

Mapping the radical right populism and their discourses in public spheres: the case of Romania and Hungary

RESEARCH PLAN

Aim of the project

Despite the growing body of literature which explains the emergence and the electoral contours of radical right populism in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Minkenberg 2002, Hanley et al. 2008, Mudde 2005, Kovács 2013, Auers–Kasekamp 2013) we have sporadic knowledge about the radical right mass communication channels and media discourses. Cross-country researches with comparative focus are particularly needed to gain more insight into the contemporary nature of the radical right populism. The proposed project fills this gap by conducting a cross-case analysis focusing on Romania and Hungary. The aim is twofold. First, we envisage an analysis of the characteristics of media discourses of the radical right. Second, we aim to identify the positions of the radical right populist media products within the network structure of the general media sphere. Our purpose is to shed lights on one of the major public issues in our region: the communicative construction of radical right populism and its location in the public spheres.

Case selection: why Romania and Hungary?

Romania and Hungary are excellent comparative cases as countries with different electoral patterns concerning the radical right populism. In Romania, the radical right political parties gained significant electoral success soon after the collapse of the communist regime and by 2000 the Greater Romania Party (*Partidul România Mare*, PRM) became the largest opposition force. Contrary to the wider European trend, popular support for the PRM has declined so far and no other radical right-wing group has managed to replicate its electoral performance. Indeed, if the PRM polled 8.6% in the elections for the European Parliament in 2009 and sent three MEPs to Brussels, in the 2012 Romanian parliamentary elections the PRM received a meagre 1.3%, score confirmed by the 2014 European elections when the PRM polled only 2.7%. These developments notwithstanding, the Romanian political landscape is not depleting of such electoral forces, such as the People's Party-Dan Diaconescu (*Partidul Poporului-Dan Diaconescu*, PP-DD) newcomer. However, there seems to be a low presence of radical right in the political competition of today's Romania.

The case of Hungary, however tells a completely different story. The 2009 was the year of the electoral breakthrough of the Hungarian Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, Jobbik), when it gained 14.7% of total votes (14.7%) and delegated three MEPs to the European Parliament. The Jobbik achieved further support in the Hungarian parliamentary elections of 2010 gaining 16.6% of votes. The Jobbik has cemented its status as by far the largest radical right group in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) by winning 20.54 percent of the votes in the 2014 parliamentary election.

The trajectory of the radical right's political performance is surely differing in the selected countries, but what can we see if we take a look at the media landscape of Romania and Hungary? There is no consensus over the fact that whether the media systems in the CEE countries gravitate towards the western, northern or southern European models or rather form a distinctively separate block, it is however safe to say that the trends of *tabloidization*, *political parallelization*, the *dominance of opinion based-journalism*, *gradual decline in*

broadsheet newspaper sales and the *high level of political pressure on media* are common in Romania and Hungary.

Previous studies on the field: visibility matters

The focus on media is not the novelty of the proposed project. Previous analyses have already highlighted the pivotal role of the mass communication channels in the rise of the radical right populism during the past couple of decades. There seems to be a wide consensus that the media is partially responsible for the radicalisation of the public discourse by covering the preferred topics of the radical right intensively. Scholars suggest that there is a clear-cut correlation between the salience and framing of certain issues in the news media and the electoral fortune of the radical parties. The behaviour of journalists towards the radical right movements and parties is also mentioned as key component. Antonis Ellinas (2010) claims that the editorial boards and the journalists play an important role in determining how much prominence the radical right parties or their representatives are given by a certain media outlet. If the mainstream media are willing to deal with radical parties and present their viewpoints on certain political issues, it has a positive influence on the electoral performance of those radical right parties. Succinctly, the more media attention is paid to the radical right populist political actors, the more votes they gain in national and sub-national elections.

Ellinas suggests that the relationship between the media products and radical right populism does make a real difference. First and foremost, the visibility matters regardless of the tones and the frames of the coverage. If the media deal with the representatives of the radical right, they are able to exploit even any negative publicity to connect with the voters and offer them a viable political alternative which is more and more popular in many European countries (Norocel 2010, 2013). In addition, radical right populism is keen to establish its own media universe with a powerful mix of social media, traditional formats of written press and radio stations to balance the hostile mainstream media environment, which looks to be continuous in the case of the established radical parties too (cf. Skenderovic 2009, Udriș 2012). Inspired by Ellinas's conclusion, this study addresses the issue of media visibility of radical right populism in Romania and Hungary.

Visibility has been mostly conceptualised by focusing on textual dimension; quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the media coverage of radical parties, politicians or hot issues is a fruitful way of analysing radicalisation (see Vliegthart et al 2012). Visibility however can be approached as chains of interactions between the key actors of the mainstream and radical media, which is rather a neglected aspect in researching radical right populism (Szabó-Bene 2015a, 2015b). The proposed project combines the merits of content-oriented and interaction-oriented approaches.

Research Question & Methods

The 2-year-long empirical examination is driven by the main research question: ***what are the differences and similarities concerning the media visibility of radical right populism in Romania and Hungary?***

To answer the question, a multi-method approach is provided. We apply quantitative (network analysis) and qualitative (discourse analysis) methods by studying different issues of the public debates.

We assume that the Romanian case reveals that the low level of media visibility (whereby we understand visibility to involve both matters of engaging with traditional mass media but also the social media interaction) goes together with lack of electoral success of radical right populism. The Hungarian case is expected to demonstrate the opposite; higher level of media visibility and higher popular support.

Issue-centred research design: selection of issues

Four controversial issues will be examined for each country to observe the differences and similarities of media discourses and media interactions case by case. The Issue no1. is chosen according to the criteria of 'media storm' which is an 'explosive increase in news coverage of a specific issue constituting a substantial share of the total news agenda during a certain time' (Boydston et al. 2014: 511). Media storm-type of coverage helps us to identify the key patterns of discourses and interactions concerning a heavily debated political question which can be considered as important topic of the general public. It could be any political debates which refer to domestic politics. Issue no2. and no3. are selected to test whether the radical right protagonist of the story makes any difference concerning the key patterns of discourses and interaction. Issue no2. focuses on a topic in which (a) representative(s) of the right wing radical scene is in a defensive discursive position in the controversy. For example, scandals of radical right politicians or parties, violent actions of radical movements or activists, legal charges against radical right media products and so on. Issue no3. concentrates on the case in which (a) representative(s) of the radical right party/movement is in an offensive discursive position. For example, an event or a topic which is heavily communicated by (a) representative(s) of the radical right party/movement.

Issue no4 explores the discourses and interactions on family/gender policy which we deem of particular importance for the ideological articulation of right wing radicalism in Romania and Hungary (Norocel 2010, 2013; Loch–Norocel 2015).

Measuring the visibility: discourses and interactions

In our research visibility will be measured in two ways. On the one hand, we will compare critically the discursive elements of emerging interpretive repertoires (such as the combination of phrases, frames, arguments, claims) that are applied by the mainstream and radical right populist media case by case, and country by country. If the discursive elements of radical right populist products can be detected in the mainstream media, we assess this phenomenon as empirical evidence of the visibility of radical right politics. The more discursive elements of radical right populism appear in the mainstream media, the higher level of visibility can be observed. We assume that high level of visibility correlates with high level of popularity of radical right populist politics. We may turn the argument the other way around by assuming that the more popular support the radical right populist parties enjoy, the more visible their preferred discursive pattern are in the public spheres. To highlight the interrelationship between the discourses and the rise of radicalism, a critical approach to discourse analysis will be introduced, to be performed with the help of ATLAS.ti/MAXQDA. On the other hand, the interactions will be analysed. Interactions are important indicators of connections. The characteristics of connections between the media products perfectly outline the structure of the media sphere. If the mainstream media outlets connect strongly with radical right populist platforms and vice versa, the media sphere can be evaluated as an integrated space. One may argue that this condition indicates the mainstreaming of the

extreme which legitimatises the position of radicalism. Zero connections indicate that the mainstream media isolate radical right populism by refusing any interactions with them. The interaction ties between media products, or the lack thereof, indicate which agents of communication are able to influence the direction of public discourses. It is plausible to assume that the more radical right populist media are integrated into the mainstream flow of mass communication, the higher their chance of producing effects in public discussions. And also the other way around: it is likely that little or no interaction ties create an unfavourable climate for radical right populism to have an impact on political debates. To locate the radical right populist media products in the interaction network of the media spheres, we will study both the general structure of the media network and the network of radical right populist media outlets in Romania and Hungary. As a software support for calculation, we will apply the igraph and the tnet packages for R as well as the Ucinet 6 software.

The framework of our analysis concentrates on the two clusters in each country: the 2014 European parliamentary elections (25 May 2014), and the 2014 Romanian presidential elections (2 and 16 November 2014) in Romania; the 2014 European parliamentary elections (25 May 2014), and the Hungarian local elections (12 October 2014) in Hungary.

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