



Rhetoric and Communications E-Journal, issue 23, July 2016, <http://rhetoric.bg/>,
<http://journal.rhetoric.bg/>

Електронно научно списание „Реторика и комуникации“, бр. 23, юли 2016 г.
<http://rhetoric.bg/>

Rhetoric, Communication, Media

Populism in post-communist Romania and Hungary: Representing cultural and political otherness

Cornelia Ilie

Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the characteristic manifestations and discursive practices of populism in post-communist Romania and Hungary¹, with a special focus on the varying perceptions of cultural and political otherness. Two issues concerning the nature and manifestations of populism and nationalism have been particularly examined: (i) reconceptualisations of the notion of populism, and (ii) the relationship between two overlapping phenomena, i.e. nationalism and populism. The main findings show that in both countries, the populist discourse contains the glorification of history mystifying the heroic past, while displaying a strong bias towards nationalistic feelings that are intended to foster a division between “Us” and “Them”. Religion is built in the nationalistic populist discourse in both countries, where messianic notions are also present in various forms. Populist rhetoric operates in both Romania and Hungary with a strong, hyperbolic, language as a result of, as well as a generator of, strong divisions between “Us” and “Them”.

Keywords: populist / populism; nationalist / nationalism; the other / otherness; post-communist; populist rhetoric; Romania; Hungary.

Introduction

Populism is alive and thriving in Europe. Traditionally, populism was associated with a “development crisis”, causing social and psychological disruption following aggressive modernisation and leading to an idealisation of the pre-change period. There are some similarities between the present context and previous historical circumstances which generated populism. In the ‘old’ Europe it was globalisation and the growing ‘eurocracy’ that alienated many voters. In the ‘new’ Europe, the major overhaul caused by the transition from command to market economy compares well to the early 20th century contexts when populism developed. Both instances seem to have favoured populism as a frame of mind that follows abrupt societal transformation, defined by fear of and resistance to change, nostalgia for a golden period and a sort of persecution syndrome.

Whereas right wing populism continues to be active in the old “western” Europe, populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe connect to a multitude of emerging political and ideological positions. The populist parties in Eastern and Central Europe share a critique of the political establishment, but differ with respect to their policies and core support groups:

there is right- and left wing partisanship, as well as an agrarian version of populism. So populism is a tangible ingredient of the current political reality, even if occasionally the electorate seems to signal a certain fatigue (Jaroslaw Kaczynski's ugly and populist government in Poland was unexpectedly defeated in October's general election as in the Polish electorate on 21 November 2007).

Referring to populism in Eastern Europe, Ivan Krastev claimed: "While the ex-dissidents dominate politics and the ex-communists dominate business, populism gives a voice to the losers from the transition period." [1]. A process of political radicalisation of both sides of the main political cleavage (generally the left-right one) was particularly noticeable in Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic. An obvious consequence was the lack of cooperation across the cleavage line and in political instability. This phenomenon was accompanied by the electoral advance of populist groups, whether extremist or relatively democratic, to the detriment of classical "ideological" parties (in Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland). Easily recognisable populist manifestations tend to be recurrent attempts to influence public opinion, manipulate elections, and aggressively denigrate political opponents.

When the new populists from Romania joined the European Parliament in 2007 a new political club emerged which initiated an era of cross-European socialisation of such like-minded parties. As has been noted by Mungiu-Pippidi (2007), although radical populists in Central and Eastern Europe may use more violent language than West European populists, none of their programmes features truly anti-democratic policies. While the values promoted by Romanian populists in their speeches are neither liberal nor democratic, these radical populists bring to the fore issues of great concern to the public at large, which may account to a certain extent for their popularity.

This claim does not seem to be entirely valid for Hungary, though. In Hungary, right after the political changes in 1989-1990, political populism used to be characteristic for the extreme right political parties and was focused mostly on anti-semitic and strongly nationalistic statements. Moreover, in the last few years of the 1990s, the biggest right wing party, the Fidesz-MPSZ (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union), used to build its political propaganda on nationalistic arguments, focusing on the Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary. Some years later, however, in 2004 the referendum about the "double citizenship" for the Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries failed, and, in the meantime, nostalgic feelings for the poor but safe life style during the communist era have acquired new strength, and the new political context has changed the populist agenda as well. The focus has turned towards social populism, and the left wing Socialist Party also started to use more and more populist arguments. So now, the populist arguments show up very specifically in the Hungarian political arena: in the race for the votes, both the biggest "conservative" and the biggest socialist party use social populism in their argumentation and political messages, while radical nationalistic and social populism is increasingly used in the rhetorics of the extreme right.

This paper sets out to explore the characteristic manifestations and discursive practices of populism in post-communist Romania and Hungary, with a special focus on the varying perceptions of cultural and political otherness. Two issues concerning the nature and manifestations of populism and nationalism will be particularly examined: (i) reconceptualisations of the notion of populism, and (ii) the relationship between two overlapping phenomena, i.e. nationalism and populism.

The notion of populism

In many respects populism is too eclectic a notion to be an ideology in the way that liberalism, socialism, or conservatism are.

“On the one hand, the concept of ‘populism’ goes back to the American farmers’ protest movement at the end of the nineteenth century; on the other, to Russia’s narodniki around the same period. Later, the concept was used to describe the elusive nature of the political regimes in the Third World countries governed by charismatic leaders, applied above all to Latin American politics in the 1960s and 1970s.” [2].

The rise of populism indicates the decline of the attractiveness of liberal solutions in the fields of politics, economy, and culture, and the growing popularity of the politics of exclusion. Populist movements have exploited the general feeling of public discontent in the mid-1990s, when most people felt profoundly unhappy, they had had enough of official messages asking for patience until the “reforms” started to work, and they found anti-capitalist, and particularly anti-privatisation sentiments attractive. The typically populist message claims that politics is the expression of the general will of the people and that social change is possible only through

the radical change of the elite.

Populism is a problematic term to define since it is a word excessively used both in the media and in highly specialised discourses, involving endless semantic associations and connotations. In current media debate, the term “populism” is used in two senses: to refer either to an emotional, simplistic and manipulative discourse that is directed at people’s “gut feelings”, or to opportunistic policies aimed at “buying” people’s support. Thus, it is a most difficult task to set up and critically investigate a typology of populism, since individual varieties of populism occur in very particular socio-historical and cultural conditions, and display extremely varied and mixed manifestations.

Since there is no general agreement about an archetypal form of populism it is hardly possible to find an acceptable point of reference. Given these circumstances, it is reasonable to start with a historical survey of the most significant moments and manifestations of populist thinking, acting and behaviour, and to continue investigating individual case studies, namely populism in post-communist Romania and Hungary.

The notion of populism is derived from the Latin ‘populus’ (= people, folk, the masses), in the sense of “nation” as a whole, not in the sense of multiple individuals. The etymological implications can be recognised in the fact that populism normally refers to a discourse which claims to support “the people” versus “the elites”. The modern use of the notion of populism seems to originate in the American Populist Party which was traced back to the 1850s. This notion may have different implications in different countries. Although it need not have a particular ideology, it may involve either a political philosophy and programme urging social and political system changes, and/or a rhetorical style deployed by spokespersons of socio-political movements confronting the existing party-political system.

What appears to distinguish populism from other “isms” is the tendency to promote simplistic political explanations and solutions by invoking “common sense” and “us-against-them” thinking patterns. Another prototypical characteristic of populism is the protest against the “gap” between political decision-makers and the majority of the people, while advocating the need for several referenda.

Lexical compounds containing the prefix “ethno-“ have often been purposefully used and have developed certain semantic associations with the notion of populism. The morpheme “ethnos” is derived from the Greek ethnos, (= people, nation, class), signifying a “band of

people living together, nation, people”, or “people of one’s own kind – race or nationality - who share a distinctive culture”. Whereas the original use of “ethnos” – the root of “ethnic” – was to designate those outside the city-state (the ‘demos’), the term “ethnic” later referred to a nation or a people. “Ethno” was used to form modern compounds such as ethnology (1842, by John Sturart Mill) and ethnocentric (1900, which was a technical term in social sciences until it began to be more widely used in the second half of the 20th century).

The term “ethnicity” seems to have originated after the Second World War, but its etymological roots are much older. They reach back to the first Greek usage in Homer, where it refers to a host or tribe, be it of friends or fighting men, or of groups like ‘ethnos Lukiōn’, ‘ethnos Achaiōn’. Pindar refers to ethnos of men and women, whereas Plato describes the ethnos of heralds. What these usages appear to have in common is that the groups in question possess certain common cultural, and in some case, physical attributes. The respective groups also appear to have some territorial referent. Herodotus appeared to consider that the cognate notion of “genos” referred to a smaller kinship group, a sub-division of “ethnos”. The Romans seemed to use “genos” to refer to larger civilised peoples, other than themselves, the *populus romanus*. For the Romans, the notion of “nation” was reserved for distant, usually barbaric tribes. Only in the Middle Ages did it begin to acquire its modern usage, alongside the old Roman usage of “genos” [3].

Modern and post-modern democracies are being confronted in different ways with populist political movements. The notion of democracy, whose etymological meaning is “power of the people”, derives from the Greek ‘dēmos’ (δῆμος = people, the common people, the populace of a state) and *kratos* (κράτος = force or power). Historically, the Greek ‘demos’ has a further meaning, namely “district or municipality, an administrative area covering a city or several villages together”. Unlike populism, the notion of democracy is associated with the deliberate involvement of individuals as members of a particular socio-political entity. Its negative counterpart, demagoguery, or demagoguery (Br.), derives from *dēmos* (δῆμος = people) and *agōgos* (= leading) from *agein* (ἄγειν = to lead). In ancient times a demagoguery was regarded as the strategy used by a leader championing the cause of the common people. Nowadays it refers to political strategies used for obtaining and gaining political power by appealing to the popular prejudices, emotions, fears and expectations of the public, typically via passionate rhetoric and propaganda, and often using nationalist or populist themes.

It has often been pointed out that populist strategies are in several ways similar and/or complementary to demagoguery. Like populists, demagogues are leaders or spokespersons who make use of widespread prejudices and false claims/ promises in order to gain power. However, there are also inherent distinctions between the two notions, since populism is most frequently the product, as well as the cause, of the inadequacies of democratic regimes. Demagoguery can be regarded mainly as the rhetorical process and product of political agents leading movements of popular discontent. The parallels and overlaps between democracy and populism can be found in many democratic countries.

Demagogues resort to popular appeals when delivering distorted interpretations of facts and events. Populist interpretations make frequent use of the argumentative fallacy according to which large quantities or large numbers are able to automatically ensure high quality: they want to persuade people about the fallacious idea that the greater the number of people involved in a particular movement, the higher its democratic quality or value. For populists, it is not the people, but a historically situated people, and the appeal to people co-occurs with the manipulation of the electorate.

The famous motto “Government of the people, by the people, for the people” (uttered by President Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg address) is often misused. Populism pretends to be democratic, but in reality it often contradicts the spirit and structure of democracy by the very fact that it is promoted by self-proclaimed, usually unaccountable elites or anti-elites, pretending to embody the features, claims and values of the people.

Brief survey of a modern typology of populism

An important landmark in the scholarly history of populism was the congress organised in 1967 at the London School of Economics and whose proceedings were published by Ionescu and Gellner (1969) [4] as the first major comparative study of populism. Some of the contributors insist that populism is not an ideology, but rather a syndrome. Historically, some of the easily recognisable negative aspects of populism are the manipulation of the voters by opportunistic and often charismatic individuals. The populist discourse displays rhetorical devices of glorification of historical and cultural myths as well as demagogical strategies for motivating and mobilising the citizens. Populist phenomena can often be perceived as closely intertwined with and reinforced by dangerous ideological tendencies, such as the extreme right, ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

One of the latest of definitions of populism was given by Albertazzi and McDonnell who, in their volume *Twenty-First Century Populism*, define populism as pitting “a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice” [5]. Worth mentioning is that one of the initial meanings of the people’s power is generally recognizable in the 1787 Constitution of the U.S.A.: “We the people of the United States ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” This use lays the basis of the democratic concept of people as citizens endowed with both rights and obligations in a state characterized by the rule of law. As has been shown by Pombeni (1997) [6], in the French Constitutions the notion of ‘people’ acquires different semantic meanings due to particular lexical co-occurrences: “les représentants du peuple français, constitués en Assemblée nationale ...” (la Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen du 26 août 1789). Later on, in the 1781 Constitution, the sovereignty of the people is enacted through the ‘nation’: “La Souveraineté est une et indivisible ... Elle appartient à la Nation; aucune section du peuple, ni aucun individu, ne peut s’en attribuer l’exercice”. Moving closer to our times, both notion of ‘people’ and ‘nation’ are replaced by ‘Français’ in the 1848 Constitution: “Au nom du peuple français, l’Assemblée nationale promulgue la Constitution dont la teneur suit.” Pombeni also points out that in Germany, Chancellor Bismarck exploited a significant equivocation of populism: by means of universal suffrage he re-directed the initiative of political classes towards a consensus-oriented attitude favouring the government. In Britain, the Liberal politician William Gladstone resorted to the support of the people as a means of legitimating the campaign launched against the ruling classes by a sort of alternative ruling class deemed more competent for the task of leadership. According to his populist model, ordinary parliamentary elections were considered a measure of the political consensus and Parliament represented the legitimation arena. In Edwardian England, popular conservatism preferred to refer to nation or country, rather than to people.

Recent scholarship has also discussed populism as a rhetorical style. Leaders of populist movements in recent decades have claimed to be on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, while some populists claim to be neither “left wing”, “centrist” nor “right wing”. Often populist movements employ dichotomous rhetoric, and claim to represent the majority

of the people. Many populists appeal to a specific region of a country or to a specific social class, such as the working class, middle class, or farmers or simply “the poor”.

Populism in post-communist Romania

The changes of post-communist government in Romania over the past twenty-five years have not brought the citizens the promised welfare, which may account for the exponential rise of populist message bearers. According to Guy Hermet (2007) [7], there are two preferred discursive registers of populist politicians, namely emotion and proximity, which are meant to enhance the unity of thought and feeling between populist politicians and the masses. While ignoring the complexity of social reality and political action, representatives of populist parties use emotional appeals related to the basic needs and demands of ordinary people. At the same time, their practices sideline democratic and institutional rules when making electoral promises that exceed their institutional attributions.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor (1949-2015) and Eugen Barbu, two former sycophants of Ceaușescu’s regime, founded the Greater Romania Party (PRM), a variant of post-totalitarian authoritarianism. The party membership was a collection of retired Securitate and army officers, as well as fierce nationalists. Under Vadim Tudor’s leadership, the party’s success grew steadily, peaking in the 2000 elections, when it became the largest party in opposition. During the elections in Romania in 2000, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, regarded by some as a charismatic populist leader, emerged as the main challenger to the then ex-communist president Ion Iliescu. This spelt a defeat for politics and a return to the populist environment of 1990 with residual communist attitudes and a preference for strong leadership.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor was a former Ceaușescu “court” propagandist and poet whose radical populist doctrine combined right-wing elements with left-wing ones. He presented himself as an opponent to both current and former rulers. He got support from categories of people who blamed the failure of transition on the political elite, rather than on the legacy of communism and the various groups opposed to reform. According to a poll commissioned by ProTV, a major Romanian TV network, (and reported by Mungiu-Pippidi), the PRM voters were male, unemployed and poor residing in small towns and in moderately prosperous areas, moderately educated, especially graduates of vocational schools. These environments were the urban neighbourhoods created by the command economy and bankrupted by the transition.

The strong position of Corneliu Vadim Tudor’s PRM was to a large extent the result of the postcommunist vacuum with deep social and economic problems and the pressures of modernisation. The development of his party was a reaction to a situation of generalised popular discontent and frustration. It relied on a combination of revived religious Orthodoxy and rabid nationalism, which created a strong sense of national messianism. The message of Vadim Tudor’s political programme drew on deep-rooted beliefs that the Romanian nation has a special historical mission to accomplish.

The populist discourse of Corneliu Vadim Tudor’s Greater Romania Party (PRM)

Special attention should be paid to the problem of the language of populist politicians in connection with historical mythology and memory. Concerning the most frequently used stereotypes in the political language, it is interesting to find that stereotypes are double-edged swords in politics. On the one hand, they can be misused in manipulating public opinion and electors. On the other, in order to achieve political aims it is necessary to make them explicit. Stereotypes serve not only to achieve political aims, but if they are ignored in political

discourses and practices, they can become a pitfall for politicians, regardless of the great and useful ideas they advocate.

A careful examination of the PRM website clearly indicated that the public discourse informed by the PRM doctrine was constructed in terms of doomsday language: ‘catastrophe’, ‘economic disaster’, ‘constant decline’, ‘national robbery’, ‘famine’, ‘programmed genocide in the field of health care, work force training, national defence and military system, as well as the redistribution of private properties’.

A recurrent PRM slogan was “Unity in prosperity”, which is described as a central party duty, as a summary of the political programme. The following colourful motto was attributed to Corneliu Vadim Tudor: “Decât o democrație bolnavă, mai bine o dictatură sănătoasă.” (Better a healthy dictatorship than a sick democracy).

PRM was euphemistically described as “the party of the national alternative” engaged in the Battle for Greater Romania. It is significant that, like other Central and Eastern European populist parties, the PRM had a moderately formulated political programme:

- to ensure the welfare of both the citizen and the society, in both the public and the national interest
- to bring together citizens united by common ideas and interests devolving from democratic, humanist and Christian convictions
- to promote and disseminate the national doctrine of PRM

The explicitly promoted PRM policies do not necessarily and explicitly feature truly antidemocratic principles, such as abolishing the rights of minority groups. The following are some of the goals and policies featured in the party programme:

- ‘As a NATO and EU member state, Romania will adopt a position of dignity and responsibility in inter- and extra-European relations, a policy of full equality for all the peoples of the planet, condemning all discriminatory criteria of a racial, religious, cultural, economic, etc. nature.’
- ‘Romanians, irrespective of the place where they live on the planet and of the name they are known by are an inseparable part of the Romanian nation.’
- ‘All citizens of Romania are entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities.’
- ‘It guarantees to the right to education in the official language of the Romanian state.’
- ‘All political and media propaganda will promote the correct image of Romania in keeping with the truth and the national interest.’
- ‘In a true European spirit, Romania will militate for the economic development and the regional and inter-regional relations in the old area of Oriental Romanity.’

The popularity enjoyed by the promoters of PRM policies can be accounted for by the fact that they took up issues that were of great concern to the public. The fundamentals of the GRP Romanian national doctrine were based on a couple of easily identifiable populist goals:

(i) Nostalgia of the past, which also includes a programmatic legacy from the Ceaușescu era: “The natural tendency of people, nations and humanity as a whole is the eternal return to

the roots, to the lost paradise, to the golden age. More than that, we are witnessing nowadays the symbolic reconstruction, in a spiritual dimension, of the Roman Empire.” (Corneliu Vadim Tudor – statement in the Romanian Parliament)

(ii) Enlightened nationalism conceived of as a reaction to earlier political actions of de-nationalisation of Romanian communities that are nowadays outside Romania’s national borders, such as the Republic of Moldova.

As a result of the parliamentary elections in Romania on 30th November 2008, the two major radical right populist parties disappeared from the main political stage. The newly introduced electoral system, that of mixed member proportional representation (MMP), produced some interesting results. As such, PRM that since 1991 has represented the radical right pole in Romanian politics, failed to attain the 4% threshold for any of the two chambers of the Romanian Parliament. With less than half a million votes, PRM managed to poll 3.15% for the lower Chamber of Deputies, and 3.57% for the Senate. This practically interrupted Vadim Tudor’s, PRM’s unquestioned leader, presence in the Romanian legislative fora.

The other populist contender, the New Generation Party (Partidul Noua Generație, PNG-CD), had an even poorer performance. With only 2.27% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies, and 2.53% for the Senate, the party was confined to a presence at local level (where it received some 1203 seats in the local councils, of 37,915 nation-wide). As a consequence of these results, the party announced that it entered a period of “preservation”. George Becali, the colourful leader of PNG (New Generation Party), failed to become a Romanian version of Silvio Berlusconi. Even though he was the main shareholder of the *Steaua* football club, a famous name in Romanian football, he did not manage to use this successfully in politics. According to the Romanian political analyst Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, “Mr Becali satisfies an important need in the voters right now - the need to denounce the whole corruption of the political system”. Explicitly displaying his Christian faith, Becali also engaged in publicised charities, claiming he was picked by God to become rich in order to help the poor and save Romania from its current difficulties. Moreover, he also declared that “western Christian democracy needs to be enriched by Eastern Orthodoxy”.

After failing to win any seats in the 2012 national elections and the 2014 EU elections, and especially after the passing away of its leader – Corneliu Vadim Tudor – in September 2015, PRM is now totally absent from the political arena.

Populism in post-communist Hungary

John Lukács, the Hungarian-American historian and political thinker, noted in his book how democracies have been degenerated into populism and popular nationalism (2005) [8]. According to Lukács, the difference between left and right is less and less relevant, and a new period of “patriotic right” vs. “nationalistic right” is emerging. Although Lukács’s observations are based on his analysis of American politics, his view about the merging of left and right political ideologies applies to Hungary as well.

Before 1990, political populism was certainly present in the political discourse in Hungary. It was actually the rhetorical basis of the “people’s republic” claiming that the legitimacy of the government and of the state party was given by “the people” as a whole, homogeneous unit.

The Hungarian communist populist discourse is of interest also from a linguistic point of view. The focus of the following analysis will be on the evolution and development of current political populist discourse(s), keeping in mind that these populist discourses go back to a certain extent to the rhetorical practice of the pre-1990 period.

Already during the campaign of the first free elections in 1990, the first streams of populist discourse appeared in the rhetoric of public speech. The leading idea of the stronger one was the combatant and “relentless” anti-communism, including personal retaliation for the four decades of communism. The other idea was a combination of strong anti-communist emotions and a romantic notion of the mythical Hungarian history according to which the National Assembly should not be a representative body but, as assumed to have been in ancient times, “every Hungarian” should have the right to take part directly in the decision making process. The pattern followed by these rather marginalised groups is the idealised image of the nomadic times, as well as that of early Feudalism in Hungary, by extrapolating the nobility rights to the “people” in a “refurbished” historical myth.

While these populist streams are present in current political discourse, they have become, however, more and more marginalised and isolated. However, their representatives have received increased publicity only recently, when, together with stronger and more articulated groups, they took part in the street riots in the autumn of 2006.

Currently, two main streams of populist political discourse are present in Hungary.

One displays the well known features of populist discourses in other political cultures and may be regarded as “nationalistic” populism. Its outstanding features are the following:

- A very strong sense of division between “us” and “them”. The members of the “us” group are right whatever they do, “them” are always wrong, whatever they do. E.g. if someone turns out to have been a Communist secret agent from the “us” group, he/she is a victim of the regime in contrast with the members of “them” group who, in such a case are traitors and hence unreliable persons.
- “Us” are the only legitimate representatives of the Hungarian people, because they actually feel what it means “being Hungarian”. “Them” are cosmopolitans or even “foreign-hearted”.
- “Us” are the legitimate owners and users of the national symbols (tricolor, flags, coat of arms) and therefore, instead of party symbols, the national symbols are used at party meetings.
- “Us” are the legitimate owners of the historical heritage, especially that of the 1956 revolution. Members of “them”, even if they were condemned to death after 1956 (but the sentence had been changed later) are not “real” ’56 fighters as they have chosen to belong to the “them” group.
- All national success belongs to the “us” group, e.g. winning in sport competitions.
- “Us” are the true bearers of Christianity. Very often this feature contains anti-semitic feelings, on a large scale, from hidden to openly exhibited ones.
- “Us” are the ones who “truly” care about the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries.
- The concepts of “nation” and “state” has been vaguely merged. “Us” represents not only the “true nation” but also the “true citizens”. Parliamentary elections are accepted to be legitimate only if “us” win.
- There is a strong nostalgia for the heroic Hungarian history, mostly for the nomadic past, and a vision of a messianic role: just as Hungary was previously regarded as the

“protecting bastion” in the battles against the Ottomans, Hungarians are now looked upon as guardians of moral values rising against both the pop culture and capitalist power of the Western World, and the lingering communism.

- Protectionism against globalisation, economic capital and traditional culture is often combined with open or hidden anti-semitism.

These features generally co-occur in the rhetorics and in the non-verbal behaviour of the right wing political groups and parties, including the biggest opposite party, the Fidesz-MPSZ. The difference between various extremist groups lies only in the covert or overt use of these populist elements. At the “hard” edge of the scale is the Jobbik party (“For a Better Hungary”) and its satellite groups which are openly racist (they have built up a strong propaganda against the Roma population), anti-semitic, anti-EU, anti-capitalist, nationalistic (they use the pre-Trianon “Big Hungary” map as a symbol), etc. Jobbik had an unexpected success at the EU Parliamentary elections in June 2009 when it obtained 14.77% of the votes and sent 3 MPs to the EUP (out of 22 MPs which is Hungary’s quota). Fidesz is situated more or less (but not always) towards the “soft” edge of the scale, its messages being more covert and stylistically less radical.

To give a few examples: Fidesz as a party does not launch openly anti-capitalist, anti-EU, anti-Roma and anti-semitic messages but does not exclude its radical MPs if they do so. The extreme right groups and parties that were not parliamentary forces in the 2006—2010 term, tried to violently spoil the national holidays where the socialist Prime Minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány delivered speeches, in order to show that they did not accept him as a legitimate leader. Fidesz-MPSZ members chose an intra-parliamentary tool to express the same notion: they left the room whenever the PM was speaking in Parliament. Whereas the tools are different, the political message is the same: the governing socialists are not considered legitimate representatives of “the Hungarian people”, even if the majority of Hungarian voters elected them. In addition, there is a remarkable overlap in respect of supporters, as some Fidesz MPs are regular participants, even spokespersons and promoters of the actions of extreme right groups. The leader of Jobbik comes from the same political organization - “civic circle” (several “civic circles” were established by Fidesz after 2002) where the leader of Fidesz is also a member. The verbal rhetoric used by Jobbik and Fidesz promoters is almost identical: the PM is a “habitual liar”, “carpet-bugger”, “hustler”, “idiot”, “debauched”, etc., their political rivals are “delinquents”, they “destroy Hungary” and “do mafia politics”. The government is responsible for the “catastrophic” situation of the economy and caused a general “disaster”.

Racism towards Romas, as well as anti-semitism, constitute a central element in the nationalistic populist discourse of Jobbik. Both concepts are based on ethnocentrism, on the idea that the “Others” are to be blamed for whatever calamities are affecting the “Hungarians”, i.e. those Hungarian citizens who are supporters of nationalistic ideas. In this discourse, the two groups, Romas and Jews are situated at the opposite ends of the socio-economic scale, a large part of the Roma population living deep under the average living standards, while functional analphabetism and unemployment is higher than in other social groups. In Hungarian stereotypical public discourse Romas are to be blamed for their own poverty and social marginalisation on the allegation that they are too lazy to study and to work, preferring the more comfortable solution of living on social security. Jobbik built this

element of public discourse into their political rhetoric and also added the increasingly accepted view about Romas being criminals. Recently an old term, officially used during the Kádár-era but later abandoned, i.e. “gypsy criminalism” (cigánybűnözés), has emerged in Jobbik’s politicians’ speeches. This term is meant to suggest that the Romas commit more crimes than others and that they are genetically wired to do so. On the other hand, Jews (whoever they are, since there is not a religious or even an ethnic term with this usage) are blamed by Jobbik for being “stranger-hearted”, who want to exploit Hungary’s riches and sell them to foreigners. In both cases the underlying idea is that groups of “foreigners” threaten the well-being of “Hungarians”. Consequently, one goal of this kind of discourse is to sharpen the differentiation between “real” Hungarians and other groups, since being “other” is in itself a stigma. Anti-semitic statements are usually conveyed less directly than anti-Roma statements.

The other stream of populism, which may be called social populism, exhibits a number of left wing features. This left wing populist discourse can be seen to actually include two discourses. One is represented by the rhetorics of the right wing Fidesz, which is rather odd since this party declares itself “conservative” and “right wing”. The reason why a “conservative” party would turn to social populism in its rhetorics is twofold. As mentioned earlier, in December 2004 a referendum initiated by the “World Association of Hungarians” failed in their initiative to grant Hungarian citizenship automatically to Hungarians living outside Hungary as citizens of the neighbouring countries. This failure was a clear indication that nationalistic populism had become weaker than it used to be, so the nationalistic sense of the Fidesz rhetoric has weakened and has started to be combined with social populism.

The kind of social populism promoted by Fidesz builds on the nostalgic feelings towards the Kádár-era (1956—1989) when people did not have freedom but felt safe. They all had jobs, however poorly paid, poverty was a forbidden topic to talk about and there were no huge differences between people in terms of wealth. Food, electricity and heating were cheap, as the state provided for these basic life necessities. The general view in Hungary nowadays is still that the state, on its own, has money and it should give more to the people. At the same time, there does not seem to be any awareness about the connection between taxes and the budget. So the Kádárist nostalgia is a powerful tool in populist campaigns and it helps to attract the votes of disappointed citizens. Using these nostalgic feelings, one of the main demands of Fidesz addressed to the government is that the government “should not allow” the increase in the price of heating gas, irrespective of the price of gas on the world market. Another demand is that farmers should get compensations if the crop is not good, and they should also get compensation if the crop is good and prices are low. This nostalgia was expressed in the main Fidesz campaign slogan for the 2006 elections, after 4 years of Social democratic-Liberal government: “Our living standards are worse than 4 years ago”. At the same time there was a spectacular change in the framing of campaign images and visual contexts. The earlier “civic” and yuppie party activists turned into ordinary people living in big high rise residential areas, and tried to imitate the look of poorer people. Even the clothing style of leading party members has changed as they started to appear officially without a tie, and started to wear less trendy and poorer-looking shirts and clothes.

A special strand of social populism occurs in the rhetorics of the Social-democrats explaining why they do not want to continue implementing the previously initiated economic and systemic reforms (in fields of education, health, and state bureaucracy). Their argument is that “the people cannot bear any more burdens”, the reforms should be “velvet reforms” so that people should not feel their direct effects.

Alongside with the two main streams of political populism, the two smaller parties of the Hungarian parliamentary arena have also developed their own populist discourses. Their common feature is that they try to bank on the emotions of those voters who are against the full polarisation of the country, and thereby they try to offer a “third way” to the voters.

The members of the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum - MDF (Magyar Demokrata Fórum) highlight their independence from the two big parties (the Social democrats and the right wing Fidesz), and, at the same time, they want to compete successfully with the other small party, the Liberals. For this reason they accuse both big parties for having split the country, for having no solid economic programs, and for being corrupt. They also claim that the liberals’ program does not hold (even if it is quite close to theirs with regard to issues about the economy), and accuse them of having extreme political goals such as the acceptance of marriage for same sex couples. Their slogans aim to show to the voters their “solidity” and “purity”, namely “Normal Hungary” (which is a typically populist slogan building on people’s self-made notion of normality) and “Clean hands”.

Quite recently, the Liberal party also joined the populist political discourse. The Liberals used to be the coalition partners of the Social democrats between 1994 and 1998, and they also governed in coalition between 2002 and 2008, when they resigned from the coalition after their health reform program was cancelled by the Prime Minister. Since April 2008 there has been a minority government in Hungary. First the Liberals declared that they were a “constructive opposition party” in the sense that they would consider the government recommendations and vote according to their judgment instead of rejecting all recommendations as the “classical” opposition parties do. However, in July 2008 the leadership of the party was changed, and the new leadership decided to behave as a “hardcore” opposition and to reject the recommendations made by the government. Since the role of being in the middle has been assumed by the conservative MDF, the Liberals needed to find a new political marketing agenda for themselves to convey their distance from all other parties. The Fidesz and the MDF forced the organisation of new elections, the Socialdemocrats proposed a program to continue as governing party, so the Liberals introduced a third idea: no new elections, but no co-operation with the present government either. Instead, according to them, a new government should be established, consisting of “experts” and not of politicians. Considering the strong resentment against politicians in Hungary, this notion was expected to gain popularity. However, the discourse has turned against the liberal party very soon as other parties, political journalists and analysts, some potential members of such a „specialist government”, and even some members of the liberal party, rejected the idea. In addition, according to polls the overwhelming majority of liberal voters rejected it as well. At that point an interesting rhetorical element appeared in the communication of some spokespersons of the Liberal party. When faced with the results from the polls they argued that although people dislike their idea of “expert government” now, they would like it later on.

Summing up the findings presented above, it seems that no Hungarian political party could and/or wanted to avoid populism in their communication strategies. The specificity of the Hungarian situation is that the right wing Fidesz party uses not only elements of nationalistic populism but also notions of social populism. Another other curiosity consists in

the fact that not only the classical right and left wing parties, but also the small central parties have developed their own populist discourses.

Concluding remarks

The comparison between the populist political discourse in Romania and Hungary provides basic findings that help us draw some important conclusions about these two new democracies in Eastern Europe. Since both countries were parts of the Soviet block, the similarities and differences in their respective political discourses may shed light on the shared or culture-specific trends that characterise political populist discourses in Eastern Europe.

The similarities found in both Romanian and Hungarian populist discourse pertain mostly to right wing politics. The following are the most frequent questions and issues raised by populist politicians:

In populist discourse the appeal to the people is usually articulated by treating people as the main justification and the primary source of political legitimacy. In order to acquire legitimacy, populist parties in Romania and Hungary resort to similar strategies aimed at the revival of their respective historical mythologies and collective memory.

In both countries, the populist discourse contains the glorification of history. In Romania, a distinguishing feature of Vadim Tudor's PRM consisted in the symbolic reconstruction of the Roman Empire. In Hungary, Jobbik pictures the nomadic Hungarian history (before the 10th century) as a world of free, proud, rich, powerful and just people with an extraordinarily high moral and culture.

- Populism tends to support a system based primarily on identity, and it is precisely identities that are threatened and/or marginalised by economic and political processes. Where a populist movement claims that it represents a specific identity within a polity, "territory becomes the one adjustable variable, since society cannot overcome its biological or cultural diversity".

- Populist rhetoric in both Romania and Hungary displays a strong bias towards nationalistic populism, which creates a division between "Us" and "Them" emphasising such aspects as the cultivation of a self-centred apprehensive perception of "the Other", of a globalising world and the cultivation of "the symbols of the victims and the weak." According to this rhetoric, both elites and minority ethnic groups are treated as "the other" in the sense that they deviate from the norm of the majority population, i.e. "the people". The other political parties are not simply rivals in a political-ideological competition, but enemies of the nation.

- Religion is built in the nationalistic populist discourse in both countries. In Romania, an important element of the profile of populist programmes of Vadim Tudor's PRM and Becali's PNG consisted in their reliance on Christian values, which appeals to a century-long tradition of Christian-Orthodox theology. In Hungary, Fidesz often highlights that the new, democratic society should be based on Christian values, while the extreme right Jobbik goes even further. Their rhetoric recalls an old topos about Hungary being the "shield of Christianity" in the wars against the Ottomans, and suggesting that Hungarians play this role again, preserving Christian moral values against communism, capitalism, globalisation. Messianic notions are also present in various derived populist discourses in both countries.

- In their most extreme forms, the discourses of populist politicians in both Romania and Hungary call for exclusion and inclusion by territorial claim. When the enemy is the rest of

the world, i.e. the transnational forces of capitalism, masons, intellectuals and lobbies, populism calls for the restoration of the nation and for exclusion of the “others”, whoever they happen to be. In Hungary, the political rivals belong to the “other” group, whose members intentionally cause troubles for the “nation”.

In both countries, the concept of “cultural nation” is used for promoting the spiritual inclusion of their respective diasporas, i.e. those Romanians and Hungarians who live outside Romania and Hungary respectively.

Right wing politicians combine national and social populism in both countries. This shared feature is the result of several co-occurring phenomena: the frustration from and disappointment in the capitalist economy which have greatly exacerbated the social and economic divide within the society, the high levels of unemployment and competition, and the widespread corruption which used to be an integral, but covert, part of communist societies, and which has now become visible.

Populist rhetoric operates in both Romania and Hungary with a strong language as a result of, as well as a generator of, strong divisions between “Us” and “Them”. The typically hyperbolic rhetoric is acceptable for the target groups of the populist political parties because of the great distance they see between themselves and the supporters of various other political ideologies. At the same time, this rhetoric also creates the image of a world in which such a style is normally accepted.

There are nevertheless essential differences between the Romanian and the Hungarian populist discourses. In Hungary, it is not only smaller parties and marginalised groups that appeal to strong nationalistic populism, but also the more established Fidesz that governed between 1998 and 2002. They won a landslide victory in the 2010 elections. Jobbik, a smaller, radical nationalistic party and Fidesz, the biggest Hungarian right wing party, differ slightly in style and in content as to their populist messages: the more substantial differences lie in the explicit delivery and dissemination of these messages.

According to Mungiu-Pippidi (2007) [9], some radical populists’ programmes in Central and Eastern Europe feature truly anti-democratic policies. This does not seem to be entirely valid for Hungary, since Fidesz disputed the validity of elections in 2002 when they, as a governing party until then, lost the elections. The notion that only extraordinary elections can restore legitimate governing in Hungary which would represent “people’s will” has become one of the most important messages of both Fidesz and Jobbik.

In Hungary, a strong sense of nostalgic feelings towards the Kádár-era is clearly detectable, and these feelings represent the basis of social populism. In this respect Hungarian and Romanian social populism differ significantly. The reason is historical: Hungary counted as “the happiest (and wealthiest) hut” in the socialist block. Especially in the late 1970s and 1980s the average living standard was higher and personal freedom greater than in other socialist countries. For example, after 1968 even small private economic enterprises were allowed to operate. As a result, most Hungarians have less dark memories the last two socialist decades than Romanians who suffered from the ruthless dictatorship of the Ceausescu-regime. Based on the Kádárist nostalgia, Fidesz, self-defined as a conservative party, has developed a social populist rhetoric, and in an attempt to appeal to ordinary, low income people, its politicians have changed their former trendy look by adopting a rather casual, even low-status look so as to appear more in line with large categories of electors.

Summing up, both in Romania and in Hungary the rhetoric of nationalistic and social populism is practiced by right wing parties. Nationalistic discourses have a historical line,

mystifying the heroic past. They contain a sharp division between “Us” and “Them”, using a strong language in order to humiliate political rivals and to deliver a magnified image of the economic and social problems. Populist discourses also contain elements that use religious ideas and traditions as a major reference. The concept of “cultural nation” is used in order to include potential members of “Us” groups from among ethnic Romanians and Hungarians living in other countries than Romania and Hungary respectively. There are certain differences as well, the most important one being that in Hungary a large party embraces the nationalistic and social populist discourse and that in Hungary social populism is built on the nostalgic feelings towards the Kádár-era.

It appears that the similarities are shared features with regard to the usual populist trends that can be detected in other countries as well, while the differences can be traced back to specific features of the individual countries.

Notes:

¹ Hereby is acknowledged the contribution made by Dr. Klara Sandor, University of Szeged, sandor.klara@hung.u-szeged.hu, who kindly provided data about populism in Hungary.

References:

- [1] Krastev, I. (2008). The populist movement. *Prospect magazine* 142, January 2008.
- [2] Krastev, I. (2007). Critique & Humanism. *Eurozine* 23.
- [3] Smith, A. D. (2004). Ethnic cores and dominant ethnies. In Eric P. Kaufmann (ed.) *Rethinking ethnicity: Majority groups and dominant minorities*. London: Routledge, p. 8.
- [4] Ionescu, Ghiță and Ernest Gellner (eds.). 1969. *Populism: Its meanings and national characteristics*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- [5] Albertazzi, D. and D. McDonnell (eds.). (2008). *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 3.
- [6] Pombeni, P. (1997). Typologie des populismes en Europe: Vingtième Siècle. *Révue d'histoire* 56: pp. 48-76.
- [7] Hermet, G. (2007). *Sociology of populism*. Artemis.
- [8] Lukacs, J. (2005). *Democracy and populism, fear and hatred*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- [9] Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2007). EU accession is “no end of history”. *Journal of Democracy* 18(4): pp. 8-16.

Bibliography:

- Agulhon, M. et al. (1997). Le populisme? Neuf réponses. *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 56: pp. 224-242.
- Albertazzi, D. and D. McDonnell (eds.). (2008). *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bacevich, A. J. (1996). The Impact of New Populism. *Orbis* 40(1), pp. 31-43.
- Canovan, M. (1981). *Populism*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Di Tella, Torcuato S. 1997. Populism into the twenty-first century. *Government and Opposition* 32(2): pp. 187-200.
- Hermet, G. (1997). Populisme et nationalisme. *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 56, octobre-décembre, pp. 34-47.

- Hermet, G. (2007). *Sociology of populism*. Artemis.
- Ionescu, Ghiță and Ernest Gellner (eds.). 1969. *Populism: Its meanings and national characteristics*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Krastev, I. (2007). Critique & Humanism. *Eurozine* 23.
- Krastev, I. (2008). The populist movement. *Prospect magazine* 142, January 2008.
- Laclau, Ernest. (1979). *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory. Capitalism-Fascism-Populism*, London: Verso.
- Lukacs, J. (2005). *Democracy and populism, fear and hatred*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2001). The return to populism – The 2000 Romanian elections. *Government and Opposition* 36: pp. 230-252.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2007). EU accession is “no end of history”. *Journal of Democracy* 18(4): pp. 8-16.
- Palonen, E. (2009). Political Polarisation and Populism in Contemporary Hungary. *Parliamentary Affairs* 62(2): pp. 318-334.
- Pombeni, P. (1997). Typologie des populisms en Europe: Vingtième Siècle. *Revue d'histoire* 56: pp. 48-76.
- Smith, A. D. (2004). Ethnic cores and dominant ethnies. In Eric P. Kaufmann (ed.) *Rethinking ethnicity: Majority groups and dominant minorities*. London: Routledge.
- Taguieff, P.-A. (1997). Le populisme et la science politique: Du mirage conceptuel aux vrais problèmes. Vingtième siècle: *Revue d'histoire*, 56, octobre-décembre, pp. 4-33.
- Taguieff, P.-A. (1996). Le populisme. *Encyclopedia Universalis*, pp. 118-125.
- Taguieff, P.-A. (1984). La rhétorique du national-populisme. *Mots*, No. 9, octobre.
- Trautman, K. (1997). *The new populist Reader*. New York: Praeger.