The traditionalism–modernism value conflict in Hungary and Slovakia – a comparative analysis from a longue durée perspective

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Published online: 22 Sep 2020.

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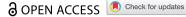
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Introduction

The birth of this essay was inspired by a series of long-maturing personal impressions which the article attempts to form into the subject of an in-depth research, aiming to make them appropriate for further academic inquiry. Thus, the scientific credibility of the topic discussed below might be not impaired by a confession that a multitude of impressions shaped the hypothesis which serves as a starting point for investigation. This hypothesis consists of two theorems: (a) Hungarian public life is much more *politicized* and ideologically *divided/bipolarized* than Slovak public life; (b) this kind of polarization and politicization can partially be traced back to twentieth-century history, which evoked more *value choice dilemmas* within Hungarian society than within Slovak society (the idioms applied here will be described below). With a bit of simplification, the dilemma in question can be decoded as a traditionalist-modernist value conflict, exacerbated and augmented within Hungarian political culture by several historical situations arising from twentieth-century history, meanwhile largely revoked and neutralized by the same historical situations within Slovak political culture. Eventually, the two societies have evolved into nations with quite different attitudes (at least from this aspect): a sort of unconcern or phlegmatic attitude has emerged within Slovak political culture towards political ideologies, while Hungarian political culture tends to immerse itself in such issues.

In order to examine these assumptions as thoroughly as possible, the degree of politicization and bipolarization/dividedness of public life must first be somehow made visible, perhaps even measurable; the first section of this study attempts to do so. It is followed by the examination of four historical situations of the twentieth century, affecting Hungarian and Slovak society similarly deeply (but in different ways): i.e. the political crises during the late decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the post-world war 1 peace settlements, the process of interwar urbanization, and the attempt of Communism to transform societies. Finally, the different effect of these historical situations on contemporary political cultures is elucidated. Such a research approach assumes the prevalence of *path-dependent* development, i.e. that past political, social, or economic trends reinforce themselves and hence influence today's state of society.

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As a general theorem within social sciences, this approach has emerged in quite different disciplines. The *longue durée* approach formulated by the Annales School attempts to elucidate the importance of institutional inertia in historical research (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009). In sociology, even concepts criticizing unilineal evolutionary theories and emphasizing ability of individuals to be "institutional entrepreneurs" or "agents of change," do not disregard the power of inertia of institutions (customs, norms, rules) (e.g. structuration theory; Giddens 1984). Similarly, the theory of path dependence is a highly acclaimed concept in economics, which emerged partially from development theories, and was coined by such renowned thinkers as the Nobel Prize-winner Gunnar Myrdal (Myrdal 1957). The philosopher Karl Popper, who was extremely fierce in criticizing *historicism* as a harmful belief in the calculable and unilinear development of societies, acknowledged the possibility of certain soft trends, and the logic of causalities (Popper 1957). Last but not least, political science is also liable to argue that attitudes determining political culture are prone to reinforce themselves (Downs 1957).

Politicization and polarization of the public sphere in Slovakia and Hungary

The ambition of scrutinizing the degree of politicization within the public sphere is seriously challenged by the fluid, overlapping and contentious definitional attempts regarding these terms. Academic literature offers a plethora of definitions and models whose comprehensive overview (see e.g. Cohen and Arato 1992) exceeds the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, some sense of what "politicization of the public sphere" implies can be derived even from contradictory concepts. In his seminal work, Jürgen Habermas defined the public sphere (*die Öffentlichkeit*) as the agora of politically critical sense, playing a crucial role in forming and controlling political decisions. This ability to assist and control political decision-making is opposed here to publicity (*die Publizität*), which is hollowed out and manipulated by market forces or state structures (Habermas 1997; for an analysis, see Cohen and Arato 1992; Nanz 2018). In a Habermasian interpretation, the "political public sphere" is a desirable state which should be restored by the re-politicization of the public sphere (Cohen and Arato 1992). A somewhat different connotation of politicization can be depicted when the "political sphere" and "civil sphere" are defined as sub-clusters of the public sphere. In this case, the public sphere can be defined very broadly as the platform of public communication, as "the abstract space in which citizens discuss and debate public issues," attaching a rather wide and neutral interpretation to this expression (Oliver and Myers 1999). Within this broad agora of "open-ended and public-spirited communication" (Baiocchi 2003), the civil sphere can be conceived as "a solidary sphere in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes to be culturally defined and to some degree institutionally enforced" (Alexander 2006, 31), as the domain of volunteer-based cooperation of citizens, a cooperative space of communities within society. Meanwhile, the "political sphere" can be interpreted from this perspective as a field of struggle, *der Kampf*, as put simply by Max Weber (Palonen 2003). However, different the (Weberian) combative and (Habermasian) constructively critical senses of a politicized public sphere seem to be, their connecting thread is the covering of activities which imply *decisions* concerning contested ideational issues. Decision is a fundamental component of a politicized public sphere in both aspects: the politicization of the public

sphere is a state when public activities – initiatives, statements, discourses – implicitly entail or explicitly indicate decisions and choices between ideas.

But how can we "measure" the level of politicization, if possible? If we are discussing a primarily qualitative phenomenon, we ought to rely on the analysis of descriptive sources. However, it seems to be worth attempting to provide quantitative data, through the comparative scrutiny of local (municipal) elections, which can be regarded as the domain of confluence of the political and civil sphere. In municipal elections, party candidates – representing great ideological schemes – duel with bottom-up organized local civil candidates, representing typically non-political themes as independent candidates without the officially recognized support of any political party.[1] This provides us with the capability of measuring the weight of non-political candidates (Hungary: "független jelölt," Slovakia: "nezávisly kandidát" or "NEKA") against political ones. However, the official labels of candidates can be misleading: it is a well-known election practice to run for a political position with the strong support of several political forces, but not using their logos. This non-official support is supposed to be fruitful when candidates' personalities seem to be more popular than their proponents from high politics. The opposite can also occur, when civil activists appear on the election lists of political parties. It is not just a methodological problem, as it ushers in the dilemma of whether we can speak about a real civil presence within the platform of any political elections? Some argue that real NGO-activists have nothing in common with "high politics," and that running for a political position means giving-up civil ideas. From this perspective, the term "civil candidate" is an oxymoron, and candidates with an NGO background are likely to be considered "traitors" to their chosen profession.[2]

These reservations notwithstanding, an assumption can be made that comparing the presence of successful party and non-party candidates in local elections can approximate the depth of politicization of the public sphere, when citizens have the possibility of opting for either civil (non-political) or political narratives. When scrutinizing the Hungarian and Slovakian municipal election results through a structured breakdown, a significant difference can be detected. In Hungary, a cluster of independent mayors consists primarily of leaders of rural small towns and villages, meanwhile cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants – particularly county towns and county centres – remain the domain of high-political representatives. In contrast, a strong civil presence can be observed in Slovakia on this level, i.e. among municipal council members and mayors of bigger cities (see Table 1).

The apparent difference unfolded in local election statistics becomes more vigorous when attempting to disregard pseudo-independent candidates, who are supported by non-recognized high-political proponent organizations, i.e parties or their informal coalitions. In 2019, numerous Hungarian city council candidates were appointed by an inaccessible broad anti-government party coalition, ranging from ex-far right to radical left, which did not seem to allow the possibility of gaining credibility through overt political communication. Meanwhile in Slovakia, the actual independence of NEKA-mayors and council members can be confirmed through campaign situations when they had to contend with both government and opposition party candidates, or through their post-election positioning and behaviour, when independently elected council members did not join any council faction. Seeing the general popularity of such candidates, a conclusion can be reached that "Slovak voters at municipal level favours (sic) independent

Table 1.. Eight of non-party candidates within local governance (Slovakia and Hungary).

Ratio of non-party candidates	Recent term (SK: 2018-(HU: 2019-	Past term (SK: 2014–2018) (HU: 2014–2019)
Capital city council members (SK)	**37.8 %** (17/45)	**26.7%** (12/45)
Capital city council members (HU)	**6.1%** (2/33)	**0%** (0/33)
District mayors in capital city (SK)	**58.8%** (10/17)	**47.1%** (8/17)
District mayors in capital city (HU)	**8.7%** (2/23)	**0%** (0/23)
Mayors of county centres (SK)	**62.5%** (5/8)	**50%** (4/8)
Mayors of county centres (HU)	**15.8%** (3/19)	**0%** (0/19)
City council members of country centres (SK)	**58.3%** (155/266)	**50.9%** (115/266)
City council members of country centres (HU)	**18%** (65/362)	

Own calculations. Data on Slovakian local elections: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, www.statistics.sk. Data on Hungarian local elections: National Election Office, http://www.valasztas.hu.

candidates or authorities distanced themselves from party politics." (Horváth and Šebík 2015, 105). And, in contrast, local election results show that the public sphere is more politicized in Hungary than in Slovakia: more public activities – including the supply side (representation of public personalities) and demand side (voters' behaviour) – imply ideological decisions and commitments between conflicting values.

The deep politicization of the Hungarian public sphere does not necessarily mean its dividedness or bipolarization as well; and from some aspects – e.g. from the aspect of the proportion of voters who defined themselves as radicals[3] – neither Hungarian nor Slovakian political culture is extraordinarily polarized. Yet, political sociology argues that a bi-polar left-right "bloc mentality" has been proved to be rather predominant and antagonistic after the fall of Communism in Hungary (Tóka 2005; Körösényi 2012).[4] This has been confirmed by the fact that since the fall of Communism, eight governments have already been established in Hungary, and all of them have been formed purely by right-wing or by left-liberal forces. Such a bipolarization, symbolized and reinterpreted through value conflicts, does not mean that parties follow strong ideological programmes, as substances of their voters' group interests (Illés and Körösényi). For this reason, it seems to be more appropriate to speak about dividing value conflicts, serving as a discursive formation, and not about ideological cleavages of group interests (Karácsony 2001). The depth of this bipolarized value conflict is revealed by an interesting research project which shows that Hungarian voters, if their parties are in opposition, become distrustful towards Hungarian public institutions as a whole. This relation between political satisfaction and public trust proved to be one of the strongest within the EU, while the same link is apparently weak in Slovakia (Patkós 2019).

Indeed, Slovakia produces the opposite of the above-outlined Hungarian tendency: the country has been governed by "rainbow coalitions" – binding together political parties from contesting ideological backgrounds (Bakke and Sitter 2005) – several times already, while this has remained an unknown phenomenon in Hungary. In Slovakia, a broad rainbow coalition was formed in 1998 by alliances belonging to left, liberal, centrist, and conservative party families, and this coalition succeeded in being partially re-elected in 2002 (Staroňová and Malíková 2003).[5] In 2010, a similar rainbow coalition was constructed again; however, it lasted just 2 years. The 2016–2020 government was also

formed by three parties which belong to three different factions in the European Parliament.[6] This elucidates that voters did not demand strong ideological commitment from their preferred parties and that they – at least generally – did not punish the preferred parties for going into coalition with representatives of contradicting ideologies.

Finally, some striking differences can be pointed out in the field of journalism as well, even when it is more than challenging to detect and measure the weight of politically oriented content in this level. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that there have been influential political mediums in Slovakia which have served as melting pots for different ideological strands: the most influential political daily *SME* [We are] is considered by its former editor-in-chief (1999–2006) Martin M. Šimečka as a journal drifting somewhere from the "liberal centre" to a right-wing attitude with high sensitivity on human rights and minority issues, and he positions most Slovakian journals within a conservative-liberal spectrum.[7] The leading political weekly *týždeň* [week] could also be positioned similarly, particularly before the 2015 split of the editorial board.[8] Meanwhile in Hungary, at least until recent times, attempts to establish centrist media portfolios have not met a market demand – i.e. a public demand. A direct experiment for launching such a centrist or "rainbow" political journal was the re-organization of the daily Magyar Hírlap in 2005, targeting a centrist audience. After having encountered market failures, the portfolio's new owner enforced it to shift towards the radical-right steppes of Hungarian publicity.[9] Similarly, unsuccessful was the initiative of renowned journalist Gergely Dudás ex-editor in chief of the most influential news portal *Index.hu*, who in 2017 struggled to launch a massive Indiegogo campaign for establishing new, politically independent media. The campaign envisaged a media platform which bridged ideological cleavages. Eventually, it ended with a spectacular failure, having gathered around 12% of the targeted foundation capital.[10]

Meanwhile, the political centre has been seemingly hollowed out in Hungary, it is intrinsically challenging to reveal what is on the two edges: what "left" and "right" covers. It cannot be stated that it conceals different economic orientations or a strikingly distinct positioning of the society within Europe: "catching up with the West" – at least in terms of economic power and wealth – has prevailed as a universal moral imperative throughout various ages of modern Hungarian history until recent years (Ágh 2019), when the rhetoric of some anti-Western neo-traditionalist streams has become increasingly influential. The difference can be found rather on the layer of political psychology, where a collectivist and an individualist idea of emancipatory development persist. The leftish-liberal tradition in Hungary implies a strong Rawlsian commitment to individual emancipation, a developmental path through the fulfilment of individual prosperity. This leftish-liberal confluence is rooted partially in post-1956 Reform Communism, aiming to raise the welfare of the working class not through collective actions (like trade unions) but by providing individual opportunities. The right (in other sources: national) idea implies a commitment to collective emancipation, assuming that socio-economic emancipatory efforts will prove to be a failure without securing and enforcing the rights and interests of communities as entities. From this perspective, the left-liberal versus right cleavage of Hungarian high politics can be interpreted as a duel for primacy between collectivist and individualist emancipatory notions. This original dispute around the primacy of notions propounds the theoretical possibility of their synchronizing, when evolving simultaneously, or even

underpinning each other. (See John Stuart Mill's thoughts in "*On Liberty*" or Rousseau's "*Consideration on the Government of Poland,*" for whom the national framework of societies was regarded as necessary for the fulfilment of individual liberties: Özkirimli, 2000. Among Hungarian political thinkers, István Bibó's oeuvre can be interpreted in a similar way: Bibó 1990; Fricz 1990.)

Nonetheless, in several historical situations, a contradiction has been encountered between the two notions, with the counter-idea experienced not as underpinning but as hampering, which leads to a discourse of binary dichotomy. Such exclusively individualistic or collectivist worldviews, institutionalized into a strong dichotomy, are also described as modernism and traditionalism within academic literature. This pair of concepts is used seemingly rarely in Hungarian scholarship, perhaps because significant collectivist streams have proved to be pro-change, according to which social progress is desirable, but within certain traditional (national) frameworks, and counting together with other national counter-interests (as a "progress with preserving," Ormos 2013). However, we consider the use of this pair of concepts also to be appropriate as elucidating a discourse evolved around the contesting ideas, separating and delegitimizing each other, thus institutionalizing an essentially universal dichotomy and framing it within a globally comprehensible context. From this aspect, modernism is the spread of the Weberian *Gesellschaft* at the expense of the *Gemeinschaft* (Dewey, 1960; Schnaiberg, 1970).

Hungarian failures in synchronizing individualist and collectivist emancipation

Meanwhile, Hungarian ethnic society in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy seemed to be excellently positioned from the aspect of political power compared to the surrounding non-Hungarians (Ormos 2013). Political culture had to face a deep crisis, i.e. the collapse of nineteenth-century "national liberalism," a political program merging individualist and collective emancipation. Hungarian national liberalism of the nineteenth century had just become gradually aware of the growing self-contradiction that liberalism could have implied the emancipation of non-Hungarian citizens through political democratization, undermining the room for manoeuvre for the society as a whole (Dénes 2006). The author of the Hungarian anthem during the *Vormärz* could honestly form the mission of this epoch in the slogan "Homeland and progress." As time passed by and national movements within the Carpathian basin begun to rise, the contradiction between individual progress and collectivist notions about homeland became increasingly apparent. National liberalism, which had been the leading idea behind Hungarian political movements in the nineteenth century, was fading away until its party proxies collapsed spectacularly in the dawn of the twentieth century (Horváth and Techet 2012; Gerő 2000). This silent crisis can be regarded as the historical basis of the modernism–traditionalism dichotomy.

Further developments did not diminish but reinforced this evolving dichotomy, since the Treaty of Trianon was constituted by the Western powers, the representative of social progress and modernization. It seriously hampered the identification of collectivist emancipation – e.g. minority rights issues or sovereignty issues like claims against the economic and political isolation of the country – with Westernization, despite some inspiring

aspirations for a Hungary-Entente reconciliation in foreign policy during the 1920s; these attempts were fuelled by the expectation that revision of borders could be achieved even with the support of the Entente powers (Romsics 2010). Yet, the interwar regime began to drift towards the Nazi-Fascist axis powers and eventually aimed at resolving the question of the state borders with overt anti-Western (Nazi and Fascist) political assistance (Ablonczy 2018).

Moreover, domestic socio-economic developments had also bolstered a tradition-alism–modernism value dilemma, when the flourishing urban middle-class lifestyle was opposed to rural agony. Such a dichotomy was not exceptional at that time, as perceived and discussed worldwide at least in the language of the arts. In Hungary, the opposition was sharpened through political and public practices which are called "groupism" by Brubaker (2002): since the urban middle-class included a significant bourgeoisie of Jewish-origin, modern urban culture became synonymous with "Jewish-like" culture (Gyáni 2010). In contrast, a "völkisch" cultural stream, opposed to urbanism and focusing on the sociographic mapping of traditional rural commu-nities, had been poisoned with accusations of being antisemitic.[11] This process of ethnic groupism along the modernism–traditionalism axis was largely boosted and manifested by the political regime as well through rhetoric (the accusation of Budapest "betraying the homeland") and through legal steps like maximizing the number of Jewish students in higher education. And when revisionism – a kind of practical implementation of collective emancipation – proceeded between 1938 and 1941, a considerable number of citizens – of Jewish origin – encountered the total nullification of the century-long results of their individual emancipation. The dichot-omy between individualism and collectivism was sharpened and over-exacerbated directly by political structures.

During the ensuing Communist decades, the perceived dichotomy between individu-alism and collectivism was fuelled both by the rhetoric and the political behaviour of the state regime. The national interest – in the form that it had been conceptualized in the interwar period – was interpreted as obsolete and bourgeois, something which hampered social progression and modernization. And meanwhile, the post-1956 political elite opened up the possibility of individual welfare (like possessing a car or cottage, travelling abroad, permitting the entry of Western cultural products), while the situation of some previously existing collective entities – village communities after the nationalization of land, religious communities after persecution – remained degraded (Romsics 2010; Rainer M., 2012, calling it "welfare socialism"). The degraded position of Hungary as a political entity remained also taboo, regarding issues like the minority rights of Hungarians living abroad, relations with the Soviet Union, or economic exposure through the toxic over-indebtedness of the state budget. From this perspective, "Goulash Communism" can be regarded as an experiment of individual emancipation at the expense of eliminating collective and national interests (Tokes 1996; Szalai et al. 2003).

These historical milestones outlined above seem to be principal in opposing individual and collectivist emancipatory ideas to each other along the modernism–traditionalism value choice dilemma, materializing their confrontation as a zero-sum-game between contesting notions. In the dawn of Hungarian democracy, the modernist-traditionalist value choice dilemma, latently existing even under Communism, could be presented overtly: ideological conflicts sparked off a *Kulturkampf* just as if Communism had not tried

to suppress plural ideological narratives in the preceding 40 years. Not just political parties but media actors – TVs, newspapers and periodicals – and even cultural organizations positioned themselves along this cleavage, already becoming reproducers of this dichotomy (György 2001).

After the fall of Communism, three decades could have proved to be enough for neutralizing value dilemmas, particularly if lacking manifest conflict of material interests. Three interpretations can explain the failure of such hopes and the strength of path-dependent polarization. The "economic" (rational choice) theory of the development of political culture (Downs 1957) argues that centrist society becomes more centrist, while polarized society becomes more polarized – political supply reinforces political demand. Hungarian political research data could confirm this process. Besides, the activism of combatant Hungarian cultural elites – maybe too influential (Schlett 1995) – seems also to be decisive in the contention between "modernist" and "traditional" attitudes. Thirdly, a relatively new phenomenon – but particularly worth investigating – is that opposing discursive streams have been reproduced in an increasingly formal way, lacking earlier intellectual content. A parallel can be drawn with the "discursive formation" of national identities born in conflicts, whose principal argument for their own existence is prone to be the existence of others (Calhoun 1997). In the case of Hungary, this discursive formation – implying a "symbolic thickening" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019) of discourses and a deflation of content – seems to be strengthened by an intellectual fatigue as well. Post-1989 men of letters can seemingly lack the interwar intellectuals' interest in or ability to demarcate from extreme rhetoric and seek common substance with others (Ablonczy 2016). As a result, the binary dichotomy of values has gained its own symbolic topics (Trianon, revisionism; permitting or prohibiting the erection of a sculpture to Horthy; usage or prohibition of the red star; etc.) within Hungarian public discourse, and what is more important, its own lingo, known by politically indifferent and rather passive layers as well.[12]

Eventually, "homeland" and "progression" as ideational forms have been filled with the denotation of exclusivity against each other: as a political analyst pointed out, "with the exception of rare occasions … these two principles could be effective on the expense of each other, against each other" (Márkus 2009, 127). Moreover, the polarization of discourse has led to the split of traditionalism into a "traditional traditionalist" stream (not giving up the substance of Europeanization and the "convergence dream") and into a neo-traditionalist stream (the "new Right") in post-crisis Hungary, questioning already the essence of Westernization, and trying to offer some neo-traditional, neo-feudal, or neo-Byzantine alternative (Ágh 2019; Kollai 2020). This neo-traditional stream could gain a decisive influence within the Hungarian right-wing political arena, backed by the government parties' "*divide et impera*" tactics and by their polarizing mechanisms. Old Hungarian traditionalism – filled with the "convergence" dream and inspirations for Europeanization – has become the new centre, facing the historical fate of Hungarian centrism, i.e. hollowing out (see Table 2).[13]

Table 2. Polarization of Hungarian political culture and the birth of "new right."

	Left-liberal	"Old right"	"New right"
Idealized society	Modern	Modern	Traditional
Primacy in human emancipation	Individual	Collective	Collective

Collective and individual emancipation in Slovakia: a latent confluence

Just like some layers of Hungarian political culture, the attitude of Slovak voters can also be partly interpreted in a *longue durée* perspective. The era of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918) exposed Slovak intellectuals to a two-fold trauma: the trauma of lacking collective (national) as well as individual (welfare) emancipation (Zajac 1997). This implied a natural cross-fertilization between ideas on social and national progression: as Dušan Kováč, a leading personality of Slovak academic life, concluded, national agitation in the era of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy went hand-in-hand with social agitation and contributed to the democratization of political agendas: "Principles of national consciousness and civic rights existed beside each other in national programmes" (Kováč 2009, 273–274). Even the thinkers who were being critical towards nation-building and ethnocentric elitism had to confront their ideas with their own elementary claim for national survival. Under the pressure of this conflict of interests and ideas, intellectuals critical towards traditionalism, like Samuel Štefanovič and Ján Lajčiak, chose the enforced path of voluntary solitude (Chmel 1975). It did not mean a total lack of modernization-traditionalism debates within Slovak public discourse. Nevertheless, these debates had a limited socio-cultural influence, lacking the symbolism which today's Slovak society could remember and reproduce, and being constrained by the general idea of transforming an ethnic-cultural minority into a nation. It is the reason why Tibor Pichler calls this debate, a kind of "Kulturkampf within Slovak nationalism," within which the idea of "individualistic nation-building was a stance which did not lead further" (Pichler 2011, 93–95, 99, 108).[14]

This political culture was fuelled further by an under-urbanized elite where thoughts of modernization came partly from rural cultural cores (Zajac 1997). For instance, as a symptomatic case, the aforementioned Ján Lajčiak moved from the metropolis of Budapest – a symbolic place of assimilation of Slovaks, to a little Northern-Slovak village in the Liptov region to complete his work (see the thesis of "village, as a counter-pole" from Škvarna 2001). The most influential and vivid hub of Slovak public life was the tiny town of Martin at that time, one of the smallest county centres of historical Hungary. After World War I, this rural intelligentsia had a chance of "nationalizing" the towns and cities, meanwhile shaping their urban atmosphere according to their customs. As a result, the dawning Slovak urban spaces were not distant from the rural atmosphere, and a poisonous rural-urban tension was not dominant there. A "rural urbanism" triumphed instead. As the renowned Slovak historian Dušan Škvarna concludes, the modern Slovak culture and consciousness were constituted on "strong plebeian features, conservative principles" even compared to surrounding countries (Škvarna 2001).[15]

Moreover, Communism in Slovakia – unlike in Hungary – has not sparked a modernization-traditionalism cleavage. The early communist decades were perceived as bringing about a "civilization boom," and this perception was engrained deeply into ensuing generations' public remembrance as well. According to contemporary surveys, 80% of Slovakian respondents assess the consequences of collectivization positively; 73% of them associate it with an increasing standard of living in rural areas and 69% with cultural development (Pekník 2006, 38). This modernization was propagated with an anti-liberal air, which resulted in an atypical disharmony between modernization and liberal values (Škvarna 2001, 261). Even the post-1968 epoch of Czechoslovakian communism was not saturated with such dividing remembrance-debates as in the

Czech Republic, because the repression of the Prague Spring ("normalization") was coupled with reorganization of the twin-country into a federative model. It is not a coincidence that more than two-thirds of contemporary Slovaks regard these decades as an opportunity for national emancipation against the Czechs, and as the age of a developing self-consciousness with a stronger Slovak political presence in the state bodies (Pekník 2006, 52). It is also not a coincidence that Red Army monuments, symbols of repression in other Central European countries, have not disappeared utterly in Slovakia, and still constitute a considerable part of all military monuments (Bartlová 2007, 158).

Approaching the end of the twentieth-century history of Slovakia, the question can be raised again: do the political tendencies of bygone decades, fading away into far history, indicate a direct explanation for the attitude of contemporary voters? The answer lies – as above, in the subsection on Hungarian attitudes – in the important roles of institutions maintaining and reinforcing voters' habits. A weakly ideologized political culture contributed to the dawn of the rainbow-coalition in 1998, embracing rural conservatives (KDH), social-democrats (SDL) and market-oriented Christian democrats (SDKU) a political formation which – with some amendments in 2002 – could lay down the path of Slovakia into NATO and the EU, and eventually into the Euro-zone (Bútora 1997). Hence, a cultural code of "rural urbanism" and "traditional modernism" materialized in concrete political and public outcomes. Leading media actors, like *SME* and *týždeň,* were impregnated with the same ideological confluences, shaping the habit of readers' community further in this direction.

Through EU-accession, Slovakia reached a well-materialized threshold of the national-social emancipation idea, whose century-long narrative seemed to have come to its end. However, although the "rainbow coalition" could come to power once again in 2010, this political constellation quickly fell apart, partly due to ideological duels between pro-marijuana, anti-abortion and other factions. Conservative journalists abandoned the weekly *týždeň* in order to establish an outspoken Christian-conservative media outlet. The lack of ideological cleavages has not meant lack of cleavages at all; but they are rooted rather in contemporary debates and scandals instead of fierce residual cultural debates, sparkling rootless ad-hoc movements and anti-politics against politics, which has contributed to the emergence of one of the most peculiar political scenes of Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade.

Criticism towards *Kampf* and phlegm in political culture

Since the Slovak and Hungarian value orientations, as cultural codes, have manifold effects on society, economy, culture, and politics, their parallel analysis should not result in their normative judgement or ranking. Seen purely from the perspective of the room of manoeuvre for civic activism, Hungarian polarization and politicization create more jeopardies through the political labelling of new initiatives (Márkus 2009, 125).[16] Anyway, the attitude of both Slovak and Hungarian voters is under academic or public criticism in both countries. In Hungary, a plethora of critical judgements of the above-depicted ideological division can be found in pamphlets, essays, analyses from contemporary literary to political science, producing strikingly similar conclusions. Péter Eszterházy was a renowned Hungarian writer, speaks about the over-

politicization of public and private spaces: political ideologies' "natural rules and reflexes predominate everywhere" (Eszterházy 2018). This is close to the thought of political researchers who are also liable to assess negatively the Hungarian "self-over-appreciating" or "over-powerful" feature of political ideologies, causing the predominance of parties (partocracy), where public opinion is not capable of constraining the power of politics (Fricz 1998; Susánszky, Unger, and Kopper).[17]

The Slovak intelligentsia is also critical towards their political climate. Drawing from these sources, the weak ideological content of public discourse tends to be referred to as just an unintentional side-effect of a general "social detachment/unconcern" which is denominated as the leading Slovak cultural code by many authors. For instance, the renowned public author Martin M. Šimečka calls it the "code of detachment" or "uncon-cern," tracing it to the mountainous home of the Slovaks, as a common secret habit. Interestingly enough, an academic analysis points out this phenomenon with the same attribute, tracing back the growing number of "unconcerned citizens" to the socio-culturally dependent situation of Slovakia in a *longue durée* perspective: "until the fall of Communism, our citizens could not assess either politics or history or their real circumstances by themselves, on their own" (Plávková 2017, 21–22). With a little malice, the contemporary Slovak author Pavel Vilikovský says that Slovak society is "doomed to eternal innocence" (Vilikovský 1997). Oľga Gyárfášová describes it as an "anti-heroic historical consciousness," where members of society have engrained "in their cultural codes that their fate was described by others" (Gyárfášová 2014, 447). Others are not so permissive: Daniel Pastirčák speaks about "annoying cultural nihilism" which is utilized and reproduced by politics (Pastirčák 2013, 479), Milan Šútovec writes about the "absurd goulash of values" (cited by Bútora 1997 without reference to the source), Pavol Lukáč, an academic researcher on Slovak post-Communist political thinking, defined it as the provinciality of Slovak elites (Lukáč 2007, 339).

The archetypes of Slovak and Hungarian political attitudes can be associated with situations depicted in the classical work of Lipset and Rokkan, who argue for the crucial influence of an inertial system of cleavages in political structures (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). If cleavages have arisen about pragmatic questions (around "profane" themes) and intercept each other, they eliminate each other's' dividing effect. If cleavages have been created around cultural-ideological ("sacralized") questions, and they do not intercept each other, but culminate, divided political "lagers" will be born.

Hungarian behaviour is close to the Rokkanian theory on congested cleavages, or to the overburdened state described by Claus Offe, where the binary dichotomy of enemy-ally, we-they oppositions rules political culture, making cooperation and compromises impossible (Offe 1991). The evolution of Slovak political attitudes has its own international context as well, described by Peter Mair as a post-communist phenomenon, rooted in a kind of civilization incompetence and embodied in the instability of voters and in the cacophony of political entrepreneurs.

To recapitulate the findings above, I scrutinized the differing development of the "ideological atmosphere" within Slovak and Hungarian societies during the twentieth century which allows me to draw the conclusion that bygone political milestones, previous political milestones and tendencies have greatly influenced the basic habits of the voters in both societies. During the last century, Hungarian political culture has encoun-tered historical situations which have strengthened antagonism between national and

individual emancipatory ideas, formulating it within a traditionalism–modernism dis-course. This division has been strongly influenced not by politicians but by the cultural elites' ideological duels; meanwhile in Slovakia, such ideologically oriented public dis-course has never become predominant. The result is that Hungarian society is marked by a strong ideological dichotomy, which lowers the public demand for un-categorizable civil initiatives. In turn, the Slovak society is characterized by weak ideological strands, giving room for civic voices, but for political entrepreneurs as well.

As a recapitulation, it is worth emphasizing that contemporary political culture is not the direct result of previous decades' historical events and socio-cultural tendencies; there is no genetics in political culture (Kubik 2018). Moreover, all the historical milestones from regime changes to democratic elections could be an occasion for resetting the contours of the public sphere. Nevertheless, institutions of political culture in a broad sense (rules and organizations, attitudes, customs) cannot be under-estimated in handing over old cultural codes to new generations; they are partially products of past cleavages, while simultaneously serving as reproducers of political attitudes.

Notes

1. In Slovakia, local elections [komunálne volby] have been arranged every four years: after the local elections held in November 2014, the next occasion took place in November 2018. Similarly, Hungary had local elections [önkormányzati választások] in autumn 2014, but due to new regulations, the next elections were held just in 2019, since the local councils' term in government has been prolonged from four to five years. In Hungary: "Act 2013/L on the election of local council members and mayors." In Slovakia: "Act 346/1990 on elections of municipalities' local governments". Election laws have not been developing in a considerably different way: citizens can vote for local council members and mayors as well, while inhabi-tants of capital cities have right to elect mayors of districts and a capital city mayor (senior mayor) as well.
2. Apart from debates in the international academic literature, an interesting example of this dilemma was produced in Slovakia where some anti-government civil protesters of Spring 2018 ("For a righteous Slovakia") decided to be engaged in the forthcoming municipal elections. Reactions were quite arborescent and contradictory. See the debate on it in the newspaper Denník N. E.g. Konštantín Čikovský: Za slušné Slovensko šíri nebezpečný blud oškodlivosti politických strán. *Denník N*, 2. July 2018. https://dennikn.sk/1168849/za-slusne-slovensko-siri-nebezpecny-blud-o-skodlivosti-politickych-stran/(Date of download: 30 July 2018.)
3. See the data of the European Value Study ('Which party appeals to you most?' On a left-right scale) or the European Social Survey ('Where would you place yourself on a left-right scale?').
4. Körösényi's essay refers to an international comparison, according to which Hungary pro-duced one of the biggest levels of ideological polarization among the 19 countries covered in the research.
5. In the second broad coalition (2002–2006), the earlier left-wing party the SDL – after falling out of parliament – was replaced by the liberal ANO, which led to this second coalition being considered by some researchers as already being a right-wing-oriented coalition.
6. The coalition governing during the 2016–2020 term consisted of three parliamentary parties. On a European level, the leading Smer-SD belongs to the "Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats", meanwhile "Most-Híd" is a member of the European People's Party. Between 2009 and 2014, when the third governing force (Slovak National Party) was represented by one MEP in the European Parliament, they joined the radical, UKIP-led club

"Europe of Freedom and Democracy". See the website of the European Parliament (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en), and the website of the MEP of the Slovak National Party (http://www.jaroslav-paska.sk).

7. Našu frustráciu preháňame [We exaggerate our frustration]. Interview with Martin M. Šimečka. *týždeň*, 10. január 2010 https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/5949/nasu-frustraciu-preha name/Šimečka: SME nehľadá pravdu [Šimečka: Daily SME does not seek the truth]. SME Online, 14.January2013 https://domov.sme.sk/c/6667070/simecka-sme-nehlada-pravdu.html

8. Peter Zajac served as an MP from 2010–2012, representing a small pro-American neo-conservative party in the Slovak parliament. František Mikloško is a mediatized symbol of the Slovak Christian-democrat movement. Andrej Bán and Lucia Piussi are committed representatives of the idea of an open society. https://www.tyzden.sk/info/vseobecne/o-nas/

9. Pál Szombathy: A tizenegy évvel ezelőtti események másik olvasata. [Another narrative of the events 11 years before.] Mandiner, 5 November 2016. https://media.mandiner.hu/cikk/20161105_szombathy_pal_a_tizenegy_evvel_ezelotti_esemenyek_masik_olvasata

10. Campaign website of the Politis.hu: https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/politis-hu-kell-egy-ujsag#/

11. Völkisch thoughts were originally conceptualized as being opposed against the German presence as well. According to them, the Ottoman conquest in Hungary (beginning with the battle of Mohács in 1526) was not the main tragedy of the country, it just diverted attention from the German-Habsburg colonization (Szabó 1939; Németh 1989). Völkish men of letters had renewed the research into Hungarian agrarianism in the interwar period, but interpreted this rural world as a counterpart to the "Westerners".

12. As an example of its poisoning effect, see the debates between Hungarian historians over the question of the traumatic weight and role of Trianon and the shoah (Kovács 2015).

13. This process can be traced back through the pages of the periodical *Kommentár*, taken over by the 'new Right' in 2014, and sparked off a debate among pro-Westerners and neo-traditionalists, who claim to be the 'right conservatives'.

14. Tibor Pichler refers to the works of Bohdan Pavlů on "conservative and progressive nationalism" as well. Pichler claimed that "the prerequisite of national development is the political freedom, democracy" (Pichler 2011, 99).

15. On the nationalization of non-Slovak urban spaces, see Gašpar (1969). The above-cited Tibor Pichler refers to Dominik Tatarka – a leading personality of dissidents during Communism and a common ideological reference of post-1989 politics – as an "urban ruralist" (Pichler 2006).

16. According to Márkus, "the culture-based policy, deforming into a Kulturkampf" hampered rational and cooperative political acting and caused the suboptimal economic performance of Hungary.

17. Fricz warns about the practice of "democracy without citizens", without a civil voice (Fricz 1998, 72). See the universal model of partocracy, or "over-particization" in Ágh (1998).

Disclosure statement

Funding

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