, after a request was voted by the European Parliament following the publication of the Sargentini Report (European Parliament, 2018a). The next step was for the Council to vote by a majority of four fifth to determine whether there existed “a clear risk of a serious breach of the EU values in Hungary” (European Parliament, 2018b). However, the Council never took its decision since the Parliament adopted its request, despite multiple hearings with the Hungarian government to address the issue: 16 September and 10 December 2019, 22 June 2021, 23 May and 18 November 2022 (European Parliament, 2023c).

This long delay not only allowed Orbán to see through most of his domestic non-democratic constitutional reforms, it also gave him time to use these reforms to strengthen his anti-EU rhetoric (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018, p. 1180). One instance of such process is the instrumentalization of the media that immediately followed the press release concerning the European Parliament’s vote: as soon as the vote results were released,

Orbán launched a massive anti-EU propaganda, arguing notably that the real purpose of the Parliament was to deter Hungary's anti-immigration stance. The government officially claimed it would "contest [the] vote on Sargentini Report at European Court of Justice" (Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, 2018), while it engaged in a direct censure and diatribe against Sargentini and backers of the Report themselves (Sükösd, 2018).

Although eventually triggered, the use of Article 7 has thus been qualified of being too little, too late, too political (Carrera & Bárd, 2018), an opinion reinforced by the absence of decision from the Council. Instead, in September 2022, the European Parliament observed that the violations of the rule of law and human rights had further "deteriorated" in Hungary, and had been "exacerbated by EU inaction" (European Parliament, 2022). Three days later, legally grounding its decision in a 2018 Commission proposal for regulation designed to protect EU funds from being misused (the so-called rule of law conditionality mechanism, adopted in 2020), the Commission proposed the suspension of €7.5 billion of European funds destined to Hungary (European Parliament, 2023d). Lastly, on 1st June 2023, the Parliament called for the Council to potentially postpone or cancel the upcoming Hungarian Council Presidency (European Parliament, 2023a). Therefore, it can be defended that "every time there is a challenge to EU values, the EU seeks refuge in a new framework that avoids using its existing powers." (Scheppele & Pech, 2018). In Hungary's case, the current measures concretely pressuring Orbán is not the Article 7, but an apparatus of measures developed as less powerful regulating weapons than Article 7.

As such, could it be argued that the EU itself indirectly and involuntarily created a favourable situation for the Hungarian democratic backsliding to happen? Based on these case studies, it indeed seems that the experience of the Austrian affair influenced the Hungarian decline by building unconscious biases and obstacles in the way the EU addresses democratic backsliding and how it ensures its supervision role, which then obstructed its will of initiative. Eventually, while conditionality was effective in fostering transition or initiating consolidation in candidate countries, this inaction led to a lack of proper norms internalisation and supervision through a dedicated mechanism after the adhesion, what in turn factually translated the failure of the "convergence dream"

(Darvas, 2015; Ágh, 2016, p. 279). Conditionality may never have been an actual issue after 1993. Convergence and inaction may have.

EU democratic backsliding management revisited: recommendations for a preventive rather than reactive mechanism

EU instruments can be distinguished between institutional (top-down) components focusing on regulation and constraints on the executive, and civic (bottom-up) components that allow for participation and contestation from the citizens (Pearce, et al., n.d., p. 6). Institutional components can themselves be separated in two categories: the preventive measures, and the sanctioning/correcting ones. Institutional monitoring components focus on preventing infringement to the rule of law, and non-exhaustively comprise the European Rule of Law Mechanism, the Rule of Law Report, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, and the EU Justice Scoreboard. Corrective ones include for instance the Rule of Law Framework, Article 7 TEU, and the Infringement Procedures (Articles 258 and 260 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). These tools, despite their frequent revision and enhancement, have been largely considered inefficient in their ability to prevent or curb democratic backsliding.

The over-reliance on institutional and reactive components, or how the EU keeps missing the point

On the one hand, this thesis identifies two major issues with institutional corrective components, in particular Article 7, as well as the current functioning of rule of law and democratisation monitoring in the EU. As has already been shown in this chapter, the use of Article 7 is widely limited in at least two manners: an institutional, and a political one. The first, institutional limit to the effective use of Article 7 lies in the nature of the current, material options for backsliding management: most are reactive rather than preventive. In 2016, a report to the European Parliament argued that Article 7 was too crisis-driven, and lacked a continuous assessment of the compliance of a Member

State with EU norms and values (European Parliament, 2016, p. 9). The addition of a ‘preventive arm’ to article 7 following the Austrian experience did not change this institutional flaw as, since 2010, the EU has been considerably reluctant to trigger it, seemingly learning “another wrong lesson from Austria” (Scheppelle & Pech, 2018).

In addition, alternative institutional corrective options like the Rule of Law Framework revealed similar flaws. Created in 2014, the Rule of Law Framework is set in three successive stages allowing the European Commission to: 1. assess whether a Member-State could be experiencing a systemic threat to the rule of law; 2. address a ‘rule of law recommendation’ to the concerned Member-State with advice, guidelines, and a deadline; 3. monitor the implementation of the proposed recommendation, and possibly trigger Article 7 in case of insufficient melioration (Kochenov & Pech, 2015). Yet the Rule of Law Framework is still a crisis-driven mechanism and does not periodically nor regularly survey the state of the rule of law in Member-States (Bárd et al., 2016, p. ii). As its failure is also supposed to trigger Article 7, is it not a fully-independent alternative either and more of a “pre-Article 7” measure (Sedelmeier, 2017, p. 345).

A second problem originates from political obstacles hindering the use of Article 7 as a democratic backsliding managing and reversing tool: as the triggering of Article 7.2 needs the unanimity of the Council, political support or bilateral alliances with other Member-States can easily fend off any Article-7.2-related initiative from the EU institutions. In September 2018, following the vote of the European Parliament, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose government has comparably to the Hungarian one been considered responsible of democratic backsliding in Poland, announced that “Poland will vote in the forums of European institutions against possible sanctions against Hungary” (Holesch & Kyriazi, 2022).

On the other hand, institutional preventive mechanisms have seemingly offered positive results. One example is the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania.

In 2006, just prior to their adhesion, both countries showed both a lower BTI Democracy Status and lower *Nations in Transit* democratic score than Hungary: respectively 8,45

(Bulgaria) and 8,20 (Romania) compared to 9,40 (Hungary); and 5,07 and 4,61 opposed to 6,00 (Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2023; Freedom House, 2023a). In 2022 however, although they had also regressed, their decline was considerably slower and more limited than Hungary's: 7,35 (BTI) and 4,50 (*Nations in Transit*) for Bulgaria, 8,00 and 4,36 for Romania, and 6,35 and 3,68 for Hungary. These positive results demonstrate that the EU should use this sort of framework to foster democratisation even after adhesion of its candidates.

Statistically, there seemed to be a considerable correlation between interest in politics, support to EU membership (Ágh, 1999, p. 847), and consequently support to the internalisation of democratic and European norms. Considering that interest in politics and Europeanisation should be higher at the time of adhesion, the EU could capitalise on these feelings to further promote norms internalisation. In doing so, replicating the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) that was established for Bulgaria and Romania could prove an efficient way of specifically monitoring new Member-States.

Nevertheless, these preventive institutional tools currently have one major drawback: their usage has largely led to the realisation that they were ineffective unless supported by the threat, if not triggering, of sanctioning instruments (Pearce, et al., n.d., p. 12). Moreover, the creation of clear and consistent tracking of Member-States' commitment to EU values and principles has proven complex and laborious, especially in the last decade. The Rule of Law Report was only created three years ago despite being based on other reports, like the EU Justice Scoreboard, that have for some existed since 2013. Comparably, attempts from the European Parliament to bring the Commission to create an EU pact or mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights (DRF) under the form of an inter-institutional agreement have been fruitless since the first proposition in 2016 (European Parliament, 2023c).

Consequently, this thesis argues that material sanctions and institutional components are insufficiently efficient yet overly relied on for managing and reversing democratic decline. Paradoxically, the erosion of the civic space has gone largely unnoticed at the EU level (Greskovits, 2015, p. 30). Hence, this thesis defends that the EU should maintain its efforts related to institutional components of democratic tracking

while focusing on strengthening immediate post-accession civil society and norms internalisation through civic components.

The strengthening of civil society, an innovative systemic solution to democratic backsliding management?

In this line of revisiting EU democratic supervision, with *Chapter III*'s acknowledgement of the results of the Austrian experience, and based on the findings of the quantitative analyses of *Chapters I* and *II*, this thesis advances the argument that an important, currently insufficiently-developed way of safeguarding the rule of law in the EU would be for its institutions to engage more actively in the internalisation of democratic European norms through non-intrusive means. This implies a new approach based on bottom-up dynamics that could be differentiated from the current dominant institutional/top-down mechanisms, in order to ensure the non-distortion of its policies by domestic agenda-driven elites that could reframe them as infringement to their own sovereignty to their population.

EU institutions have recognised the role and importance of civil society in defending European values and protecting fundamental rights. Not only is their participation welcomed, their consultation can be considered mandatory as part of the EU's decision-making process (based on Article 11 TEU and Article 15 TFEU) (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, pp. 4-5). However, their ability to exercise their role has considerably shrunk over the last decade, as has been demonstrated throughout this paper. Based on its findings, the present thesis hence reiterates two of Pearce et al's (n.d.) recommendations: the need to reinforce the civil society organisations' (CSOs) self-sufficiency and EU funds dedicated to them, and the need to create a specific European Ombudsman for civic space.

Ensuring the self-financing of civil society organisations have proven growingly necessary since the implementation of laws and national authorities restricting such funds to pro-governmental civic agents (see *Chapter II*). In 2017, Hungary adopted a law on the transparency of organisations receiving support from abroad. The government's purpose

was allegedly to counter CSOs who had become agent of foreign interests acting against the establishment of an illiberal state (Buyse, 2018, pp. 978-979).

To counter these restricted practices, helping CSOs to diversify their sources of revenue would help them emancipate from funds that could be captured and unfairly redistributed by the government according to a political agenda. Such diversification encompasses not only the multiplication of services offered by CSOs, but also the development of alternative types of funding that do not rely on public funds, but rather on private ones (Pearce, et al., n.d., p. 20). Also, transnational and intra-national cooperation between CSOs could facilitate their fundings and organisation of activities, even in cases where illiberalism restrains CSOs' capacities. Such example has been given by the Hungarian coalition *Civilizáció* since 2017 (Negri, 2020, p. 2). Lastly the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' (FRA) 2021 report also underlined the need for the European Commission to elaborate a new framework dedicated to the monitoring of EU CSOs funds repartition within Member-States (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 9).

Such framework could be associated to the parallel creation of a European Ombudsman for civic space, whose task would be to ensure transparency in the environment CSOs evolved in. Backsliding regimes will generally attempt to hold a democratic façade, and thus allow for constrained and weakened CSOs to remain in existence to “strengthen the legitimization discourse of authoritarian regimes” (Lorch & Bunk, 2017, p. 991). This is a particularly valid postulate as the literature has shown that part of Orbán's success relied on the instrumentalization of CSOs and NGOs as to support the ruling regime. For instance, in 2012, pro-government protests linked to the Civil Unity (CÖF) organisation have progressively emerged, who valued “democracy (or what they understand by the term) as other protesters critical of the government” (Greskovits, 2020, p. 263). This experience illustrated that, as was sustained in *Chapter II*, the Hungarian population values democracy, but part of it may hold an interpretation of it distinct from the European democratic standards.

In Hungary, the dialogue between the government and CSOs was ruptured as soon as the Fidesz won the 2010 elections. The party rapidly deconstructed previous communication

channels, like the National Reconciliation Council (Geró et al., 2023, p. 19). To replace until-then-active CSOs by pro-government ones, the Fidesz has relied on various strategies including dividing civic space, disintegrating institutions, and closing the space by directly attacking pre-existing CSOs (Geró et al., 2023, p. 23). In this context, a European Ombudsman report, focusing in depth on the civic space instead of institutional components (like the current Rule of Law report does), would allow CSOs to report to the institutions any case of “unreasonable delay, failure to follow established policy or procedures, lack of impartiality, unfairness... as well as harassment or restriction of NGO and CSOs’ work” (Pearce, et al., n.d., p. 21). It could also rely on the already established European Network of Ombudsmen (European Ombudsman, n.d.).

Overall, both measures should lead to the strengthening of the civil society in Hungary and, consequently, to the reinforcement of the rule of law concomitant to the harmonisation of the Hungarian people’s democratic values and the EU democratic standards.

Conclusion

This thesis has defended the two arguments that the lack of civil empowerment through democratic consolidation and norms internalisation has considerably influenced the Hungarian democratic backsliding, while the lack of European supervision facilitated the entanglement of these de-democratising dynamics. The Hungarian backsliding itself was diffused from 2010 onwards, with defects concerning the electoral regime, the freedom of the media, and the separation of powers and independence of the judiciary. However, corruption was already highly present and influenced the public opinion towards democratic norms. In turn, the subsequent lack of internalisation facilitated the democratic decline despite the apparent attachment of the population to the concept of democracy. In this context, the thesis has supported two specific recommendations, following a study of EU tools for democratic consolidation supervision and backsliding management. The first consists in strengthening the financial and political resilience of civil society organisations, while the second rests upon the creation of a supranational monitoring authority for the civic space.

Due to space limitations, other Member-States have not been included in the analysis. Yet, the replicability of this thesis's findings would benefit from being tested in different Member-States where the existence and resilience of a political culture can be questioned. In recent years, the multiplication of mild and serious infringements to the rule of law and democratic principles of the EU has accelerated, and scholars have identified quite a considerable number of countries as having experienced a democratic decline, though to different degrees. A wide enumeration would for instance include Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Malta (Cenevska, 2020). Poland, amongst others, was the first European Member-States for which Article 7 was triggered and, passed similarities like the neutralisation of the Constitutional Courts, has declined in distinct ways compared to Hungary (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018, pp. 1176-1178). Such comparisons could highlight the "uniqueness" (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018, p. 1175) of the Hungarian decline and the need for other, country-specific recommendations.

Eventually, with the recognition of new candidates for membership, the purpose of this thesis would also be to reignite the European convergence dream and involvement of civil society in democratisation, perceived as the keys for successful negotiations and proper democratisation of all upcoming candidates and would-be Member-States.

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Annex - Sources of the Tables' Data

This annex gathers the different links used in the creation of the tables of *Chapter II* based on the ESS data. The WVS data is not included here as no permanent link could be obtained, apart from the one in the Reference List (see World Values Survey, n.d.).

Table II-01

How satisfied with the way democracy works in country	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/704c5bdf-ff53-478b-a4c5-70b6774e0d25
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/169d6dbf-83c1-435f-9d52-95b70442a4c3
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/c9ebc9bf-6976-46e2-885a-46f707a015b4
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/bb9c91b2-4472-4ca6-934b-653606ca118c
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/1f4bfde0-7ace-4577-8577-806ad1ee2530
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/4dcba4d8-cba0-4b72-a61f-0bcf156c1caf
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5c7d96b6-7557-4b6f-b3c8-b54fb454143d
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/257ab3ac-0935-4f72-8ec0-b10c29f59db3
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/eda5ca04-49b5-4b60-950a-08e34d5bd1d1
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/34362d29-3ed5-4d16-ba19-4f16bfb735a4

Important that government is strong and ensures safety	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/0d34f9be-fe7a-4c83-a51d-524546ec1209
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/de35d256-772b-4c65-9613-0929d2e9206e
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/81ab1366-57d2-4a63-9838-861b26225704
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/f870797b-81b8-4e92-a2aa-4317b11a45fa
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/6977022a-e1ca-45e7-880b-f2189df93cf8
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/230c7932-8aaf-4bb5-b059-e022d42c26cf
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/bb88edb8-ffaa-40a7-97e0-d0a88ecd5826
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/f0eba64d-6b97-4418-b84d-a5b2d20e0a1f
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/2d473647-3eb7-4a82-a1d3-b1357dfdd829
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ac6d2c6b-177b-4034-8704-b6ebd5b07a51

Table II-05

Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/46436bb8-b549-4817-849c-2047e438b91c
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ef36a7ea-7fcc-454c-8a8d-20e871d19de4
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/a92f685b-2f3e-4ac3-bc11-ba0fef4cdbc6
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d0691d0f-333f-4f8e-805d-033e9b9c30ad
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/4c56c99b-8253-4ddc-9fcd-692a40795540
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/2e8151d8-f690-4203-8533-5b79e7336650
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ff2bfc0d-ee5b-4cdd-9c5e-e25854f63b7e
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/7cab8571-d226-43ea-b942-96a91a39a199
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ec98db00-4dc3-4d2b-9cec-2ba5a0ea754c
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ef74b26c-f25a-4922-ba98-01764aca7c1d

Volunteered for a not-for-profit or charitable organisation	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d3fe3493-d503-42f4-8c97-f03c9ca92f25
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ab7154ef-3ee7-43b9-ac88-a7be02301133
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/7366f4b1-7358-419e-944f-3d6cd2170869
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5bd0290f-5b40-455e-9281-43ebb7fe45b7
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/6ab0badf-1e10-48bb-98e9-73320678f0d6
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/95c1c68a-c941-4ea2-a84d-c2785cad461d
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/b12f11f4-d58c-4247-970f-ddf7df28fec1
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/0bc6628e-18a2-4835-aaff-aff4429fb0b5
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/88325261-bd53-40ce-8bce-f27e270d5c07
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/804c7551-a5de-4754-b911-7708fff867d1

Table II-06

Trust in the police	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/66803067-05ab-4936-96c4-b020fb52abea
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5caf8a8c-4b6a-4d65-87cc-4f673923f8b9
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/4dda4505-aa18-4aca-956e-cadb31c645f1
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/296a1947-c496-43b4-9ff1-6f60e127534a
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/13c9cc9c-86ab-48bc-b3ff-5b9a87fa154f
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/a0e10140-4ead-4f06-83d9-6558b204eede
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/6973bc41-8d96-4c6d-b9b9-f96268b499fe
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e6fbcd39-3bcc-4a69-acce-85879f30a09b
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/75644eb7-7153-4e4f-b8a8-647c1093545f
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/23725077-a780-4544-aff2-81e85ed7e44d
Trust in politicians	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d35a16f8-93bf-4390-a61f-dd1d7b89ce5d
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/aab37db0-5fe4-4f19-82db-993252bc3209
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/064c25f5-8dc9-4a32-95aa-0da7c08ff106
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/863e9606-08ce-47c1-b4a8-3fc992b1e38a
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/094627f2-2457-485b-af19-5ef7ed962792
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5c69c6cf-e1f5-4411-99b0-32eaff0cb9ba
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d2ce3c15-934a-4a37-a3cc-cc61604b3f65
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d8222a9b-6337-4f0e-aeb0-f3ae1c0fb8f7
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ec8af066-3639-43eb-9268-d04966d5ac16
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d654fc72-eddf-46b7-b284-e861bf3d68c3
Trust in the Hungarian Parliament	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/385cbfc3-3c9b-46e7-8e0e-c8a4fe8deb24
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5dd720e3-68e6-460c-a722-268e7623996c
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/398d3194-66eb-4bbb-87d8-a921d5b7509d
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5a81df97-35c4-4a51-b94d-4e8c078197be
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/94050e8d-a727-4fe5-a3f3-8c882a323eb1
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/b8facc0f-1fb2-44ba-9017-0d458840e8c9
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/bf7f12a5-ce2d-4930-9ac5-5fdcfbc56e09
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/68db36eb-e905-4fd1-880b-ec34afe28be9
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/64c6cb47-1b9f-46fd-a5d1-7e361b882325
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/938de8fc-dc87-4127-8f3f-5231365e675b

Table II-07

How interested in politics	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/a8e4c047-6a5d-41dc-9344-cfbc7113acee
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/235745b1-4258-43ea-8df3-58386e3c890e
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e96721a6-e6bb-4427-ba91-2bc27e52e5c6
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/549c79c8-a5bc-42b3-90ce-de68d79bb2e6
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e64702cd-3ca2-474a-a399-e983f806ae93
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e4db17be-75ce-4e6b-b3ce-f9657e16c0f7
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e8528adf-8600-442a-9aaa-1250bea8bd46
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d43d426d-183e-4da8-a1c8-26acb61f111d
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/4fd8668c-60c6-4267-bce9-1da51edb0d90
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/deb9faf3-fa70-4031-a574-9d1c0f45aed

Taken part in lawful public demonstration last 12 months	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/0347b035-ab0e-416b-90ea-ca6e2b1480c8
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/529f620c-2a17-4350-8916-8498ad2c399a
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/f8d0b732-f7e9-4abf-8c9e-d3ee5bb5f67e
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/efea75b9-f1de-4858-a9db-0ed0f8e9f1e0
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/585b1a41-37b1-44ef-94cd-1a321e98d8c1
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/8288a301-3784-4ba1-b08b-4f61a0d0d597
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/b87855cc-61bd-4aa3-898f-3f168cd824d8
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e097ea06-c9cd-432e-b7f8-0dc69b5af9f9
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/8f1fa73f-323d-4029-8ba7-fe93e26bde2f
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/6b2300ec-cbe6-4832-8f74-63c0b4dd5e44

Table II-08

Boycotted certain products last 12	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/13fa65ea-f531-4ea5-ba7a-422144cc1780
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/c7976732-6013-4629-8f91-084bf81bcaf7
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/bf6e5c19-ddc1-4781-94cd-c103bf9818b7
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/75315dea-d748-4f3e-af6d-a337473ee39e
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5d4f2bf0-4c34-406f-9649-c625cee9708f
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/47d71481-02f7-4cfa-b163-83de2fa5a0cf
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ec62fb85-bc85-4685-871d-4da17f8eea02
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/061d2855-e2ed-4b68-b089-5c387f109a7c
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/0573461e-1173-49e6-a26f-4916b6d81781
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ca6554c2-d0b4-428d-ae53-6c2528950902

Signed petition last 12 months	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/4969970c-2603-4ca0-8e26-c8311ec1bd93
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e3d16540-7770-4bd7-931c-fb051aa49f04
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/7a5ff1cd-4d2a-494e-8fcd-5eac1c7f95e2
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/960920d9-b530-48a5-aa2a-4b3653449fd5
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/38fabcc7-ecc1-44c8-9191-24cb4c2c4acc
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/42cd8921-f505-4bb8-b031-6564ec7a0621
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5227d45b-2f48-4f3c-8601-d2a1ea2694a6
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/18da45d8-76b9-4f78-abe4-33fb5174ddd3
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/ec3dd643-808b-4c57-b13d-c360370490b4
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/a49104b1-2669-45b7-b216-5c9c652b6f1b

Table II-09

Gays and lesbians free to live life as	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/1309c44c-2129-4a32-b624-322d2258972f
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/dd5576a0-a0a6-4ae3-adcd-d14d5d458872
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/8e613be8-8da5-4d86-99af-f94add3e99f4
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/36d64f14-46e5-4c6f-a09c-3e4b350e871f
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/30b9d1b7-2417-49eb-80ae-90b2f62b32e1
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/454091b3-19a3-4765-ac84-4df4393c6cf5
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/f8ebc1db-2331-4ede-8290-e4da77941381
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/50e86470-06b2-4069-99e1-319ad726afd0
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/6dc7660c-0bce-46a9-88d3-7a427e168184
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/94f2b19f-6b41-49ea-9a14-52705122dff2

Immigrants make country worse or	2002	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/38ab60ed-266f-4e75-9aaf-356f5fff736a
	2004	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/2695d934-2658-4b7a-b903-b1e2c5cf2dc8
	2006	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/e6e484b5-0532-4240-85a3-a35ac5418caf
	2008	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/1651abdf-257a-48ec-b10d-7ad66a91206c
	2010	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/5edb9b7f-5a38-4b28-9897-ecb122858ba7
	2012	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/d84feedf-deb4-4a26-974a-cf8bf2f7a1d5
	2014	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/f3bef181-9b2c-46d1-906f-0cda9892e991
	2016	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/b2ad10d4-6e65-4204-906b-549edf79022d
	2018	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/31f41d68-c09d-471c-8f6d-1741b6fb7f03
	2020	https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/variable/81d0a77d-7bb8-45c2-842f-2f1840fc969c