

Hate in the Name of Safety: A Look at an Orwellian Hungary

An onslaught of political campaigns has ravaged the cities of Hungary in recent years. Each campaign presented a new enemy of the people, a new reason behind the woes of the country, and a new direction for rallying the citizens together against a common threat. Most recently, the Fidesz party launched a campaign against the Jewish Hungarian-American billionaire, George Soros.¹ Amidst the rising xenophobia, the allegedly anti-Semitic campaign against Soros, accusing him of being behind the refugee crisis, gave the public a new and more physical target, causing a tremor in the country's Jewish community.

At the outset of this research, the focus of the study was on anti-Semitism and finding whether the current politics had increased it as some had alleged. Upon further exploration, the entire premise of this work changed from a bottom-up approach (looking at whether anti-Semitism was there), to a top-down one. The goal thus became studying today's Hungarian political narrative and how it responded to the migration crisis and subsequently understand how it affected the Jewish community. In other words, anti-Semitism and its effects on the Jewish community are but a (perhaps unintended) consequence of the politics of hatred in the current Hungarian dialogue. This paper attempts to demonstrate this by examining the political scene through a combination of interviews conducted in Budapest and various secondary sources.

Hungarian history has been filled with incredible stories of survival resulting in an exceptional sentiment of nationalism. With a unique language and a largely homogenous

¹ "Soros: Hungary Posters 'Anti-Semitic.'" *BBC News*, July 11, 2017, sec. Europe.

society, Hungarians have been living under a constant sense of threat from both within and without. Very little in Hungary's history has proved the contrary, until the fall of communism, Hungarians went from one outside 'threat' to another, with the Treaty of Trianon hanging above them as a lifelong scar. Despite the relevant success of the independent nation since the fall of the Soviet Union and the sensational nationalist phenomenon of "victory in defeat," the sense of dread, of threat, and of being in constant danger has never gone away.² Therefore, the words of the poet Sandor Petofi "We are the most forsaken of all people on the Earth," still resonate with many Hungarians.³ Living in this constant state of alarm has thus left them as what Paul Lendvai calls "an easily seducible nation."⁴

No one has been able to capitalize on this reality more than Viktor Orbán. An individual with great charisma and a true sense of realpolitik, the leader of the Hungarian nation has been able to monopolize on every opportunity that presented itself to him in order to maximize his power. Having gone through the entire political spectrum available in Hungary, from being a liberal icon to a sweeping right-wing conservative, he has studied and understood what resonates best with the people.⁵ Portraying himself as the protector of culture, religion, the nation, and its citizens, he was able to reach the top of the political hierarchy.⁶ Since his success in 2010, he has used every available tool at his disposal to secure this position of power for as long as possible.

² Paul Lendvai. *Orbán: Hungary's Strongman*. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.

³ *Ibid*, 112.

⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

⁶ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 36.

On the road to achieving this unprecedented success, Orbán has failed and succeeded multiple times. By doing so, he recognized a few important factors in rallying the people and securing their vote and support. Playing on sentiments of nationalism, of threat, principles of religious piety and honesty after a cycle of corrupt officials in the post-communist era were the main narratives to use.⁷ To communicate these messages, there was one essential tool: the media. Even before getting elected to any significant political position, Orbán criticized József Antall, a former prime minister, for never having control over any sources of communication.⁸ With a combination of rich and trustworthy oligarchs, financial capital, and ownership of a few media outlets, the Fidesz propaganda machine was built.⁹

Winning after a series of scandals swept through the nation, in 2010, Orbán put the gears, that were already set up in his first term in office, into full motion.¹⁰ The opposition fractured and weak after Ferenc Gyurcsány's defeat left the political platform clear for the all-encompassing attack that Fidesz had planned.¹¹ Changes in the constitution, the judiciary and electoral systems, imposition of high taxes on various entities (i.e., foreign investors), and a crackdown on free speech and non-governmental organizations followed rapidly.¹² By winning "57.2% of the popular vote and 206 parliamentary seats" the Fidesz leader could pass virtually any law uncontested.¹³ According to Lendvai, József Debreczeni had warned in 2009 of the effect of Orbán winning a constitutional majority,

⁷ *Ibid*, 51.

⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid*, 115.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 79.

¹² *Ibid*, chapter 14.

¹³ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 85

as once he achieves it “he will turn [Hungary] into an impregnable fortress of power ... Nobody should have any doubts that Orbán will recklessly and utterly exploit his power.”¹⁴

This exploitation came in the form of an onslaught of hate politics. Historian Attila Pók divides objects of hatred into two categories: social and national.¹⁵ The targets of which can be “all kinds of exploiters and oppressors,” which encompasses all former members of the political elite in the social sector, and any national minorities.¹⁶ Nationally, the target can be the “hostile great powers,” or the neighboring nations.¹⁷ Correspondingly, the present Hungarian government has presented enemies and targets of hatred that fall under all the categories Pók had summed up in explaining scapegoating in the 20th century. Henceforth, a series of public enemies was created, towards which all woes can be directed and dubbed as threats to sovereignty and national identities. After the destruction of the national opposition, Orbán turned to the bankers of the 2008, which was followed by the attack on a demonic Brussels that sought to infringe on the sovereignty and the national wellbeing of Hungary.¹⁸ Politics of hatred thus come into full effect in the Hungarian narrative, the biggest wave of which were the anti-migration and anti-Soros campaigns that hit from 2015 until the present day.

Effectively, the fortress Debreczeni had warned about came up, and despite the drastic exploitation of the public, it remains largely unnoticed. Most public concerns, like health care and education, get systematically pushed to the background as the government

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁵ Attila Pók. *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe: Scapegoating in Twentieth Century Hungary : History and Historiography*. Savaria Books on Politics, Culture and Society. (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2009) 46.

¹⁶ Pók. *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe*, 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Cabinet office of the Prime Minister. “This Year We Must Defend Ourselves against Five Major Attacks – Miniszterelnok.hu.” February 11, 2017.

claims dealing with some sort of existential threat.¹⁹ This is constantly either met with complete silence and apathy or in other cases, general lack of political awareness. An important example of this is when the public kept quiet in 2010 as “3 million citizens” were robbed of their money after the “plundering of private pension funds, which were nationalized overnight.”²⁰ Misusing public funds has also extended to building the media empire and propaganda campaigns with the tax-payer’s money.²¹ András Inotai, in response to this indifference said that “in such a society almost anything can be done” without repercussions.²² In fact, when asked about similarities between the interwar government and the current one, Professor Victor Karády at the Central European University (CEU) said that “the Horthy regime was not corrupt in a comparable degree [...] the present government says this is the way to build up a new middle class; corruption is now deeply engrained in the government.”²³

While many in the public sector, journalists, intellectuals, and non-governmental organizations are still trying to fight for liberalism, the government is no longer concerned by it. On one hand, it has openly called itself an illiberal democracy, and scarcely pretends to care about issues beyond its own agenda.²⁴ On the other hand, protests from the European Union (EU) and from the former government of the United States of America (USA) have been ignored.²⁵ Interestingly, Orbán has mastered the art of working matters

¹⁹ Szurovecz, -Illés. “Hungary’s Health Care System in Desperate Need of Reform, Says Expert.” *The Budapest Beacon*, November 29, 2016.

“Thousands of Students Protest in Hungary for Education Reforms.” *Reuters*, January 19, 2018.

²⁰ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 121

²¹ Morales, Silvia. “Analysis: Hungarian Taxpayers Fund Unique ‘Fake News’ Industry.” *International Press Institute* (blog). Accessed March 7, 2018.

²² Lendvai. *Orbán*, 121

²³ Victor Karády, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 11, 2017.

²⁴ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 141.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 223.

to his advantage. By claiming “Hungary for the Hungarians,” speaking for the people, being the only person who fights for them, and by proclaiming religion at every opportunity, he has been able to dub every attempt to stop his centralization an attack from the hostile outsiders.²⁶ This has worked perfectly since the 2015 migration crisis.

During the 2014 elections, Fidesz’s popularity was declining.²⁷ Its attempts to pass laws taxing the internet and to bid for the 2024 Olympics were quickly shut down.²⁸ Along with some rifts amongst Orbán’s closest officials, namely Lajos Simicska, this was creating a small fracture in the united front.²⁹ Despite winning the elections, Fidesz was losing a big percentage of its voters, to the new far-right party Jobbik, and to the ever-fragmented opposition. Therefore, when the 2015 refugee crisis hit, Orbán put all his force in leading the wave of populism that swept through Europe. He became the protector of the European Christian culture, a role he was ready to play long before.

Harnessing Hungary’s deeply rooted nationalism, he created the biggest campaign to date. The hostility against refugees was justified as protection, the country was showered with hate speech in posters, billboards, television advertising, and reached anyone who would listen.³⁰ The refugees became illegal immigrants, vessels for Islamist terrorism.³¹ Suddenly, Hungary was no longer the victim of the European society but its hero.³² Anything from violence to blatant xenophobia was vindicated as the public dialogue turned into a state of fear and anger towards the intruders. “Whenever you opened the TV, in commercials, you changed streets, there it was, a poster or an ad about the migrant

²⁶ *Ibid*, 195.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 131.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 186.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 135.

³⁰ Bulcsú Hunyadi, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 12, 2017.

³¹ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 213.

³² *Ibid*, 220.

crisis,” said Bulcsú Hunyadi, Senior Analyst of Radicalism and Extremism at the think tank Political Capital.³³ The campaign, made entirely in Hungarian, was directed, not at the refugees, but the public, to stir the pot, and rally the people.³⁴

Akin to an Orwellian novel, Hungary’s politics became more divisive than ever, anyone who was not with the government, became an antagonist. Moving from the vague idea of migrants, Orbán created Hungary’s own ‘Emmanuel Goldstein’: George Soros became “the number one enemy of the people”.³⁵ Soros, a Hungarian-American, a Holocaust survivor, and a symbol of liberalism and capitalism became the face of Orbán’s campaign. The debate that arose following the campaign against Soros, which pictured him smiling next to words such as “Don’t let Soros have the last laugh” left the world shocked.³⁶ Orbán, having learned every tactic in the book, from interwar scapegoating, to communist-style propaganda, and elegant diplomatic attacks, knew how to reach his goal of destroying Soros in the public eye. He also mastered word manipulation, to the extent that he is able to say just enough to convey a message, without referring to anything directly by its name.

Going after the Soros institutions in Hungary, the government worked to discredit all the organizations funded by his Open Society Foundations. Swept in this tide were the CEU, and the human rights organization Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HCC). CEU has been the pinnacle of liberal education in Hungary with hundreds of international students and faculty.³⁷ Therefore, the government put the university’s standing in Hungary in

³³ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ George Orwell. 1984. (New York: Rosetta LLC, 2000. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed March 6, 2018) 19.

³⁶ “Hungarian Government to End Anti-Soros Poster Campaign: Spokesman.” Reuters, July 14, 2017.

³⁷ Interview with Victor Karády.

jeopardy as it passed new laws about foreign affiliations.³⁸ According to Professor Victor Karády: “this is a real threat to the university, as it tries to get highly qualified students, and it will hard to get them to apply if the fate of the university is uncertain.”³⁹

Additionally, “Helsinki Committee has been at the forefront of the attack as it fights for many minority rights and is active in the political sphere,” said Hunyadi.⁴⁰ The institute has been defamed through the series of National Consultations sent to all Hungarians with a so called Soros plan that accused the organization of having called for lighter sentences on crimes by immigrants, and working against the wellbeing of Hungary.⁴¹ In fact, between the Soros plan consultations, the billboards, and the entire campaign effort, the government spent more of the public’s money than the two parties in the Brexit campaign spent combined.⁴²

The campaign affected more community as its symbolism caused discontent in the Jewish community and various debates on where it stands in, not only the Hungarian community, but also in relation to the Israeli State. “No one in Hungary ignores that George Soros is a Jew,” said Professor Karády.⁴³ Portrayed as a “financier, capitalist, tyrant, all symbols associated with the Jews” the campaign could easily be seen as anti-Semitic although it is not outwardly so.⁴⁴ According to Professor Karády “the Soros campaign is a typical ideological construction,” which serves perhaps as a trigger to some anti-Semitic

³⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. “Hungary: The War on Education.” *The New York Review of Books* (blog), May 20, 2017.

³⁹ Interview with Victor Karády.

⁴⁰ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁴¹ Justin Spike. “Hungarian Helsinki Committee Sues Propaganda Ministry over National Consultation.” *The Budapest Beacon*, October 16, 2017.

⁴² Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁴³ Interview with Victor Karády.

⁴⁴ Interview with András Kovács, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 12, 2017.

sentiments, yet, he believes, anti-Semitism is not the goal.⁴⁵ Alternatively, Professor András Kovács, a scholar in history and philosophy, explained that if one is familiar with the symbolism in the posters, they will recognize the references, but it can also easily be overlooked in ignorance.⁴⁶

The Hungarian Jewish community has been working on reviving itself for generations in the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War. In the post-communist era, the previously silenced history of the holocaust started resurfacing. While there were also reemerging sentiments of anti-Semitism, the community was able to by and large reconstruct. With the help of the government Synagogues were rebuilt and refurbished in Budapest, and previously unknown or unacknowledged Jewish identities were rediscovered.⁴⁷ Yet, “seventy-two years after World War II the restitution of the Jews has still not been fully completed.”⁴⁸ Lingering sentiments of anti-Semitism from the inter-war period have been constant with occasional spikes along the years, yet they remained unfelt on any significant scale.⁴⁹

The identity conflicts in the Jewish community of Hungary can be traced back to the end of the 19th century when the emancipation of the Jews caused a “tempestuous and conflict-ridden transformation of traditional Jewish identities.”⁵⁰ At the time, the Jews tried to assimilate and they formed a significant part of the societal structure: “the liberal Hungarian nobility supported the Jewish middle class in modernizing the economy”

⁴⁵ Interview with Victor Karády.

⁴⁶ Interview with András Kovács.

⁴⁷ Edit Páll, Lauren Granite, and Marcell Kenesei, eds. *The Hungarian Jewish Source Book*. (Central Europe Center for Research & Documentation. Vol. 6. A Centropa Reader, 2017) 9-10.

⁴⁸ Eva S Balogh. “András Heisler’s Speech in the Presence of Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Orbán.” *Hungarian Spectrum*, July 20, 2017.

⁴⁹ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁵⁰ Páll. *The Hungarian Jewish Source Book*. 54

resulting in a society where Jews were perceived as “being different to other Hungarians only in their religious denomination.”⁵¹ This shift in attitude was short lived as the interwar era left the Hungarians in a previously unconceivable state of trauma due to the Treaty of Trianon.⁵² In attempting to understand what had occurred, the Hungarians looked for the “familiar foreigner,” a cause for the disaster that is not as alien as external super powers, but still different enough to be blamed without having to self-reflect.⁵³ This entity would serve as a scapegoat that could consequently be easily removed from the society it had allegedly ruined. The answer was found in the Hungarian Jewish community.

The Hungarian government has been actively tampering with the nation’s historical memory, pushing the society’s limits to test them. Refusing to take responsibility for its past actions, “the Hungarian governments have been ambiguous about the role Hungary played in the Holocaust, and the responsibility of the government and governor of the time.”⁵⁴ For instance, the ‘Memorial for the Victims of the German invasion’ and the commendation of controversial political figures from Hungary’s past by current politicians (such as Miklós Horthy) have triggered many debates along the years. Another example is the contentious museum of *Terror Háza* run by the historian Maria Schmidt, one of the Prime Minister’s most trusted advisors.⁵⁵ However, “when the Nazis came to Hungary, they had 200 people, they couldn’t have possibly transferred thousands of Jews to their death alone,” said Karády.⁵⁶ This systematic denial of the past has created a gap in a society where part of the population has felt like an outsider for generations. Despite having tried

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 54-55.

⁵² Interview with Victor Karády.

⁵³ Pók. *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe*, 40.

⁵⁴ Eva S Balogh. “András Heisler’s Speech in the Presence of Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Orbán.” *Hungarian Spectrum*, July 20, 2017.

⁵⁵ Lendvai. *Orbán*, 50.

⁵⁶ Interview with Victor Karády.

to assimilate and be an integral part of the society, after the events of the 20th century, the majority of the Hungarian Jews “would never be able to rid themselves of their stigma.”⁵⁷

While the government retains its position claiming that nothing about the campaign is anti-Semitic, members of the Jewish society have disagreed. Peter Arvai, a representative of *Szim Salom*, the first progressive Jewish congregation in Hungary, expressed concern over the campaign saying that members of his congregation have been disconcerted by the scale of the campaign and the involvement of vivid imagery and hate speech.⁵⁸ In fact, in his address to the Prime Ministers of Israel and Hungary, András Heisler, the President of the Jewish Federation in Hungary, *Mazsihisz*, exclaimed: “One can argue about the intent of the campaign, but one thing became unacceptable to me: the Jews of Hungary began to live in fear.”⁵⁹ In an exceptionally worded speech, President Heisler condemned the actions of both Prime Ministers, one for instigating the campaign, and the other for backing it despite the Jewish Community’s disdain.

Nonetheless, not everyone in the Jewish community agrees with Heisler. In fact, Rabbi Slomó Köves of EMIH Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation, has explicitly opposed all allegation that the campaign is anti-Semitic. When asked about the significance of the symbolism in the posters, Rabbi Köves expressed no concern as he sees anti-Semitism as being possibly the biggest conspiracy theory in the world, one that should not be encouraged.⁶⁰ Moreover, George Soros, is not a symbol of the Jewish community, and to the orthodox denomination, he can scarcely be considered Jewish.⁶¹ As such, to the

⁵⁷ Páll. *The Hungarian Jewish Source Book*. 59.

⁵⁸ Peter Arvai, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 13, 2017.

⁵⁹ Eva S Balogh. “András Heisler’s Speech in the Presence of Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Orbán.” *Hungarian Spectrum*, July 20, 2017.

⁶⁰ Slomo Köves, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 13, 2017.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

Chabad community, and in accordance with the government, Soros only represents uncontrollable capitalism.⁶² Alternatively, Rabbi Köves emphasized steering away from problems of the past and looking at the future of the Jewish community in Hungary.⁶³ Normalizing Judaism and Jewish traditions in Hungary for both Jews and ethnic Hungarians is his top priority.⁶⁴

To an extent, both Peter Arvai and András Heisler agree with Rabbi Köves on normalizing the Jewish faith in society.⁶⁵ Yet, they drastically defer on their acceptance of the campaign. For both Arvai and Heisler, the hate speech is not acceptable in all its forms, and the Jewish community “stands for human dignity and human rights, this applies to all humans.”⁶⁶ Arvai’s congregation was also quite welcoming of the refugees in 2015, and Heisler has been actively fighting against the aggressive narrative taken by the government since it started.⁶⁷ Furthermore, while Rabbi Köves described the campaign as being “not [his] cup of tea,” he believed that his congregation has little to do with the matter. He also pointed out that the narrative in Hungary differs very little from other places in the world (i.e., the current government in USA and various countries in Europe).⁶⁸ Additionally, he emphasized multiple times the physical safety that both the fences built by Hungary, and the government’s position in the matter of the migration crisis, has left the Jews in.⁶⁹

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Andras Heisler, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 14, 2017.

Interview with Peter Arvai.

⁶⁶ Interview with Andras Heisler.

⁶⁷ Interview with Peter Arvai.

⁶⁸ Interview with Slomo Köves.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Comparing the situation in France with that of Hungary, he has expressed gratitude that the much warned against, Muslim anti-Semitism, is not a problem in his country.⁷⁰

The contrast in the reaction to the campaign much resembles the divide in the Hungarian nation at large. While some are baffled at the political circumstances they are currently living in, others, perhaps the majority, are quite pleased with it. Most of the stakeholders interviewed in Budapest expressed concerns over this very divide. Even amongst intellectuals and academics rifts have occurred over political debates.⁷¹ Gabriella Komoly, the former President of the Jewish Studies Student Association at CEU, reiterated just as much in our discussion about the political climate amongst the youth.⁷² Moreover, when asked about whether the divide has reached the Jewish community, Heisler said that it has not reached the people, but it has definitely caused a rift between the congregations.⁷³

Orbán's politics have turned people against each other. They have angered and frustrated the public against a mythical enemy that changes day in and day out. The degree of hate speech and propaganda that has taken over the nation is alarming to say the least. Despite claims to the contrary, they have indeed affected at least a segment of the population in legitimizing anti-Semitic sentiments. As Heisler said, it could be argued that the intention behind the campaign is different, but the reality is that it has resulted in public and palpable acts of anti-Semitism with words like "stinking Jew" and drawings of swastikas being written on the posters and propagated in society.⁷⁴ A controversial image of a Fidesz lawmaker standing with his family in front of a slaughtered pig that said *Soros*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Interview with Victor Karády

⁷² Gabriella Komoly, Interview with Farah Rasmi. Informational Interview. Budapest, December 14, 2017.

⁷³ Interview with Andras Heisler.

⁷⁴ "Hungarian Government to End Anti-Soros Poster Campaign: Spokesman." Reuters, July 14, 2017.

on it also went viral in December, 2017.⁷⁵ Defended as a benign act, there are few way to interpret the intention behind it, nor can the rising hatred in the society be ignored.

Perplexed at the situation, Bulcsú Hunyadi pointed out that the population has been increasing malleable. Research found, said Hunyadi, that when asked about leaving the EU, most Hungarians said they wouldn't want to, but when asked about there feelings towards 'Brussels' (the target of the government's campaigns) they expressed anger and hate.⁷⁶ The ignorance and blind following baffled the analyst as they conveyed how effective the propaganda is. Furthermore, he stressed that while there haven't been situations of extreme violence against Jews in Hungary, there have been multiple assaults on the country's Roma population.⁷⁷ Such a reality suggests that the anger and hate are present, and the more the public is rallied through propaganda, the more it can easily be imagined that the anger might transfer to other minorities.

Effectively, George Orwell's notorious two minutes of hate in his novel *1984*, have turned into reality in Orbán's contemporary Hungary, only it is not just for two minutes a day. This culture of scapegoating was emphasized time and again in various works, especially in historian Attila Pók's book *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe*. It cannot be contested that this escape root has been entirely embraced by the Hungarian society. Much like Pók described it in speaking of 20th century Hungary, George Orwell's society with its ominous Big Brother has come to life in Orbán's world. Similarly, in speaking of the differences between Horthy's regime and that of Orbán, Victor Karády exclaimed that the latter was quite different since it runs as a "one man government,"

⁷⁵ "Hungarian Ruling Party Lawmaker Mocks Soros With Image of Dead Pig." *Bloomberg.com*, December 8, 2017.

⁷⁶ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Horthy's regime was a generally centralized government where power was shared amongst the elite during the war.⁷⁸

The government has responded to all allegations of anti-Semitism with complete denial. Relations between Israel and Hungary have served as proof in that effect. Especially significant was Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Budapest in the middle of the Soros campaign. While the Jewish Federation called for support from Israel and for the Hungarian government to end the "bad dream," the Israeli government revoked its ambassador's original condemnation of the campaign and expressed support for the nationalist government. This proved a betrayal in the eyes of the Jewish Diaspora, which Heisler emphasized in his speech. Heisler's condemnation of the overriding *realpolitik* was not met with much happiness from the Prime Ministers, in fact when asked about the response he said that "Bibi did not like it. Did not like it at all. But it had to be said."

Alternatively, others saw it as neither proof or denial of the allegations. Rabbi Köves highlighted that politics do not work that way and that pragmatism is essential. Stating it is unrealistic for Netanyahu not to go to a country if there is anti-Semitism, he exclaimed "can you imagine? If that is how he did politics, then he would have no diplomatic relations at all." However, Hunyadi took it further in expressing the reality of the situation:

Good relations with Israel are strategically important for Fidesz because of the following reasons. First, Orbán and Netanyahu are ideologically close to each other. Second, Netanyahu's support help Fidesz to reject accusations of anti-Semitism against the government. And third, Israel can serve as an example and reference as in the case of the NGO law, for instance.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Interview with Victor Karády.

⁷⁹ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

This kinship emphasized by Hunyadi summarizes the extent of the political game at play in Hungary. Worth mentioning, Márton Ugródsy, the deputy director at the institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade, reiterated those exact words in a presentation when asked about the National Consultations.⁸⁰ It is thus all but a “political game,” namely the campaign against Soros, which according to Ugródsy, Soros is also taking a part of by responding to the campaign.⁸¹

The Hungarian government has thus been extremely careful in all its communications. Allegations of anti-Semitism have in fact been proved useful to Orbán as he can strongly refute them and still use them to portray his government as “the bulwark of democracy against extremism.”⁸² Fidesz has also managed to use them for votes from those who believe Orbán is protecting Christianity and the Jewish community, and still use the “anti-Semitism to get voters in a country where the tendency to be extremely right-wing is prevalent.”⁸³

Orbánism, the “Führer democracy”, the “most dangerous man in the EU”, and “Hungary’s Strongman” are but a few expressions that have been used to describe Orbán and his government.⁸⁴ Described as a “nationalist government with strong authoritarian traits, and a centralized highly corrupt bureaucracy” this regime has shocked the world with the speed and confidence with which it has moved since it was elected.⁸⁵ Regardless of the character of George Soros, the campaign against him has certainly encouraged hate and

⁸⁰ Márton Ugródsy, Informational Presentation, Center for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, Toronto, November 20th, 2017.

⁸¹ Presentation by Márton Ugródsy.

⁸² Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁸³ Interview with Victor Karády.

⁸⁴ Lendvai. *Orbán*.

⁸⁵ Interview with András Kovács.

unhinged the societal balance in the country. Plastering pictures all over the country, propagating blatant misinformation throughout with questionnaires that, at best, play with the truth, the government has been distracting the citizens from the real concerns within their borders.

As Bulcsú Hunyadi said, “raising the anti-Semitism question diverts the focus from the anti-democratic developments and the anti-pluralism approach of the government and the violations of the rule of law and human rights principles in Hungary.”⁸⁶ Running a full-fledged distraction campaign before the upcoming elections of 2018 has been a strategy of pure, unethical, politics. While the level of control Fidesz holds on the entire population has been raising alarms around the world, there can still be hope for a change. Despite the attack on institutions like HHC and CEU, they have been fighting back and for the time being, winning.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the migration crisis proved to be Orbán’s most opportune tool to rally people behind him again. Questions on the extent of anti-Semitism may have been left unanswered, but what is clear is that Orbán has shamelessly used it and the refugees to infuse hate in the society. As history has taught us multiple times, fueling hate and anger can only have extremely destructive consequences.

⁸⁶ Interview with Bulcsú Hunyadi.

⁸⁷ “Helsinki Committee Wins Lawsuit Against Cabinet Office Over Stop Soros National Consultation.” *Magyar Helsinki Bizottság* (blog), February 28, 2018. “Hungarian Accreditation Renewed; CEU Ranks in QS Top 100 in 5 Subjects | Central European University.” Accessed March 7, 2018. <https://www.ceu.edu/node/21269>.

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