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4 Against "post-communism"

The conservative dawn in Hungary

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Introduction

In August 2014 news of Viktor Orbán's "secret Bible" made headlines in the Hungarian media. Journalists claimed that the "political science gossip" was true and that the "Orbán system" closely followed the ideas of Tilo Schabert's 1989 book *Boston Politics: The creativity of power* (Tóth 2014). In this book Schabert presents the approach to politics of Kevin White, the mayor of Boston from 1968–84, to support his own theory of the "primacy of persons"—and not of institutions—in politics (Gontier 2015). The information that Viktor Orbán could be the follower of a Western (German) political theorist was, to say the least, sensational: earlier analyses concluded that Orbán and his party Fidesz were rather opportunistic and idiosyncratic in their political choices and cannot be easily pinned down to any political current. These analyses referred to Orbán and Fidesz as following a loosely defined form of "socially conservative" (Kiss 2002, 745) populism (Egedy 2009). The information also turned out to be grossly inaccurate and exaggerated: not only was it difficult to verify what books Orbán "kept on his bedside table," it also turned out that *Boston Politics* was not so much Orbán's favorite, but rather a book (along with works of Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss) that some of his aides read and considered the best description of the prime minister's approach to politics. The story about Schabert's 1989 book connection to Hungary is nevertheless far from trivial: it helped draw attention to the political ideas supported by leading figures at the Fidesz-allied "Századvég" think tank, who had been trying since the 2000s to formulate the key ideas driving the Fidesz agenda in the case of a return to power.

After eight years as the leader of the opposition, former (1998–2002) Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán returned to power with a sweeping victory in 2010. Not only did this victory earn, for the pre-electoral coalition between Fidesz and the small Christian-democratic party KDNP, the "super-majority" needed for constitutional changes, the entire Hungarian party system, which was regarded as one of the few consolidated ones in East Central Europe, collapsed as a result. The main opposition party, the post-communist "Hungarian Socialist Party," in power between 2002 and 2010, lost more than half its voters and earned a historical low of 21 percent of the vote. Orbán won with the promise of a new social contract that emphasized populist

paternalism, national sovereignty, and economic nationalism. The landslide victory of 2010 gave Orbán the opportunity to realize this vision. Backed by a constitutional majority during its first term (2010–14), Fidesz passed a new constitution, eliminated a large part of checks and balances, weakened the parliament's prerogatives (and halved its size), challenged the independence of the judiciary (Halmai 2015), and installed a new, controversial media oversight authority (Kornai 2015). Adding to this, a new electoral code was introduced which included heavily gerrymandered voting districts and voting rights for Hungarians abroad. Following these changes, Hungary took a deep dive in all measurable and quantifiable indicators of democracy. As Kim Scheppele argues, though many of the new institutional arrangements—media authorities, high courts, or electoral systems—are not untypical for established democracies, it is the combination of these that makes Hungary into what she terms a "Frankenstate" (a pun on "Frankenstein," Scheppele 2013).

In this chapter we introduce the main center-right intellectuals or "conceptive ideologists" (Marx and Engels 2010 [1845]) lending support to Viktor Orbán, either as his personal advisors or via the Századvég think tank. These "ideologists" either directly engage in constructing the ideology of Fidesz or—in the case of Századvég—lead the process of spelling out conservatism, and emphasizing its relevance for Hungary. We present their ideas and place them in the wider context of conservative thinkers in Hungary (not all of whom actually support Orbán). In the next part, we discuss the main contributions in the literature on the nature of the Orbán regime, and delineate our own approach of looking, not so much at what Fidesz politicians say and write, but at how intellectuals close to Fidesz define and seek to address the problems of Hungarian politics and society. Our argument is that one main common denominator in the position of these intellectuals is their focus on the post-communist "political elite" and "institutional arrangements" as deeply problematic and illegitimate, elements that they want to be replaced by those of a state that is first and foremost "normative," that is, capable of recognizing and pursuing national interests (a state referred to by two of these intellectuals as "neo-Weberian"). These ideas—and in particular those they claim to be the very essence of politics—occur in parallel with and help us to understand the essence of the Fidesz political project.

Interpreting the Orbán project: the role of ideational foundations

For a relatively long time, post-communist Hungary was considered a success story of democratic consolidation. It featured a stable party system and strong governments; it was the leading country in the region in attracting foreign direct investments and eventually became one of the front-runners considered for EU membership. However, shortly after EU accession in 2004, Hungary entered into a spiral of interlinked crises which in effect reshaped the political system to a large extent. The landslide electoral victory of Fidesz[1] under Viktor Orbán in 2010 was followed by constitutional changes which have moved the initially consensual system toward a strongly majoritarian one. This development was sharply criticized by the European Parliament as a departure from democracy toward authoritarian rule (Tavares 2013). After a second sweeping electoral victory of Fidesz in 2014, the democratic rollback became even more accentuated and was complemented by strong anti-EU rhetoric and closer ties to global and regional authoritarian powers.

In a public speech at a summer university in Transylvania in 2014, Orbán praised "illiberal democracy" and declared the Western economic model dead. Tracing economic success to illiberal political systems, he cited the authoritarian regimes of Russia, China, Turkey, and Singapore as templates to follow for Hungary, declaring that "We have to abandon liberal methods and principles of organizing a society. The new state that we are building is an

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illiberal state, a non-liberal state."[2] Speeches held before the 2010 elections also foreshadowed the political system that Orbán envisioned. The emerging system he referred to in 2009 as the "central field of power" (*centrális erőtér*) places Fidesz at the center of the political system, and cements its position for a longer period of time, making "unproductive" political debates unnecessary (Bátory 2015). The emphasis on power in Orbán's statements has been a recurring theme:

> Cooperation is a question of force, not of intention. Perhaps there are countries where things don't work that way, for example in the Scandinavian countries, but such a half-Asiatic rag-tag people as we are can unite only if there is force.[3]

Such claims—declaring Western liberalism and individualism alien to a country with an authoritarian history—can be seen as the call for a centralized, strong, and paternalist state. The new government followed the (self-termed) ideal of a "neo-Weberian" state to replace the "sell-out" of public assets and excessive embracement of the ideas of "new public management" by previous socialist governments. Instead of a market-oriented, "lean" government, which was seen by Fidesz to have served foreign business interests to the detriment of the public good, a new, centralized core executive was installed, halving the number of ministerial departments, replacing ministry staff with Fidesz loyalists, and strengthening the prime minister's office (Gallai and Molnár 2012). Regional decentralization efforts carried out during the last decade to accommodate EU regional policy demands were also largely reversed (Buzogány and Korkut 2013).

The literature has mostly focused on determining what enabling factors paved the way for the backlash against democracy in Hungary. Such explanations range from problems related to institutional engineering in 1989/90, including overly strong checks and balances, the lack of "lustration" and a real exchange of elites (Pridham 2014), the dynamics of the party system (Enyedi 2016a, 2016b), political polarization (Palonen 2009, 2012; Buzogány 2011), elite populism (Korkut 2012; Palonen 2009; Enyedi 2016a, 2016b), negative effects of patrimonial capitalism (Csillag and Szelényi 2015), democracy's lack of societal support (Herman 2015), to the weakness of external support for democracy (Sedelmeier 2014; Müller 2015).

Yet, capturing the essence of Orbán's "revolution" is a more difficult exercise than establishing the factors behind Orbán's 2010 return to power. The usual interpretation ignores the self-positioning of Orbán and Fidesz as conservative, and treats the "Orbán project" as a "populist" undertaking. Nevertheless, many authors feel the need to further qualify populism. Zsolt Enyedi, for instance, writes of "paternalistic populism" in Hungary, that is, a populism that, although claiming to be on the side of "the people," criticizes "the lack of self-discipline in the lower classes" in order to cut welfare spending (Enyedi 2016a, 15). Agnes Bátory also argues that the populism of Fidesz is directed toward changing the country and its inhabitants fundamentally, and qualifies it as "nationalistic," "Christian conservative" and, after the 2004 Eastern Enlargement of the European Union, increasingly "Eurosceptic" (Bátory 2015, 286).

What is less known is how Orbán and Fidesz came to position themselves as Hungary's main *conservative* right-wing formation. Csilla Kiss traces this development back to how Viktor Orbán and Fidesz "read" the actions of other parties, most notably the "Hungarian Democratic Forum" (MDF) of József Antall and the alliance between liberals and socialists, Orbán's main political opponents (Kiss 2002). Thus, Orbán interpreted the defeat and demise of the MDF in the early 1990s as an appropriate reminder of the dangers of a conciliatory style of politics, and he perceived the socialist-liberal governments

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as betraying national interests. Viktor Orbán appears as an opportunistic actor who learned from his defeat in the 1994 elections on a liberal agenda that liberalism has to make way for a "national-conservative catch-all party" (Lang 2005). The weaknesses and conflicts on the spectrum of conservative parties provided the opportunity to rebrand Fidesz from a liberal-alternative party into a conservative one and win subsequent elections (Szabó 2011; Machos 1993; Fowler 2004; Egedy 2009). Thus, Orbán's political ideas are best understood as "strategic choices" in reaction to the political environment around him (Bátory 2015).

We argue that Orbán's political ideas should be seen in a wider context of an anti-liberal milieu that became visible around 2002 to 2006 (when Fidesz lost parliamentary elections). Although playing a leading role in this milieu, Orbán was by far not the only one to grow disillusioned with liberalism. In what follows we map the relevant thinkers and in particular the "conceptive ideologists," non-party organizations (such as think tanks), and publications that have provided a background to the intensifying criticism and rejection of liberalism in Hungary and the ideational foundations of the "Orbán project." Building on the work of Karl Mannheim, we see the rise of conservatism (a current to which Fidesz and Orbán claim to belong), not just as a strategic repositioning in the political field, but as a social current developing in opposition to and with growing irritation over the perceived dominance of liberalism. It is through common experiences—a "community of experience"—that intellectual currents take shape (Mannheim 1955 [1936], 31). In Hungary a key unifying or crystallizing experience for conservatives (whether they used this term then or not) was the 1994 political alliance between liberals and post-communists that conservatives perceived as a liberal betrayal of the central unifying right-wing principle of anti-communism.

Intellectuals, "individuals whose only capital consisted in their education," play a central part in processes of "ideology production" (Mannheim 1955 [1936], 156). In Hungary this is perhaps best documented by the intellectuals' relevance to the 1989 regime change and transition period (Bozóki 2007). More recently there has been increased interest in the intellectual traditions of Hungarian liberalism (Korkut 2012) and the radical right, with social scientists asking about the role of political ideas in the making of the Hungarian radical right, and in particular in the "Movement for a Better Hungary," also known as "Jobbik" (Gyurgyák 2007; Paksa 2012). In the meantime we are also witnessing a growing interest in the political and intellectual history of Hungarian conservative traditions (more generally and including pre-war times; see Csizmadia 2013; Wéber 2010; Enyedi 2016a, 2016b).

What is lacking, however, is not only an engagement with the ideas of the intellectuals, but also with the field in which they have developed and circulated their ideas: while most of the actors we study in this chapter had turned to conservatism already by the early 1990s, that which has intensified since then is the network of venues in which they develop and circulate conservative ideas—from university departments to think tanks, institutes, and a growing number of publications. In other words, what has changed over the last decades is the conservative "knowledge network" (Bluhm and Varga in this volume), understood as loose groups of conservative intellectuals, think thanks, media outlets, politicians or factions within political parties, university departments or holders of single university chairs, who engage in the production and dissemination of ideology—a "political conception of the world" (Mannheim 1955 [1936]). In Hungary, this has developed from a first generation of university-based scholars into a second generation with numerous and active publishing outlets, as well as important public positions in think tanks, universities, media, and research institutes. Although Hungary's well-developed "knowledge network" is far from unitary, we present its different facets by focusing on the main figures, think tanks, and publications who share as a common denominator the conviction that the post-communist, constitutional-institutional arrangements were deeply problematic, and who yet differ in the solutions envisaged as well as in the causes identified behind the "dysfunctional" post-communist institutions.

We distinguish between two positions that have been highly active in shaping Hungary's conservatism and that welcomed Fidesz' 2010 return to and record in power. The positions are each embodied by a key figure in Viktor Orbán's 1998–2002 prime ministerial office. The first position is composed of intellectuals often pursuing university careers devoted to the study and dissemination of conservatism. It is best represented by the former minister and head of the prime ministerial office István Stumpf, who traces problems of post-communism to "flaws" in European thinking about institutions, in particular in liberal thinking, and envisages solutions in the realm of what he calls neo-Weberian thinking about the state. Others who could be included in this position are most notably the political theorists András Lánczi and Gábor G. Fodor, who added to it critiques of European modernity based on the writings of Carl Schmitt, Eric Voegelin, and Leo Strauss. The second position is composed of intellectuals holding Fidesz membership or government jobs as early as 1998, best characterized by Gyula Tellér, the head of the "internal affairs" political analysis unit of the prime ministerial office in 1998–2002, and who would later become chief policy advisor to Viktor Orbán from 2010 onwards. Tellér approaches problems of post-communist institutions in Hungary as the outcome of direct, unfriendly actions of external powers, going back to at least the 1970s, when Hungary fell into the "debt trap." Privatization processes unleashed throughout the 1990s only deepened the dependency on external powers and robbed the Hungarian state of the material means needed for pursuing autonomous action. Before going into a more detailed discussion of these ideas, we first explain the wider conservative context from which these positions, particularly the first one, emerged.

A conservative network of knowledge

During the early 1980s, an underground opposition scene was thriving in Budapest and became influential after regime change (Szabó 2010). The intellectual debates taking place during this period had important implications for the future of Hungarian political development after the fall of communism (Falk 2003). One of the most important groups in the democratic opposition was the "samizdat" movement of the liberal intelligentsia that published the underground journal *Beszélő*. This samizdat journal brought together intellectuals of different political leanings, many of whom still regarded themselves as leftists, while others were in the process of re-defining themselves as "liberals." The Beszélő circle continuously tested the limits of state oppression not only by publishing a journal without the consent and censorship of the ruling party, but also by engaging in several initiatives that directly or indirectly called for more democracy (Bozóki 2007). Along with Adam Michnik in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian writer and sociologist György Konrád became of one of the most well-regarded dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s. His essays centered on utopian ideals of democracy and the role of civil society, which he regarded as being largely non-political (Konrád 1989). At the same time his political philosophy was built on the idea of "anti-politics" that defined civil society in terms of resistance to an oppressive state. His "ideology of civil society" became an instrument for 1980s' dissidents propagating an alternative to both communism and Western capitalism.

This "anti-political" tradition of the Hungarian and ECE liberal intelligentsia became the dominant discourse of regime change in 1989. Political discourse strongly influenced by liberalism was converging with the global liberal discourse of that time, with a strong emphasis on checks and balances, individual rights, and judicialization (Mándi 2015). These directions had important implications in the founding years of the new Hungarian state, in

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preferring for example a consensus versus majoritarian model of democracy (Ágh 2001), a strong and independent constitutional court (Sólyom 2003; Scheppele 1999), and the chosen liberal economic transition model (Stark and Bruszt 1998).

It was in this intellectual climate—one of a later felt liberal domination—that the first conservative intellectuals appeared in Hungary in the early 1990s. This "first generation" hardly used the term "conservative," but nevertheless focused on the dissemination of Western conservative thinking through translations of Leo Strauss, Edmund Burke, and Michael Oakeshott, as well as its own theoretical work in political philosophy, studying and developing conservative ideas. During the early 1990s, the members of the "first generation" secured teaching positions at the larger universities in Budapest. András Lánczi, perhaps the most prolific intellectual figure of conservative convictions and the author of the "Conservative Manifesto" (2002), began teaching at the university later named "Corvinus" from 1991, heading the political science department there from 2002 and becoming rector of Corvinus in 2016. Lánczi wrote his dissertation on Leo Strauss in 1993. Throughout the 1990s, Tibor Navracsics, another key conservative figure, who would later introduce Lánczi to Orbán, also taught at Corvinus in the 1990s and, according to Teczár (2016), worked closely with Lánczi to further refine their common ideas.

Navracsics later worked at the Political Science Institute of Budapest's largest university, ELTE. At this institute there was a slow strengthening of positions critical of liberalism around figures such as István Stumpf and István Schlett. Some staff members there have since been connected with Fidesz directly as politicians: Navracsics served as department head in the Prime Minister's Office (1998/99), as Minister of Justice (2010–14) and of Foreign Affairs (2014–16) under the second and third Orbán government before he went on to become European Commissioner for Culture and Education. Another prominent figure, Orbán's professor at the Bibó Kollégium, István Stumpf, served as head of the Prime Minister's Office under the first Orbán cabinet (1997–2001) and since 2010 has been the Fidesz-appointed member of the Hungarian Constitutional Court. András Körösényi was another scholar, teaching at ELTE in the 1990s, and one of Hungary's best-known political scientists abroad, interested in Hungarian conservatism, and at least until 2010 often described as close to Fidesz. After the Fidesz victory in 2010 he became the head of the Political Science Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but, in a way similar to Stumpf, became increasingly disillusioned by the Orbán regime.

At the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, another member of the "first generation" and ELTE graduate in sociology and history, Attila Károly Molnár, worked on the writings of Edmund Burke and other conservatives and defended there his habilitation in 2005. Molnár issued in 2004 together with Lánczi another programmatic statement of Hungarian conservatism, entitled *Hungarian Conservative Speculations: Against Post-Communism* (Lánczi et al. 2004). In 2012 he became director of the newly created Thomas Molnar Institute at the National Public Service University established by Fidesz in 2011 (apparently on the initiative of then-minister Navracsics).[4]

The 2000s saw the gradual rise of a "second generation" of conservative authors who had been students of the first generation, but it is fair to say that what caused their adoption of conservatism was not just the influence of teachers such as Lánczi or Molnár, but also their collective political experiences during the decade's two major events: the 2002 and 2006 electoral defeats of Fidesz. According to Rényi and Vári (2011), most of the second-generation members share features such as: being predominantly born in the 1980s; studying under members of the first generation; holding membership in the Fidesz youth organization "Fidelitas"; writing for UFI[5] (the organization's publication); and sharing a deep resentment over the course of events in their country, in particular after the electoral defeats of Fidesz and the leak of socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyürcsányi's 2006 admission of lying to the public over the country's finances. The activities of the second generation materialized in an active blogosphere and multiplied the number of conservative

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periodical publications. During the 1990s the publication landscape was restricted to *Konzervatív Szemle* (which folded in 1994), *Magyar Szemle*, and the homonymous publication of the Századvég foundation (which in fact dedicated a fair amount of space also to liberal positions). The 2000s brought UFI, which later changed into the *Reakció* blog and then to the *Mandiner* blog and news portal; the Navracsics-close *Jobbklikk* blog and news portal; the blog (and later journal) entitled *Kommentár*; the *konzervatorium* blog (its authors acknowledged Molnár as their mentor; established in 2007, inactive since 2015, its editor-in-chief Gergely Szilvay moved to *Mandiner*); the newsportal *888*; and a new journal issued by Századvég, entitled *Nemzeti Érdek* (National Interests).

Though the members of the first generation published only occasionally in the blogosphere, it later spawned a host of prolific young authors who also gained access to institutional positions. Most central was Gábor G. Fodor, a graduate of two political science institutes at ELTE and Corvinus, and who came to symbolize the success of the second generation: after completing a PhD on early twentieth-century Hungarian critiques of liberalism with István Schlett, he proceeded to work on the history of political ideas focusing on Voegelin. He was regarded as one of the most original and promising political scientists of his generation (winning several awards, including the prestigious Hungarian Science Academy Youth Prize in 2005). Fodor, a co-author with Lánczi, served as the Századvég director for research (until 2010) and then for strategy, and established the *888* news portal. Other well-known representatives of the second generation include Tamás Lánczi from the *Jobbklikk* blog (the son of András Lánczi), later to serve under Navracsics, and Márton Békés (also from the *Jobbklikk* and *konzervatorium* blogs) to become the head of research at the Terror Haza Museum (the museum for the victims of "20th-century dictatorships," established by the Fidesz government in 2002), and the journalist Bálint Ablonczi, one of the editors of the Fidesz-close *Heti Válasz* (a weekly publication established by the Fidesz government in the early 2000s).

Over a period of two-and-a-half decades the conservative milieu has grown diverse with a strong presence at universities but also in the form of think tanks, foundations, and media outlets. Some of the most important manifestations in terms of continued visibility in public life have emerged in close relationships with political parties: Századvég with Fidesz, and the Batthyány Lajos Foundation with the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Others have been rather short-lived, such as the Hayek Society established in 1999, of classical, laissez-faire liberal leanings (this initiative was brought back to life in 2014 as the fiercely anti-Fidesz Hayek Club). The 2000s also brought the more loosely-knit intellectual circles of the second generation, such as those that run different blogs: *Mandiner, Jobbklikk* or *Konzervatorium*. A recent addition is the Danube Institute founded in 2013 by the conservative Batthyány Foundation, which has had unprecedented success, mainly on issues relating to regional cooperation. It openly subscribes to classic liberal and conservative ideas, and is producing a blog which surveys international theoretical literature in this field. The institute is also closely connected with the *Hungarian Review*, which together with US and UK conservative think tanks with Thatcherite and Reaganite leanings, such as the Centre for Policy Studies or the Social Affairs Unit (London), try to counter the massive critiques that Orbán's reforms have received in the Western world. To be mentioned is also the Common Sense Society, which organizes regular events and regularly invites Western speakers to Hungary such as the British conservative thinker Roger Scruton of the American Enterprise Institute and Tilo Schabert, author of *Boston Politics*.

In what follows we study the ideas developed around two positions of central importance to Fidesz and its political project; the first one is relatively easy to identify, as it emerged from around the Századvég (Hungarian for "fin-desiècle") think tank and traces the problems of the country back to flaws in European, "institutionalist" thinking. The second position is hardly traceable to any organization and consists of intellectuals who joined Fidesz out of disillusionment with the liberal SZDSZ party (Alliance of Free Democrats) and its political alliance with the post-communist MSZP. The most prominent

exponent of this second position, Gyula Tellér, sees Hungary's problems not as having arisen from Western-influenced thinking, but from the outright enmity of international forces vis-à-vis the country.

The Századvég group

Századvég was founded in the early 1990s and earned the reputation of a respected think tank, initially only loosely affiliated with conservative politics. At the same time, its links with Fidesz have been intimate. Fidesz was founded in the dormitory of the University of Budapest's elite graduate law school, which established the social science journal *Századvég* that was highly critical of the communist regime. During the late 1990s, when Fidesz first came to power, this collaboration became more obvious. The think tank offered various consultancy-related work and started a postgraduate program in political management intended to be mainly a conservative recruiting pool—even if its graduates were employed also by other parties (László 2012). During most of the 2000s, Századvég remained critical of Fidesz' political activities, but after the 2010 Fidesz landslide election victory it became a major co-producer of governmental policies on the basis of consultancy contracts of close to 5 billion forints.[6]

The founder of the Századvég think tank, István Stumpf, was the head of the prime minister's office from 1998–2002. In 2010 he left his position as head of Századvég to become the Fidesz appointee to the Constitutional Court. Stumpf was followed as head of Századvég by András Lánczi, a political science professor at the Corvinus University in Budapest (Lánczi became rector there in 2016). Lánczi dedicated an important part of his academic career to the study and dissemination of the work of Leo Strauss, defending his dissertation on Strauss in 1993 in Budapest and publishing it as a monograph in 1999, under the title *Modernity and Crisis*. In 2002, already as head of the political science department at Corvinus, he published his *Konzervatív Kiáltvány* (conservative manifesto or proclamation), one of the few programmatic statements of Hungarian conservatism, and perhaps the only one written by a figure of Lánczi's public standing. The reception in Hungary's intellectual circles was wide, with numerous reviews and comments in leading journals, most importantly in Hungary's *Élet és Irodalom* (2002), the most prolific liberal weekly.

Lánczi's most important connection with Fidesz prior to 2010 was to Tibor Navracsics, currently Hungary's European Commissioner, himself a political scientist at Corvinus University in the 1990s who served in the first Orbán government as head of the communications department in the prime minister's office (under Stumpf again). Depicted as "the Right's spiritual leader" (Teczár 2016) during Fidesz' opposition years (2002–2010), Lánczi claims that he only met Orbán once, in 2002, in Navracsics' Fidesz office, when after an hour-long conversation Lánczi came to believe that Orbán was a person who was "sad in light of the 2002 electoral defeat, but implacably eager to understand" (Teczár 2016). In 2007, Lánczi established the Center for European Renewal, a pan-European organization of academics and politicians publishing the journal *The European Conservative*. Lánczi currently chairs the Amsterdam-based organization that includes members such as Roger Scruton and former university professor and current MEP representing the Polish party PiS, Ryszard Legutko.[7]

As head of Századvég, Lánczi was joined by another political scientist with an interest in political philosophy, his former student and colleague Gábor G. Fodor. Together they published in 2009 an edited volume entitled *A Dolgok Természete* (The Nature of Things, 2009), which attracted the participation of the most important names associated in Hungary with intellectual conservatism (not necessarily, however, also with Fidesz), such as Ferenc Horkay

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Hörcher, András Karácsony, Gergely Egedy, István Schlett, Márton Békés, and Balázs Ablonczy. Since 2010 Fodor has led the Századvég think tank as its strategy director; he is also in charge of the newly issued Századvég journal *National Interests* (a bi-annual publication, supplementing the Századvég think tank's decades-old homonymous publication). Fodor's social and political theory interest lies especially in the work of Eric Voegelin, an interest he shares with Lánczi.

Stumpf, Lánczi, and Fodor (the Századvég group) are perhaps the most important names associated with efforts to give the Orbán project a theoretical footing since the early 2000s. Far more than Tellér, who mainly published in a Hungarian-language journal, the Századvég group published widely (also in English) long before the 2010 elections. In what follows, we offer a summary of their ideas, arguing that there is a difference between Stumpf on the one hand, and conceptive ideologists Lánczi and Fodor on the other. The difference concerns how radical their critique of liberalism is, and whether they spell out their preferred alternative, conservatism. Stumpf's articles (including the ones he co-wrote with Fodor) are still reconcilable with the broad and diverse set of ideas on institutional reforms present in West European academic scholarship. In contrast, Lánczi and later also Fodor explicitly reject "institutionalist" solutions which they see as an ineffective approach to politics, not just in the case of Hungary, but also in Europe, and openly advocate for a different ideology, conservatism.

The "normative" state

Stumpf approaches the Hungarian state as an organization that has lost its "normative" credibility and is incapable of tackling problems such as corruption and poverty because the wider public deems it incompetent and immoral, which undermines its efforts. This reading of the state applies to the time periods when Fidesz was in opposition and the country was run by the "left-liberal" coalition between the liberal SZDSZ and the post-communist MSZP. One project in particular that these parties pursued and that Stumpf considers harmful was the concentration of power around the Ministry of Finance, leading to a situation of a "two-headed" government, that is, led by the prime minister and the finance minister. In contrast, Stumpf claims that the first Orbán government (1998–2002) tried to counter this situation by strengthening the prime-ministerial office—at that time, under the leadership of Stumpf himself—to become the real and single center of government (Stumpf 2009). After their return to power in 2002, the left-liberals again reversed these efforts, much to the disdain of Stumpf, who, in writings authored together with G. Fodor, calls his conception of the state "neo-Weberian," and further states that the concern with "normativity" is crucial to his approach, to be differentiated from and contrasted to that of New Public Management (NPM), which was strongly supported by the left-liberal Gyurcsány government (Fodor and Stumpf 2007).

This "neo-Weberian" conception is largely in line with mainstream developments in contemporary Western public administration scholarship emphasizing the necessity of a post-NPM paradigm (Ongaro 2015; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Dunn and Miller 2007; Randma-Liiv 2008). If this were the only ideational footing of the Orbán project, it could hardly explain the Fidesz preoccupation with power that is evident in the notion of the "central field of power" and, in particular, notions about the place, role, and legitimacy of the opposition. It should also not come as a surprise that Stumpf, despite being appointed by Fidesz to the Constitutional Court, grew increasingly critical of Orbán, often giving his support to the Court's indictments of Fidesz-initiated legislation.

Against post-communism's "flawed" modernity

Lánczi introduces a far more critical discussion of the political forces opposed to Fidesz. Stumpf's critique of the left-liberals basically consists of mismanagement accusations, and he traces the negative record of left-liberals back to the institutional arrangements reached in the "Round Table" negotiations of 1989. For Lánczi, the left-liberals not only mismanaged the country but are also wrong in principle. Their negative record cannot be explained by references to the Round Table accords but should be traced back to the problematic aspects of these forces' ideological underpinnings—liberalism and socialism (in its softened, social-democratic version). For Lánczi, these are political projects without moral guidance, but with ambitions of changing the world, and therefore are, unsurprisingly, bound to fail. Lánczi's proposed solutions go in the direction of returning politics to its moral grounding, to be sought in "rules of custom, tradition, and authority" (Lánczi 2013). The country's problems can be solved by such a reorientation, rather than by "institutionalist" projects, an approach he criticizes at length. Both Lánczi and Fodor have worked on placing these ideas in politico-philosophical contexts—that of the Straussian and especially Voegelinian critique of modernity and "modern" political projects such as, most importantly, liberalism, communism, and national-socialism, all projects promising and trying to achieve "paradise on earth." "Modernity," as manifested in the "twin projects" of liberalism and communism, becomes the central frame for condensing everything that for these conservatives is wrong about the present day in Hungary and Europe.

Radical critique and rejection of the Hungarian version of modernity can also be found in the writings of Fodor, the Századvég director for strategy, who wrote his PhD thesis on early twentieth-century Hungarian critiques of liberalism and went on to work on the history of political ideas, focusing on Voegelin while also addressing state theory and questions relating to political power (Fodor 2008). Together with István Stumpf and András Lánczi, he authored a series of articles describing the "strong state paradigm," or the concept of "hard government." A common denominator here is the critique of the "governance" paradigm of the West, which diffuses power and depoliticizes what are essentially political decisions. In contrast to the governance paradigm, G. Fodor proposes redefining the state around a moral, political leader, acting as a self-secure, masculine "Prince of Chaosmos." A central concern—the same as for Lánczi and Molnár—is post-communism. In the 2009 volume co-edited with Lánczi, G. Fodor argues that post-communism is best understood as the continuation of communism (an idea previously shared and formulated by Lánczi, also in English), using Marxism to depict the commonalities of the two periods—before and after 1989. Thus, what is Marxist about the twin liberal projects of democratization and marketization is the almost religious *belief* in the power of reforms and progress (Fodor 2009); instead of "reforming" the state, G. Fodor argues for "renovating" and returning to the "ancient" meaning and responsibility of politics: government, a responsibility that he argues is increasingly diminished or even negated in liberal thinking.

Importantly, there are notable commonalities between many of the ideas of Századvég intellectuals and the content of the "National Cooperation Proclamation" and the "National Cooperation Regime," two programmatic Fidesz documents adopted by the newly elected, conservative-dominated Hungarian Parliament in 2010. The "Proclamation," requiring its mandatory display on the walls of institutions such as military barracks, clearly distinguishes the period that started in 2010 from previous decades, the 45 years of communism and the "tumultuous" transition years (1989–2010). The result of the 2010 elections is praised as yet another "revolution," comparable to 1956. The "National Cooperation Regime" makes repeated use of such concepts as "bad government [or governance]" to describe the years of liberal and socialist rule, a key concept in the 2007/08 writings of Fodor and Stumpf. The

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parallels between "National Cooperation" documents and Századvég writings (including a defense of these documents by Fodor and other authors on the Századvég website, entitled "The End of Ideologies") lead some commentators to talk of the Századvég group as the "theorists" of the National Cooperation Regime (Böcskei 2013), although the authorship of the National Cooperation documents remains unclear.

Right-wing advisors

While G. Fodor's media presence and provocative verve has earned him a cynical Machiavellist reputation, newspaper reports suggest that his or Lánczi's personal influence over or appeal to Viktor Orbán are difficult to support with evidence. Although Századvég clearly provides important consultancy services to the government, the closeness of Orbán's positions to some of Lánczi and Fodor's ideas are possibly more an instance of ideational alignment than of influence of the latter over the former. This seems to be different in the case of Gyula Tellér, a sociologist and renowned poetry translator. As Orbán's "chief ideologue" (Enyedi 2016a), Fidesz's "main ideologue" (Mándi 2015), the "grey eminence" behind the prime minister (Ripp 2010), Tellér clearly stands out as a prominent conceptive ideologue and as the most experienced figure among the prime minister's five chief advisors and closest advisor from the mid-1990s on.

Tellér served as the head of the political analysis department of the Stumpf-led prime minister's office during Orbán's first (1998–2002) term in office and was a Fidesz MP in 2006–10. His conception of a "civic Hungary," of central importance to Fidesz' success in 1998, is still considered important by members of the Orbán government as it is a unique amalgam of classic liberalism and conservative thought (Mándi 2015, 29). This system defines the citizen as a self-responsible, but socially empathetic person striving for the common public good in a way very much in line with classic liberalism. Tellér rarely labels his political positions and more often uses the term "right-wing" rather than "conservative." He perceives Hungary, before the return to power of Fidesz, to have been the victim of international forces, from the US to Russia, the World Bank and the EU, and in particular what he sees as these forces' local representatives—the communists and the liberals. Tellér's analyses are imbued with mythical elements, as he sees such forces responsible for "centuries- or even millennia-old" subordination of local communities (such as "nations"). Tellér, though exceptional in terms of his personal influence on Orbán, is far from alone in his positions and is part of a wider current of intellectuals who joined the first Orbán cabinet as advisors.

For these intellectuals, the formation of a coalition government between liberals and post-communists in 1994 represents a key formative (but negative) experience; following the formation of that coalition, they either joined Fidesz or extended it their support, as they perceived it as the main "anti-communist" force. Key exponents of this group are Mária Schmidt, a historian based at the Pázmány Catholic University who also served as main advisor to Orbán in 1998–2002; or László Tóth (another Orbán advisor during the same years), author of numerous books taking issue with the continued presence in public life of figures close to or participating in the pre-1989 regime.[8] Only few share Tellér's mythical approach to world politics, tracing international conflicts back to millennia-old conflicts between good and evil, but one prolific author popularizing similar views is economist László Bogár, yet another former colleague of Tellér in the 1998–2002 Orbán cabinet.[9]

In fact, Schmidt and Tóth in 1998 published a volume, which Tellér also contributed to, that offers a good overview of the contours of this group (Schmidt and Tóth 1998). The unifying theme for the authors of the 1998 volume is the preoccupation with the "survival" of communism (that is, the

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continued public and political involvement of former communist officials) and the "anti-national" bent of the communists' and liberals' policies ranging from the economy to education.[10] Tellér's analysis in 1998 stands out for its radicality about the post-communist regime, accusing it of being even more successful than Stalinist communists of the 1950s in "breaking the nation's back."

Tellér's later political writings have been increasingly radical critiques of liberalism, which he calls either "(neo)liberalism" or even "SZDSZ liberalism" (using the pejorative Hungarian formulation *szadesz*). In a 2014 pamphlet, Tellér provides an in-depth analysis of the Hungarian political development of the last two decades, which he describes as a fight between "post-communism" and "regime change." At Orbán's request, Tellér's pamphlet was distributed to Fidesz MPs as a hands-on *vademecum* to help them make sense of the allegedly numerous accomplishments in Orbán's project of recent years (Tellér 2014). Tellér's 2014 essay was intensively discussed in the Hungarian press as the inspiration for and even the source (Csuhaj 2014) of Viktor Orbán's famous speech about the desirability of an "illiberal state." The claim that Orbán took inspiration from Tellér's essay seems to be true: Orbán's June 2014 speech indeed takes an entire passage from Tellér's March 2014 essay. This passage is also what caused the international media's initial attention to Orbán's speech, namely the critique of the liberal vision of society, as a reductionist vision that celebrates the individual and limits all individual duties to the sole one of respecting other individuals' freedom. For Tellér, individuals should act out of "deeper motivations" such as, most importantly, obligations toward the community.

> In real societies [author's note: for Tellér, liberalism abolishes the notion of society] such motivations commit since ancient times the members of the community to [positively] relating to life, children, the elderly, property, neighbors, the opposite sex, and to truth.
>
> (2014, 358)

Tellér's conception combines a quasi-Marxist perspective on structures such as the class of "large estate owners," with a focus on strengthening the middle classes that is congruent with classical liberal conceptions. Marxism nevertheless is guilty of undermining the moral foundations of the country: Tellér sees in Marxism—particularly the "Frankfurt postmarxist philosophical school" (Tellér 2014, 352)—a destructive and still relevant intellectual force. In contrast to Fodor, he does not trace the workings of "postmarxism" to flawed ideas of "reforms" and "progress," but instead discusses at length its destructive effects on society. As Enyedi notes, for Tellér "Globalization, neoliberalism, consumerism, privatization to foreign investors and cosmopolitanism" are all "interrelated and carefully managed processes aimed at establishing the world dominance of certain economic and political powers" (Enyedi 2016a, 11).

Yet in his 2009 text Tellér is quite explicit about these "certain external forces": "Israel, USA, EU, Russia, 'The Symbolical Investor' and 'his' international organizations: WB [World Bank], IMF [International Monetary Fund], WTO [World Trade Organization] and so on" (Tellér 2009, 984). Tellér adopts a mythical perspective, from which an ideal-typical actor—the "Symbolic Investor"—moves history over "hundreds, perhaps even better to say thousands of years" (Tellér 2009, 987). History thus becomes a mythical battle between the good (i.e. "national communities") and the evil deeds of the "Symbolic Investor" and the forces that represent him and enslave countries by using, in particular, the tool of the "debt trap," put to use against Hungary from the 1970s (Tellér 2009, 987; 2014). In an almost textbook example of anti-Semitism, another 2009 text depicts "Jews" as playing a central part in this conflict

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by bringing Stalinist communism to Hungary, and then "reforming it" against János Kádár (Tellér 2009, 349; 2014). His analysis recalls the almost century-old debate between cosmopolitan urbanists and populists in Hungary of the 1930s (Körösényi 1991) but extends it by applying the same categories of analysis also to the communist and post-communist periods and by framing "Jews" as an "anti-national" presence undertaking to enslave the country.[11]

Conclusions

In this chapter we have portrayed two intellectual positions that strove to formulate the ideational and ideological footing of the Orbán regime. On the one hand, there is what we called the "Századvég group," a group that is well anchored in the wider "conservative" scene in Hungary and partly also internationally and has attempted roughly since 2002 in a long series of publications to formulate new political ideas for influencing the decades to come. On the other hand, more right-wing intellectuals, serving in the first Fidesz cabinet as advisors to the prime minister, represent the other pole of Fidesz-aligned right-wing thinking. Tellér, Orbán's main advisor since 2010 and a key figure for the Fidesz program also before 2010, best represents this latter position that features no common formal affiliation except for Fidesz membership. Tellér seems to have less interest in influencing public or academic debates than does the Századvég group but is all the same credited with considerable influence over Orbán.

These two positions share one important feature: their point of departure is "post-communism," understood as a *deeply problematic political system* or *regime*. The authors of these two positions differ in their explanations of how far back and how deeply the roots of post-communism go: Stumpf only dates them back to the actual start of the post-communist period—the "Roundtable Accords." Lánczi and Fodor dig deeper and trace them to the very beginnings of "modernity." Going even further, Tellér sees post-communism as one side in an eternal battle between good and evil. The latter three intellectuals all emphasize that the liberal celebration of individual rights and freedom needs to be replaced by an order that commits individuals to community-based virtues, be they of Christian (Lánczi, Fodor) or more "ancient" (Tellér) origins. In this sense, these positions are indeed conservative and similar to those of authors elsewhere in Europe who seek to formulate a conservative consensus (see for instance the paleoconservative thinking of Roger Scruton, Goss 2006). And similar to conservative positions elsewhere, at least in this respect (Lakoff 2010 [1996]), the Hungarian conservatives' attack on "post-communism" is basically a moralizing frame: liberals and post-communists are guilty not so much of designing faulty interventions with false aims, but of ignoring questions of the morality of such interventions, and about the character of the interventionist design itself. Only a "normative" state, willing to and capable of recognizing and formulating normative issues, can deal with the country's problems. Tellér and the associated wider group of right-wing advisors and intellectuals disillusioned with liberalism go further, to make the nation into the central victim of dangerous liberalism.

It is striking that Századvég intellectuals' discourses mainly feature Western references. In contrast to the claims made about the "Eastern roots" of Hungary's illiberal democracy, as defined in Orbán's infamous illiberalism speech (Müller 2014; Simonyi 2014; Zakaria 2014), there is no evidence of an Eastern imprint on the ideational foundations of the new Hungarian regime. The reference sources of the Századvég group, consisting mostly of lawyers, historians, and political theorists, exhibit Western, conservative-leaning influences more than even autochthonous Hungarian sources. Many of these influences relate to questions about the "quality of democracy" and the necessity of a "hard government" (Fodor and Stumpf 2007). Another interesting,

often-cited reference is Norwegian sociologist Stein Ringen's work that develops an outcome-focused definition of democracy versus a procedural or liberal one (Ringen 2009). In this way, the mentioned Hungarian positions might in fact be seen as part of an international debate on the role of the state and contemporary representative democracy in the Western world.

Yet the Western conservative lineage that Hungarian intellectuals seek is a special one. With Leo Strauss and especially Eric Voegelin and Thomas Molnar, a lineage is constructed that allows Hungarian conservatives to critically distance themselves from conservatism in the form of classical, laissez-faire liberalism that in Hungary is best embodied by the Hayek Society (currently the Hayek Club that claims to be the right-wing "capitalist" opposition to the ruling Fidesz). Their preoccupation is not so much with the founding father of capitalist laissez-faire thought (Adam Smith) and its later advocates (Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman), but, in line with Strauss, Voegelin, and Molnar, with the legacy of ancient Greek statecraft and in particular the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. This preoccupation translates into a rejection of "modernity" understood as the Enlightenment challenging central political and religious authorities and culminating in the 1789 Revolution. Given this approach, it is no wonder that their writings are particularly at odds with the idea of an "open society" as posited by Karl Popper, that is, as an achievement to be defended precisely against the "Spell of Plato" (the subtitle of Popper's first volume of *The Open Society and its Enemies*). From this perspective, the Századvég intellectuals' unequivocal support for an "active" state looks less reconcilable with (Western) conservative ideas highly skeptical of strong states. Yet importantly here, the debate is not so much about the limits of the state, but about addressing a problematic situation in which the liberal state was very far from the conservative intellectuals' notion of the public good, and incapable of giving society a normative orientation. In contrast to such a situation, conservative intellectuals portray the ideal Hungarian state as a "neo-Weberian" state model thought best to replace the "wholesale sell-out" of public assets and the excessive embracement of the ideas of "new public management" by previous (socialist) governments (Stumpf 2009). Instead of a market-oriented, "lean" government, espoused but never really implemented by the socialists, which was seen to have served foreign business interests to the detriment of public good, Hungarian conservatives envision a new, centralized state which should follow the ideal of an effective, "hard government."

Notes

1 Fidesz is the acronym for *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, which translates as the "Alliance of Young Democrats."

2 For a full English transcript of the speech, see http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/10592.

3 For a discussion of the context in which Orbán made this statement, see Balogh (2012).

4 Thomas Molnar (1921–2010), a Hungarian-born American conservative and Catholic philosopher, friend of Russell Kirk and admirer of Eric Voegelin, was as committed to criticizing liberalism as he was to taking issue with socialism. Perhaps most interestingly for the Hungarian conservatives studied here who generally oppose liberalism, Molnar also criticized American conservatism of the "optimist[ic]"—the "what-can-we-do-about-it…" type—as being just "an updated copy of nineteenth-century liberalism," and basically committing the same error of "assum[ing] that man is free to shape [his] destiny"; Molnar argued that Voegelin shared exactly the same positions (Molnar 1981, 383).

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5 Short for *Utolsó Figyelmeztetés* ("The Final Warning").

6 The governmental contracts with Századvég in 2016 were valued at 38 million euro in total and were shrouded in mystery. It took a lengthy trial for the press to get a glimpse into the 77,000 pages delivered by Századvég to the government in 2012–14 for 12 million euro; see Erdélyi (2016) and http://index.hu/belfold/2012/04/02/a_bizalmas_think_tank/; http://valasz.hu/itthon/az-onmerseklet-mindig-nagyon-jo-tanacsado-44957/.

7 For more information see the Center's webpage at www.europeanrenewal.org/main/page.php?page_id=1.

8 Another well-known politician disillusioned with the liberals' decision to form a government with the former communists is Péter Tölgyessy, a leader of the liberal SZDSZ party and of the parliamentary group, who, in a way similar to Tellér, switched from SZDSZ to Fidesz while a member of the 1998–2002 parliament.

9 Bogár often publishes in "traditionalist" outlets of the far right, promoting a vision of society uncorrupted by "modernity" and the return to an allegedly original religion of humanity, and praising such far-right thinkers as Julius Evola (a chief reference for Italian rightist terror groups of the 1970s). Yet long before the rise of the far-right party "Jobbik" and its traditionalist publication "Magyar Hüperión," it was Fidesz that backed the creation of an institute dedicated to Bélá Hamvas, Hungary's key exponent of traditionalism. The institute, which still exists today, is headed by Fidesz politician Ágnes Hankiss and sees its central mission in researching the potential of "modern conservatism."

10 For a sympathetic review of the book see Posá (1998).

11 For the framing of "Jews" as an anti-national force, which characterizes much of anti-Semitic discourse, see Weyand (2016).

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