

## Radical Right-Wing Politics and Migrants and Refugees in Hungary

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### Abstract

Radical right-wing politics and ultra-nationalism have always been important issue across Europe's political spectrum. However, the recent flourishing of right-wing and populist parties in Europe in the past couple years were provoked by the European migrants and refugee crisis. The European institutions fail to solve the crisis. We witnessed various terrorist attacks occurred in major cities in Europe such as Paris, Berlin, and Italy etc. This had led not only the European people but all over the world to grow more suspicious of the EU institutions and their capabilities to manage the incident. As a consequence, the radical right-wing nationalist and right-wing political parties in Europe have taken this opportunity to claim and run their campaigns on a strong anti-refugees and immigrants. As a result, right-wing politicians and parties tend to gain more popularity among voters and achieved electoral success in many European countries such as Marine Le Pen in France, Andrej Babiš in Czech Republic, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe. These right-wing nationalists and political parties represent themselves as a defender of European Christian values, the protector of Europe, the savior of Christianity. They are working in every way to prevent the land of Europe from Muslims. This kind of rhetoric is spreading across Europe and developed as an anti-refugee/immigrant campaign which can be seen in both online and offline media especially in the case of Hungary. It has signified as a backlash against the political establishment and a wave of discontent. Furthermore, the rise of right-wing politics has created concerns over human rights, national identity, refugee and migrant issues.

**Keywords:** Visegrád Group, Radical Right-wing Politics, Hungary, Refugee Crisis, Migrant Crisis, European Studies, Immigrants

### Introduction

The year 2014 to 2016 marked a challenge period for Europe as a huge number of migrants and refugees have fled from their homelands, escaping the war in Syria searching for a shelter in Europe. The Syrian Civil War is a part of the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening began in 2011. The events of Arab Spring is the wave of revolution in the Middle East region to overthrow the authoritarianism regime in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. In Syria, the conflict between the Syrian government, led by President Bashar al-Assad and the protesters against him erupted and was recognized as the longest and the bloodiest case of Arab Spring. The conflict was intensified by religion between Muslim Sunni and Muslim Shia, which resulted in drawing a regional and world powers into Syria. Furthermore, the dimension of the rise of jihadist militants from Islamic State (IS) has worsen the situation and Syria was turned into a battlefield. In 2015, the Syrian war has resettled in the evacuation of 6.6 million Syrians internationally, with 4.9 million Syrian refugees worldwide (Global Trends in World Displacement in 2015, UNHCR, June 2016).<sup>1</sup> 11 million Syrians were endangered after the continuation years of war. In 2015, Syria became the country that generates the highest number for asylum applicants to EU Member States. Pew Research center analysis of data from Eurostat<sup>2</sup> found a record of 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the EU in 2015 as shown in figure 1

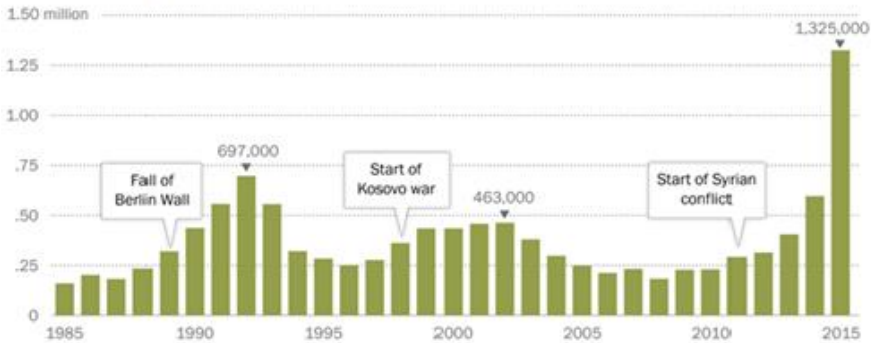
<sup>1</sup> [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

<sup>2</sup> The European Union's official statistical agency

**Figure 1:** A number of asylum seekers in the EU Member States, 2015<sup>1</sup>

**Number of asylum seekers in Europe surges to record 1.3 million in 2015**

*Annual number of asylum applications received by EU-28 countries, Norway and Switzerland, 1985 to 2015*



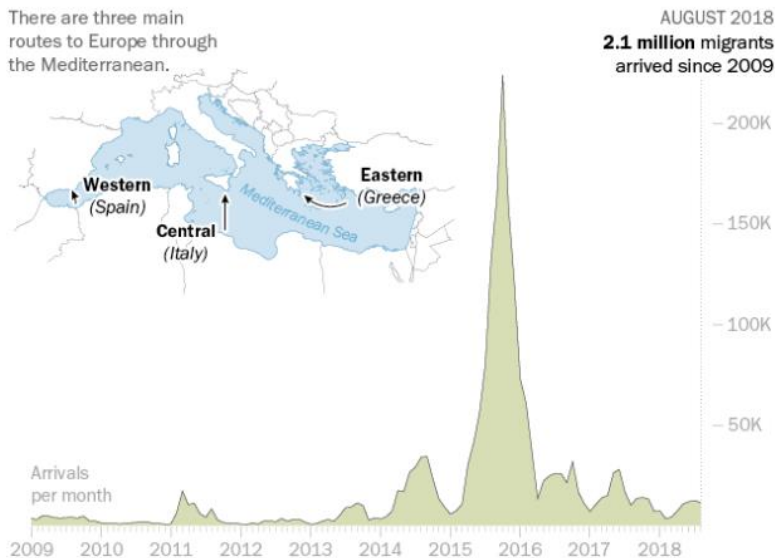
**Source:** Pew Research Center analysis of Eurostat data, accessed August 11, 2019. “Number of Refugees to Europe surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015”

Europe and the Middle East are geologically connected, with the shortest border distance of three kilometers between Greece and Turkey. Thus, this has made the land route the shortest, easiest and cheapest for refugees to reach Europe. However, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from Frontex, Europe’s border and coast guard agency, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the statistics, as shown in figure 3, shows that more than 200,000 migrants have arrived Europe in 2016 by crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

This fast-growing number of migrants and refugees entering to Europe has created concerns over how the EU Member States will handle with this problem. There was a division among European governments and public opinions whether they should reject or accept the migrants and refugees into their countries or not. This problem lies heavily on the forefront countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain because of their sea corridor. As a result, to lessen the burden of those forefront countries of the Mediterranean Sea and share of responsibilities equally across EU Member States according to the European solidarity, the European Union proposed a refugee relocation scheme to transfer persons who are in need of international protection from one EU Member State to another EU Member State.

**Figure 3:** Number of migrant detections by sea (January 2009 to August 2018)

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center analysis of Eurostat data, accessed August 17, 2018. “Number of Refugees to Europe surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015”



**Source:** Pew Research Center; Frontex (January 2009 to June 2018); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (July to August 2018), accessed August 11, 2019.

### The Visegrád Group and the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis

After the EU has proposed the quota scheme, many European Member States were struggling to impose a solution for the migrant and refugee crisis (Damoc, 2016). The debate of two major opposition perspectives had spread across Europe. For instance, Germany under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel, is known to welcome and receive the highest number of asylums as she considered this crisis as an opportunity for Germany to increase their work labors (Carnegie, 2016). On the contrary, the Visegrád group, comprises of the Czech Republic, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Hungary, refuse to take any migrant and refugee into their countries. The Visegrád four was highly criticized for its negative standpoint on the issue. One of the Visegrád group leaders, Mr. Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister described asylum seekers in Europe as 'a poison' and 'poses a public security and terror risk'. Orbán also reaffirmed that Hungary will not take a single migrant into the country<sup>1</sup>. In accordance, the Visegrád group strongly support each other in an effort to close their borders claiming that migrants and refugees will bring in 'disease' (Ignatieff, 2017), that they are a threat to the nation and are harmful to Christian civilization.

The group's negative position was clearly shown when Poland and Hungary decided to take none of the refugee into their countries and openly disagree to the scheme while other EU Member States agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees across Europe in 2015. To express its prompt disagreement to the EU proposal, Hungary and the Slovak Republic brought the case to the European Court of Justice accuses the EU of ignoring the right of individual national governments and their opinion. In their point of views, solidarity should be 'flexible' rather than a mandate, each member state should be able to make a decision over refugees' issue based on their voluntarily (Winterbauer & Végh, 2017). However, the European Union won an important victory as the court ruled that Hungary and Slovak Republic were obligated to accept migrants under a quota system.

#### Right-Wing Populism in Hungary

The rise of populism is one of the most important political developments in Europe. In the 21st century when we started to witness the collapse of center-left ideology which has dominated European politics since the end of World War II. Hungary

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-migrants-are-a-poison-hungarian-prime-minister-europe-refugee-crisis/>

is one of a group of former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe under the hegemony of the Soviet Union (USSR) during the period of Cold War (1947-1991). The revolution of 1989 was a starting point of a revolutionary wave in the early 1990s, which resulted in the end of communist rule and influence in Central and Eastern Europe. At the end of the Cold War, Hungary had experienced a liberal atmosphere, the country had free elections with multi-political parties and independent institutions. People had a chance to vote for a referendum and enjoy free media. Hungary and other three member states of the Visegrád four finally joined the European Union in 2004.

However, radical right-wing politics started to evolve in Hungary since 2010 under the Fidesz government led by prime minister Viktor Orbán which, at the beginning, ran as a young, liberal, even idealistic party after the fall of communism. Later, the party and its leader have become deeply conservative over time. Orbán and his government pioneered Hungary into 'illiberal democracy' state with partial democracy (Calleros-Alarcón, 2009). An illiberal democracy is a governing system in which though there are elections and democratic institutions but the true notion of democracy as civil society and freedoms of speech are limited. Orbán and Fidesz use the logic of 'majoritarian' to reject the idea that minority groups and ethnicities have human rights. Viktor Orbán adopt the concept of populism which is a political approach supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against a privileged elite. The concept mobilizes the animosity of 'the people' against 'the corrupt elite' (Barak, 2017). However, populism can fall anywhere on the traditional left to right political spectrum. In addition, the European refugee and migrant crisis has created doubts among Europeans over the effectiveness of EU institutions in solving the problem. Therefore, the crisis has become a mechanism of populist politicians particularly Viktor Orbán of Hungary to win his position in the government and gain more popularity among its people. Finally, the right-wing populist, mainly in Hungary, has used the Eurosceptic and populist rhetoric to convince the voters, develop their political ground positions and become a part of modern European politics (Danaj, Lazányi, & Bilan, 2018). ตัวอย่าง

The following part is an analysis of four cause factors; history, economic, security and defense, and populism in which Viktor Orbán uses to legitimate his negative policies towards migrants and refugees. By using a case study of Hungary, readers will clearly understand how each factor is used to create anti-refugee sentiment.

#### Cause Factors of Anti-Migration in Hungary

##### 1) History Factor

First, we must examine the history of Hungary in order to understand modern Hungarian politics and its negative standpoint towards migrants and refugees. Hungary has experienced a long memory of foreign invasion. To begin with, the war between the Ottoman Empire and Hungary began around the fourteenth century and eventually led to the defeat of the Hungarians at the Battle of Mohács in 1526 which was a decisive victory for the Ottoman Empire. A military alliance comprised of Christian Europe countries called The Holy league was formed in 1594 with a purpose to gain back territories from the Ottoman. In 1867, Hungary defeated the war with Austria and became a part of Austrian Empire. After Austria and Hungary agreed to create a dual monarchy system, an Austria-Hungary Empire was born and became a large multinational country, the second largest in Europe after Russia. Hungary lost its territories in the Treaty of Trianon after the end of World War I. it has lost physical lands of 72 percent. The population went down from 20 million to 7 million. The economy was unstable due to the war. As history went on, by the end of the Second World War, Hungary was occupied by the Soviet Union, people protested against Communist regime in 1956 resulted as the Hungarian revolution. After the end of the Cold War, the Visegrád group was formed and joined the European Union in 2004. One of the most significant loss for Hungary from the rule by foreigners is, for example, the Hungarian language was turned into a "peasant language" and was replaced by Latin and German as they became official languages using in administration or business.

##### 2) Economic Factor

The economic impacts of refugees are also a huge debate whether it will bring advantages or disadvantages to the country's economic. The short-term impact will be 'fiscal spending shock', an additional expenditure that the government has to pay when the refugees arrive, they have to absorb cost on processing their application and subsidizing their settlement including housing, food, education, and health. And because of the continuation of fast-growing number of refugees enter to Europe. European citizens started to skeptic to accept a high number of refugees into their countries due to public spending, together with growing of islamophobia and increasing terrorists' activities, supported with the rise of right-wing and populist parties who symbolize refugees as a threat to European society (Buerjin, 2016). They started to fear that this will weaken the countries' economy. However, in the long-run, the government starts receiving fiscal benefits after the refugees enter to

the labor market (Poddar, 2016). Therefore, the government has to be able to identify the skills that the refugee possesses and provide necessary training so that this could be an investment instead of a burden. A large percentage of the refugees entering the EU are young and skilled in different professions. They are people whom were forced to leave their homes because the "Islamic State" had seized their home areas and imposed the totalitarian rule. However, it will take a few years for refugees to be able to adjust themselves to the new society and be able to add value to the economy. A study by Kalena Cortes claims that after years of integration, refugees will generate growth to the economy each year more than the original cost of receiving them (Cortes, 2004).

### 3) Security and Defense Factor

The European refugee crisis not only has created concerns over countries' economy but also raised fear about terrorism since there were terrorist attacks in many areas since the outbreak of the migrant and refugee crisis. This crisis has led people to believe that the movement of refugees from the Middle East is the main reason of terrorist attacks and would increase European security challenges. However, there is only a small statistical and study evidence that shows a flow of refugees and migration are the causes of terrorist attacks in Europe. On the contrary, there is an evidence from Europol showing that ISIS uses a strategy of recruiting an army of home-grown radicals living within the European Union through online propaganda and networking via social media. Europol concludes that:

"Jihadist attacks are committed primarily by homegrown terrorists, radicalised in their country of residence without having travelled to join a terrorist group abroad. This group of home-grown actors is highly diverse, consisting of individuals who have been born in the EU or have lived in the EU most of their lives, may have been known to the police but not for terrorist activities and often do not have direct links to the Islamic State (IS) or any other jihadist organization."

European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018

EUROPOL (5)

These European homegrown terrorists use their E.U. passports to travel across the continent according to the open border policy of the European Union. Thus, it is difficult to detect suspected terrorists. In conclusion, there is little evidence on the linkage of the refugees and migrants and the terrorist attacks in Europe.

### 4) Populism Factor

Populism has become a very distinctive characteristic of modern European politics especially for right-wing parties. Right-wing politicians and parties aim to use populism in order to increase their support from the public and gain voters. I will show how populism was adopted by right wing politician and Viktor Orbán, the leader of Hungary is the best example of this. He uses populism as one of his most important and effective tools to influence on the people, specifically in the case of Hungary. A government propaganda and rhetoric on migrants and refugees have created the fear of an Islamic invasion and losing the European identity over Muslims. This creation of external enemy encourages the people to feel that right-wing parties are the answer to the increasing threat of Muslim migrant and refugees since other political parties are not aggressive enough in responding to the crisis.

#### Anti-Migration Campaigns in Hungary

In many Orbán's speech, he selects and use a point in history of Hungary which emphasizes the loss of territory, for example, in the Treaty of Trianon. Then he links the incident that happened 170 years ago to encourage people to vote for him.

"We need it because today we must talk to each other about serious matters: matters just as serious as those which had to be dealt with **170 years ago. We are the heirs of the 1848 revolutionaries and freedom fighters**, because, just as 170 years ago, today we must speak honestly and directly. If we do not clearly state what is happening to Hungary and why it is happening, then no one will understand. And if we do not understand it, **then we cannot make a sound decision three weeks from now.**" [My Emphasis]. Orbán Viktor's ceremonial speech on the 170th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, 15 March 2018, Budapest

Another example is that the prime minister did exaggerate on how refugees 'do not fit' with Hungarian society and core values. He tries to connect the refugees as people that could overthrow the Hungarian, and the European Union had made

this happen by allowing more refugees to enter to Europe with the help of allies in Hungary, and by this he meant George Soros.

"Dear Friends, is that there are **those who want to take our country from us**. Not with the stroke of a pen, has **happened one hundred years ago at Trianon; now they want us to voluntarily hand our country over to others**, over a period of a few decades. They want us to **hand it over to foreigners coming from other continents, who do not speak our language, and who do not respect our culture, our laws or our way of life: people who want to replace what is ours with what is theirs**. What they want is that henceforward it will increasingly not be we and our descendants who live here, but others. There is no exaggeration in what I have just said. Day by day we see **the great European countries and nations losing their countries**: little by little, from district to district and from city to city. The situation is that those who do not halt immigration at their borders are lost: slowly but surely, they are consumed. **External forces and international powers want to force all this upon us, with the help of their allies here in our country.**" [My Emphasis]. Orbán Viktor's ceremonial speech on the 170th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, 15 March 2018, Budapest

In accordance with his speeches, Viktor Orbán starts his first phase campaign on "If you come to Hungary" as shown below;

**Figure 4:** Phase 1 'If you come to Hungary' billboard campaign against migrants and refugees by Hungarian government



1. If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away the work of the Hungarians!

2. If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture!

3. if you come to Hungary, you have to respect our law!

Source: *Budapest Business Journal* "Government to Address Immigrants on Billboards." *Budapest Business Journal*, [bj.hu/politics/government-to-address-immigrants-on-billboards\\_98686](http://bj.hu/politics/government-to-address-immigrants-on-billboards_98686).

At first glance, it seems that these messages are aimed directly at the migrants and refugees but the fact is these messages are written in a language which can only be understood by the Hungarians. This kind of campaign could develop negative attitude towards refugees and migrants among Hungarians. Moreover, Orbán did send out a national consultation attached with a questionnaire, a kind of a direct message to the Hungarians of how refugees and migrants are a threat to the nation. Most of the questions are designed to influence the respondents on the issues of refugees and migrants with a high degree of interdiscursivity, xenophobia and mislead questions full of various discourses.

Cas Mudde defines populism as a relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite'. This message is strengthened by Orbán through his second phase campaign against Brussels (Figure 5). This time, all the messages starts with "Did you know?" and end with "Referendum, October 2, 2016. The campaign is translated: (1) "Did you know that since the beginning of the immigration crisis more than 300 people died as a result of terror attacks in Europe?" (2) "Did you know that Brussels wants to settle a whole city's worth of illegal immigrants in Hungary?" (3) "Did you know that since the beginning of the immigration crisis the harassment of women has risen sharply in Europe?" (4) "Did you know that the Parisian terror attacks were committed by immigrants?" (5) "Did you know that just from Libya close to one million immigrants want to come to Europe?" (6) "Did you know that last year one and a half million immigrants arrived in Europe?"

Viktor Orbán puts the European Union as 'Brussels elite' and represent himself as a savior. He would take the same side as the Hungarian people instead of participating with the elites in Brussels. In respond to this, Viktor Orbán delivered the policies and government services that are claimed to be made to ensure security for Hungary and the Hungarians: the building of wall fence at Hungary's border. The country will be safe from Muslim refugee threats. He convinces his fellow that Hungary is under attack by Brussels as in another of his speech, apart from the billboards. Orbán says:

"We do not need to fight the little opposition parties, but an international network which is organized into an empire. We are up against media maintained by foreign, professional hired activists, troublemaking protest organizers, and a chain of NGOs financed by an international speculator embodied in the name "George Soros".

Viktor Orban's speech on Hungary celebrates the Revolution for Independence of 1848-1849

15 March 2018

**Figure 5:** Phase 2 'Did you know?' billboard campaign against migrants and refugees by Hungarian government



Source: Thorpe, Nick. "Hungary Poster Campaign Pokes Fun at Migrant Referendum." *BBC News*, BBC, 10 Sept. 2016, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37310819](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37310819).

Viktor Orbán continues his campaign series in phase 3 directly on George Soros. Orbán claims that Soros's plan is supported by Brussels, allowing a foreign international organization on settling one million migrants in Europe. Europe will become unrecognizable by a flood of Muslim refugees once Soros and his allies succeed in opening the borders. The Hungarian government amplifies this campaign against Soros by passing a 'stop Soros' law on June 2018, a purpose of this law is to strictly prohibit providing any kind of assistance to undocumented immigrants from individuals and organizations. This law means Hungarian government will have an extra power to jail its political opponents by accusing them for 'helping the refugees'. To conclude, "Stop Soros" law is a bill that human rights advocates fear will be used to shut down opposition groups and civil society.

**Figure 6:** Phase 3 Hungarian government campaign against George Soros



## Conclusion and Discussion

One of the main rhetorical features of right-wing populist parties and their supporters is the opposition between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite". It can be seen from the case of Hungary that facts might not be able to speak louder than the power of the political message. I can see that there is a relationship of voting for right-wing populist parties which is

essentially interconnected with citizens' trust in public officials and political institutions. In the case of Hungary, Orbán convinces the Hungarians through media that he is the savior of Hungary and Christian values, and his political party, Fidesz, is the answer for its strong policies against migrants and refugees. To conclude this paper, I see how right-wing populist leader such as Viktor Orbán create anti-refugee sentiment among Hungarians by using each factor of history, economic, security and defense and populism to legitimate his actions of conducting negative policy against the refugees. He has created 'fear' of others and an external enemy to distract people from domestic hard issue policies such as education, health & welfare. By connecting a selective point of national collective trauma in history to boost up nationalism, by claiming that letting the refugees in, people will lose their job which is not true, by claiming that refugees are security threat while neglecting the fact that most terrorist attacks are conducted by EU native born-radicals, Orbán, again, won the election and succeeded in planting ground of populism in Hungary.

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