The latest 'southern protection system' and the revived 'fortress of Europe' topos in Hungary¹

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Abstract: *As a response to the processes of international migration in the Balkans, the Hungarian government in 2015 constructed a technical border defence system on the southern border of Hungary, also assigning manpower to guard the border. As a response to migration, this is not unique in Europe if we also consider previous and subsequent events. Although this topic has already been addressed by several authors from different perspectives, this paper is the first to analyse in detail the construction and characteristics of the technical border defence system, and the structure and operation of the assigned police and military forces. The paper also examines how government policy related to the protection of the southern border and the fence revived the 'Hungary, the fortress/bastion of (Christian) Europe' concept, and also how the Hungarian government communicated this in order to achieve its political objectives.*

Keywords: *Hungary, migration, border, southern technical border defence system, Bastion of Europe*

Introduction

In 2015, many people departed for Europe, mainly due to the civil wars taking place in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. As a result, not only Spain and Italy were under great migratory pressure, but significant masses migrated to the core areas of Europe through Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia,

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i.e. through the Balkan migration routes and then through Hungary. This new situation has posed a major challenge to the European Union and put great strain on the relationships between the old and new member states and the countries aspiring to join the EU.

The Hungarian government decided to establish a technical border protection system on the southern border of Hungary from summer 2015 in response to the fluid migration situation, which it supports with assigned manpower. The system thus caused the “hardening” and militarisation of the border in the South.

It was not unprecedented in Europe for some states to block irregular migration through the Balkans with technical barriers. With regard to the above, the number of refugees arriving in Greece has increased significantly since 2011. As a result, in the spring of 2012, Greece erected a fence of around 12 km long and 4 metres high on the Evros River section of the Greek–Turkish border, which is guarded with an electronic surveillance system, thermal sensors, night-vision cameras and drones. Following the Greek intervention, migration was partly diverted towards Bulgaria. This prompted the Bulgarians to erect a total of 201 kilometres of fences on the 259 km long Bulgarian–Turkish border from 2014 to November 2017. These were guarded by cameras and thermal cameras in addition to soldiers and border guards (Benedicto – Brunet 2018).

Already after the construction of the Hungarian border protection system from July to October 2015, and in response to the relocation of the migration route, Slovenia also started to establish a technical barrier on the 670 km long Slovenian–Croatian land border in November 2015. Although the Slovenian government tried to keep the information confidential, Croatian media learned that, in 2019 (when constructions were still ongoing), there were 179 km long technical barriers at 50 different sites (Betj 2019). Also, almost 200 km of technical components consisting of wire barriers and fence panels were completed by 2020 (FRA Report 2020).

In November 2015, Macedonia also started to install a technical barrier along the border sections under greater migratory pressure from the direction of Greece. Various data have been published on these construction works, which were also performed in secret (Šabić – Borić 2016; Mileski 2018). Based on field experience, it is safe to say that slightly more than 25 km of barriers have been installed in the area of Gevgelija, as well as of Dojran and Medzitlija. Most of this comprises a 3.5 meter high, double-row fence reinforced with blade wire and protected by border guards, but in some hard-to-access places, only a quick-install wire barrier was installed. The barriers are concentrated at the main ‘migration gate’, in the vicinity of Gevgelija.

Partly due to the Macedonian and Slovenian construction of fences, and despite a significant reduction in the number of migrants arriving to the Balkans following the EU–Ankara migration agreement in March 2016, the Serbian

government changed its position in August 2020 and began fencing. No official information has been released on the construction on the Serbian-Macedonian border either. An inquiry in the public interest by Radio Slobodna Evropa was rejected by the Serbian Ministry of the Interior on the grounds that the information was strictly confidential (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2020). However, following media reports, it became clear that Serbia would hinder migration mainly with technical solutions constructed north of Tabanovce (North Macedonia), at the southern entrance point to the Preševo Valley.

The above clearly shows that barriers have been installed in several places since 2012, along the main migration channels crossing the Balkans, on both difficult-to-control and more easily accessible junctions and sections. The erection and strict guarding of the Hungarian fence also marked a turning point: firstly, it redirected mass migration in the Balkans to transversal routes, and secondly, it swelled the number of refugees in the territories of some states. The former provoked a Slovenian response, and ultimately the construction of the Serbian fence on the 'Miratovac plateau', which was largely the cause of the Hungarian, Macedonian and Slovenian measures and the increased Croatian border police activity.

The erection and strict guarding of the Hungarian fence in 2015 received criticism internationally (US Embassy in Hungary 2015), while other governments pursuing similar actions did not receive such criticism. However, unlike the aforementioned governments, the Hungarian cabinet did not keep any information about the construction of the fence confidential at all, but reported regularly on major developments. Moreover, in an effort to endow the fence with some additional meaning, they made it a communication vehicle, using it as a political argument in domestic and international politics.

Since one of the authors of this paper is a researcher focusing on the Balkans and the migration processes in the region, and the other is a professional soldier who has been actively involved in the establishment and operation of the Hungarian territorial defence reserve force, they have preferred to pursue the participant observation method in writing this paper. During their field trips to the Balkans and in Hungary, they consulted with a number of law enforcement officers and national military bodies and members of academia, while they were able to personally observe the operation of the Hungarian southern border fence and the assigned manpower. Using their experience in this field, this paper examines the technical barrier at the southern border with a view to the historical context, presenting the historical-political legitimacy of the Hungarian fence construction efforts. They also place special emphasis on the location, nature, construction and operation of the technical barrier, and analyse in detail how and for what purpose the Hungarian government revived the image of Hungary being the defensive bastion of Europe.

Overview of bibliographical references

Research into the field of borders has had renaissance for the last three or four decades. While initially it was mainly the field of geographers and regionalists, over time, due to its complexity, the representatives of more and more other disciplines also started to focus on this topic. A community of 'border studies' experts has also emerged, who consider themselves specifically border researchers working with an interdisciplinary approach. Their representatives do not merely examine state boundaries and subnational administrative boundaries, but also concentrate on the cultural, social, economic, and religious boundaries that integrate or separate certain groups in society (Kolossoff – Scott 2013).

From the 1990s, a kind of duality has been observed in the field of border studies research. First of all, the termination of the East–West confrontation with the acceleration of globalisation brought about the softening of borders, which carried with it the prospect of the completion of a 'borderless world', popularised from the 1970s to the 1980s (O'Dowd 2010). In Europe, as part of this process, with the progress of integration, internal borders have become increasingly insignificant, while the role of cross-border cooperation and networks has increased significantly (O'Dowd 2002; Scott 2011). However, from the beginning and especially since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, many border studies researchers have been increasingly critical of the concept of a 'borderless world' in the media, in certain social organisations, in politics and in academia, emphasising its overly general nature and unrealistic character (Paasi 2018).

Evidence also supported their position, with the disintegration of the bipolar world and the emergence of a new world order in which many new states emerged, during which territorial and border disputes arose in numerous cases (Kürti 2006). While certain processes contributed to the demarcation of borders (in the aforementioned way), in the case of the newly created states, in addition to the growing importance of integration efforts, the principle and role of the inviolability of borders have also become more important. Also, due to international irregular migration and global terrorism, many countries have tightened their border controls since the 2000s, in many cases not only in a legal, but also in a physical sense (Pap – Reményi 2017). This also contributed to the importance of the role of borders.

This has brought the triad of closely interrelated issues of international irregular migration, namely securitisation, migration and borders, which have intensified to an unprecedented extent since 2015, to the forefront of academic interest. Although the dimension of migration was not a significant part of traditional discourse, works examining the risks of migration impacting national security and national identity already appeared in the 1990s and 2000s (Buzan – Weaver – Wilde 1998; Huysmans 2000). Still however, it was only after

the aforementioned terrorist attacks of 2001 that the securitisation of migration issues started to come to the fore. Although several researchers have addressed the issue, the relevant discourses in the coming years have generally revolved around the social, criminological, economic and political threats of the migration process. As Georgios Karyotis, who also examined these dimensions, believed that migration did not directly threaten the survival of the state or society, as opposed to traditional security threats. However, according to many actors (including decision-makers), migrants pose a serious threat: they endanger the harmonious coexistence of the host community, cultural homogeneity, identity, religious, linguistic and ethnic composition; disrupt the public order of the host society, commit crimes, participate in drug-trafficking, organised crime and terrorism; take the jobs of others, reduce wages, increase unemployment and social security burdens. While examining the political dimension, he also highlighted that some fear larger immigrant communities could influence bilateral relations between the departure and host states, and that politicians could more vocally support securitisation of the migration issue in order to increase their legitimacy and popularity (Karyotis 2007). Carrera's examination of the European Union's external borders revealed that border control by the police already suggest that migration, especially in the cases of persons identified as 'migrants', is a suspicious activity involving relations to organised crime and disorder (Carrera 2010). Campesi highlighted that the securitisation of migration will greatly increase the control function of the borders, while reducing the freedoms and rights of migrants. He outlined three main paradigms in which migration emerges as a threat to public order and state security; political and cultural integrity; and poses a socio-economic threat (Campesi 2012). Referring to the migration crisis intensifying from 2015, Juhász and Gashi claimed that the refugee crisis, which started as a humanitarian problem, had become a security policy issue in Europe. They emphasised that according to some populist arguments, migration threatens the future of the continent. In this context, many values to be protected can be listed: culture, religion, morality, women and children, who, according to populists, are threatened by an influx of people who are incompatible with the European, Christian way of life and culture (Juhász – Gashi 2016).

In the context of the management of the migration crisis in Hungary, Iov and Bogdan addressed the policies of Orbán and their impact (Iov – Bogdan 2017). They concluded that the Hungarian Prime Minister had warned the leaders of the European Union that the majority of those arriving are Muslims, i.e. representing a different religion and a radically different culture. This approach, in their view, has only strengthened the link between migration, identity and insecurity across Europe, which has led to an increase in Euroscepticism. The intensification of xenophobic and radical discourse, with which they were able to mobilise voters in many places, generated a certain issue of identity. Thus, the

distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, in which Muslims emerged as a burden on the social security system, or as religious fanatics and even potential terrorists who threaten the integrity of Christian values, has definitely emerged.

In connection with the latter idea, we shall mention Edina Vajkai, a Hungarian scientist, who believed that the majority of Hungarian society sees the migration crisis as a threat to security, and often associates irregular migrants with the phenomenon of terrorism. In her opinion, this was only confirmed by the Hungarian government’s 2015 billboard campaign, in which illegal immigrants appeared as elements that had a negative impact on e.g. public order and public safety (Vajkai 2015). Stepper examined forced migration as a security threat in the Visegrad countries. Analysing the Hungarian situation, he concluded that the statements of the political actors regarding securitisation, with relevance to migration, appeared in the military, political, economic and social dimensions. In his opinion, these are primarily manifested in the construction of the border barrier, in drawing attention to the threats of terrorism; emphasising the issue of sovereignty; highlighting the impact of increasing unemployment; and in the representation of identity as a value to be protected (Stepper 2018). And although Stepper was not yet able to mention the public health dimension in his analysis, based on the sector theory of the Copenhagen School, Éberhardt analysed in 2021 the extent to which irregular migration in the Western Balkans can be a source of health risks in Hungary or elsewhere during the Covid-19 epidemic (Éberhardt 2021). Finally, we shall also mention the names of Balla and Kui who discussed the Hungarian temporary security border barrier (built for border control purposes) explicitly as a physical barrier (Balla – Kui 2017; Kui 2017).

The southern border of Hungary as a wide frontier and defence zone

From banates to the disappearance of physical borders

The ‘hardening’ of the southern border of Hungary has occurred rather frequently over the last couple of centuries. The Kingdom of Hungary, in the absence of natural obstacles that are more difficult to pass, was the least protected in this ‘soft spot’ in the Délvidék region (southern land), which changed from time to time. Along the more easily accessible river valleys, the most important migration routes of the Balkan Peninsula reached the state territory at the gateway of the Morava (Belgrade) and continued along the Danube through Hungary, until they exited through the gateway of the Morva to access central parts of Europe (Pap – Kitanics 2015).

In the so-called Délvidék, a wide frontier existed for centuries since the formation of the Hungarian state, the area of which often changed depending

on the current balances of power. In the Middle Ages, this foreground of the Hungarian state, on the northern edge of the Balkans, was used by Hungarian kings to establish banates (territories ruled by a ban), and as the Ottoman Turks advanced, the remaining Croatian–Slavonian territories were the departure ground to take control of the defence corridor stretching to Poland. After the expulsion of the Turks, the *Határőrvidék* (Military Frontier) established here constituted a buffer zone and ‘cordon sanitaire’ in the direction of the Balkans, and at the end of the long 19th century a wide southern buffer zone was created here with the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the dependence of the Serbian state.

Following the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon, the state of Hungary became more vulnerable to the South than ever before. In the interbellum revisionist period, the Hungarian government clearly moved toward unilateral debordering,² causing the border protection of the *Délvidék* to rely on the Drava–Danube line once again. In the state socialist period following the Second World War, unilateral rebordering followed with the strict control of any inward or outward movement (Pap – Reményi 2017). The western border was closed by the iron curtain, and the southern border section became even more militarised. After the Eastern Bloc rejected the independent policies of Yugoslavia, the so-called Yugoslav–Hungarian border section has seen the construction of the so-called Southern Defence System. In order to slow down the attack expected from the South, Hungary built a 630 km long, 100–160 km deep, multi-line defence system requiring the service of 100 000 soldiers in combat-readiness, reinforced with wire barriers, concrete works and mine barrage (Kitanics – Pap 2017). Indeed, for a decade and a half (1950–1965), a wide southern frontier zone was formed again within the state border.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, with the end of the bipolar world and the democratisation processes in Central and Eastern Europe, the disappearance of physical borders began in the region. However, between 1991 and 1995, the southern Hungarian border section again found itself in a special situation as a result of the war in Croatia, when it became ‘harder’ and its militarisation persisted in these years (Šokčević 2016; Ács et al 2017). In 2004, in addition to Hungary, Slovenia, and then, in 2013 Croatia also became members of the European Union, and the accession of the candidate Serbia to the EU has been intensively supported by Hungary for a long time. However, the debordering phase towards Serbia and Croatia (which followed the end of the Yugoslav Wars) ended in 2014–2015. In 2014, migration pressure from the South increased, and from 2015, the southern technical barrier was built.

2 The pursuit of unilateral debordering was related to the return of territories lost with the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 and annexed to the neighbouring states.

The new defence zone

In 2015, a single-row and then a double fence was constructed on the Hungarian-Serbian border, including a manoeuvring road designed for patrols that is around 3.5 m wide. A single-row fence was erected on the Hungarian-Croatian border, and easy-install wire barriers were placed on the more difficult-to-cross sections, while the Drava River formed a natural barrier on certain sections. From July 2016, people crossing the border illegally could be stopped within the 8 km frontier zone of the external border and escorted by police and soldiers to the Serbian or Croatian side of the fence (Magyar Közlöny 2016a). The practice applied for the said border section was then extended to the whole country from March 2017 (Magyar Közlöny 2017). In the border zone, police are working with increased alertness at the junctions of the roads leading to the centre of the country, while also carrying out full inspections beyond the border zone, inside the country. This clearly shows that the southern border has been re-militarised from 2015, and once again a wider border zone, secured and highly controlled with the participation of thousands of policemen and soldiers was established within the country.

At the same time, the Hungarian government has started developing the objective of establishing a buffer zone in the foreground of the state of Hungary, South of the border, in order to restrict migration. With relevance to this, the Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán said the following in his state of the country address in February 2016: *'... We are giving personnel, border guards, technical hardware and equipment to the Balkan countries, because it is they who are in reality defending Europe's borders. And while they are resisting, we will also be able to defend our own borders more easily. We have known this since the time of Hunyadi* (About Hungary 2016a).' He essentially repeated this at the 2016 Vienna Migration Conference organised by Austrian chancellor Christian Kern, adding that since Greece was unable to undertake its duties, and the shaky migration agreement between the EU and Turkey could not be relied on either, migration defence lines needed to be established in the Balkans, including a first line on the Macedonian-Greek border, a second on the Serbian-Macedonian border, and a third on the Hungarian-Serbian border (EU Brüsszel MFA 2016). The consistency of Hungarian government communication was also indicated by foreign minister Péter Szijjártó's statement in Skopje in April 2020, expressing that the line of effective protection against migratory pressure should be as far South as possible from the Hungarian border (V4NA 2020).

Concrete steps were taken between 2015 and 2020 to implement this principle. But first, in addition to the support of FRONTEX, the Hungarian government requested the assistance of the Visegrad Group (V4) to support the guarding of the technical barrier on the Hungarian-Serbian border. Following the V4 border police cooperation agreement, a Slovak and Czech police unit

of 50 each arrived in Hungary in late October 2015, and a Polish border guard contingent of 43 arrived in early November 2015. Police and border guards provided pedestrian and vehicle patrol and surveillance support services, and also contributed to complete inspections inside Hungary (Foreign... 2015; Police 2015a; Kovács 2015). At the same time, from mid-October to mid-December 2015, the V4 countries, with the participation of 21 Czech and 21 Slovak soldiers and Polish military technology, held a joint training event under the name 'Balaton 2015' in Hungary to deal with the 'crisis caused by mass immigration' (Hungarian Government 2015a).

Figure 1: Illegal border crossing on the Hungarian border in 2015

As V4 assistance for border patrols was no longer continuous and a joint training course also took place from October to December, the joint action on border protection was not necessarily an increase in manpower and technical equipment, according to our interpretation, but rather a demonstration of a joint V4 support for Hungarian migration policy. This may also be supported by the fact that the construction of the temporary security barrier, and thus the closure of the green border with a physical barrier on the entire southern border section was already completed by 16th October 2015. As a result, even before the arrival of V4 assistance, the number of illegal border crossings had drastically decreased, and the Hungarian Defence Forces were able to carry out border control tasks in a legally regulated manner from 21st September (Magyar Közlöny 2015a). Thus, the manpower required for the operation of the border barrier had already been provided before the Slovak and Czech police officers and the Polish border guards entered service. In its communications, the Hungarian government attempted to use this situation to its best advantage. The joint action

was interpreted as a common stand not only for the efficacy of the Hungarian border fence and the need to comply with Schengen directives, but also for the rejection of the mandatory settlement quota system, the protection of European culture and sovereignty, and the idea of a close connection between migration and terrorism (Magyarország Kormánya 2016; Tulok et al. 2018).

However, in connection with the above-mentioned goal, the Hungarian party was really contributing to establishing a kind of buffer zone, a 'line of defence' south of the Hungarian border. According to this principle, the Hungarian government also supported the accession of Macedonia and Serbia to the EU as soon as possible, for reasons related to migration, with the undisguised intention of filling the territorial gap between Greece and Hungary more effectively in order to control the main migration routes in the Balkans, thus easing the situation of Hungary (Hungarian Government 2015b). It should also be emphasised that Hungary supported the construction of a technical barrier on the Macedonian-Greek border similar to that erected at the Hungarian southern border, with the aim of reducing migratory pressure. Thus, in November 2015, it decided to donate 25 km of 450–600 mm and 75 km of 900–1000 mm radius razor wire, piledrivers, fingerprint scanners, computers, cameras and protective gloves to the Macedonians, free of charge (Magyar Közlöny 2015b). With this support, the Macedonian government was able to build the two-row fence reinforced with razor wire and quick-install barriers on the aforementioned critical sections of its southern border by 2016.

In 2016 Hungary and the Visegrad Group increasingly worked towards closer migration co-operation in addition to Macedonia with Bulgaria and Serbia, without Greece, which had been often criticised. This was already made clear at the extraordinary V4 summit, held in Prague on 15th February 2016, prior to the 2016 Vienna Migration Conference (Visegrad Group 2016). Indeed, in addition to the Macedonian head of state, the Bulgarian Prime Minister was invited to the event with the undisguised intention that if Turkey and Greece could not cope with the influx of refugees in the near future, the V4 countries would strongly support Macedonia and Bulgaria in halting illegal migration (while Greece and Germany were unhappy with the proposal).

Hungary was implementing this principle when, on the basis of a bilateral agreement, from January 2016 and on a continuous, monthly basis, it sent a 30-strong police contingent with off-road vehicles, mobile night vision devices and thermal camera reconnaissance systems to the Macedonian-Greek border to patrol, guard and perform escorting/support tasks (Police 2020). A few months later, in early June 2016, a Hungarian police unit of 10 officers arrived in Bulgaria for a month to assist the defence of the Bulgarian-Serbian border section (Police 2016). Hungarian police officers arrived in Serbia, on the Serbian-Macedonian border, in late June 2015, also on the basis of a bilateral agreement. In this case, they started service with a 20 person unit, using vehicles

equipped with thermal cameras (Police 2015b), while the first 20 person police unit departed for the Serbian-Bulgarian border under the Southeast-European Police Cooperation Agreement in October 2016 (About Hungary 2016b).

Overall, as shown above, between 2015 and 2020, the Hungarian government focused less on Greece than on the internal 'line of defence' in the Balkans. The continuous Hungarian police support was thus mainly concentrated on the Macedonian-Greek, Serbian-Macedonian and Serbian-Bulgarian borders, where various Hungarian police contingents arrived in turn.

This course of action changed in 2020 when the Turkish authorities made it clear at the end of February that they would not halt migrants travelling to the European Union at their borders. In response, Greece significantly strengthened the protection of its eastern borders with its military forces. Therefore, Hungary signalled its solidarity with Greece in its efforts of protecting the border, and offered the participation of 65 police officers in the FRONTEX mission in Greece to deal with the crisis, and then in November 2020 Hungary again offered assistance in protecting the external border of the EU (About Hungary 2020a, 2020b). Thus, from March 2020, the Hungarian government supported moving the first line of defence from the Macedonian-Greek border to the Greek-Turkish border, while maintaining the technical and guarded protection of the inner-Balkan 'lines of defence'.

As outlined above, from 2015 onwards, the Hungarian government made enormous efforts compared to Hungary's strength and capabilities to ensure that more than just one border barrier within Hungarian state territory would prevent migration across the Balkans. In doing so, it contributed to the creation of a buffer zone south of the Hungarian border, which also closed the main migration routes with physical barriers, where Hungarian manpower and equipment were used to help curb illegal migration in the belief that this would facilitate the protection of the Hungarian border.³

Construction and operation of the southern technical border defence system

Presently, the border protection of Hungary is basically performed by the police as, according to the Constitution, border protection is the duty of the police. However, this is the result of a longer process. Prior to the suspension of military conscription, the guarding/security duties were performed by conscripts serving in the Border Guard assigned to the Ministry of Interior. The suspension

3 The proposal to relocate assistance to the migration source areas and to set up hotspots for asylum procedures outside the European Union was also aimed at relieving Hungary and the Hungarian southern border as much as possible from 2016 onwards (About Hungary 2016c, 2016d, 2016e). The Hungarian premier also made a specific proposal to create a hotspot in Libya for refugees coming from Africa (BBC 2016).

of conscription has resulted in a significant expansion of the number of professional border guards. Border Guard directorates replaced the former Border Guard districts, while the former Border Guard stations were transformed into Border Guard branches. After Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, the Border Guard branches and the Border Crossing branches controlling border traffic were also merged, thus creating the Border Police Offices still operating today.

Accession to the Schengen Area already indicated that the country will no longer need border controls for the more than 1000 km section of its borders within the European Union. Therefore, the number of border guards was reduced before the accession and the forces were redirected to the Union's external borders. The European Parliament eventually approved Hungary's accession to the Schengen Area on 15th November 2007, and, in line with EU recommendations, the border guard was merged with the police on 1st January 2008. From then on, within the police organisation the police departments with a border section in their area and the Border Police Offices within the organisation of each relevant county police department became responsible for border protection. Accordingly, the Hungarian-Serbian border section affected by the southern technical barrier includes one Border Police Office in Csongrád-Csanád County (Szeged) and four Border Police Offices in Bács-Kiskun County (Bácsalmás, Bácsbokod, Hercegszántó, Kelebia), while the Hungarian-Croatian border section is controlled by the relevant county police departments.

In response to the highly intensified migratory pressure on the southern border, particularly on the Hungarian-Serbian border section, and following the protocol as a first step, the police attempted to carry out their border guard tasks by redeploying internal resources. However, this proved to be less than sufficient. With its resolution No. 1401/2015 issued in June, the government ordered the construction of a temporary fence that is 4 metres high and 175 kilometres long for border protection purposes and in order to halt movements through the green border (Magyar Közlöny 2015c). Subsequently, in July 2015, the amendment of Act LXXXIX of 2007 on the State Border also made it possible to build and operate facilities for the protection of the order on the state border, as well as to carry out national defence, national security, border guard, asylum and immigration tasks in the 10-metre band from the external border line of the territory of Hungary and the border signs (Magyar Közlöny 2015d).

The construction of the border fence was carried out by the units of the Hungarian Defence Forces. In a trial phase, 4 types of construction method were tested on a 175-meter section near Mórahalom. Of the four methods, the following was ultimately chosen, considering mainly speed and cost-effectiveness: with a piledriver machine, the 4.5-metre steel fence posts are fastened to the depth of 1.5 metres, on which a three metres high wire mesh is stretched. A quick-installed wire barrier was placed on the top of the fence on a tension line.

Figure 2: Illegal border crossing on the Hungarian border from 2015 to 2021

However, before beginning to build the fence, a quick-install wire barrier was installed as a temporary technical barrier. In poorly-accessible areas, three cylinders were usually placed on top of each other in the form of a pyramid, while in more easily accessible places a so-called Technical System was built on 'Y'-shaped reinforcing bars. In the latter case, the quick-installed wire barrier was fixed 3 floors high on the vertical shank of the rebar, and then the fourth row was installed on the top of the rebar. The Technical System was left in place after the construction of the fence, so that they formed a single organic unit, a barrier with the border fence, when viewed from the Serbian side. In locations where no fence has been built, especially in swamps, floodplains, difficult-to-cross areas, and in cross-border water canals, only quick-install wire barriers continued to function as the barrier.

After the complete closure of the Hungarian-Serbian green border on 15 September 2015, fewer people tried to cross, but also fewer were able to cross the obstacles unnoticed. Clearly, the rapid reduction in the number of attempts was also due to the fact that human traffickers reacted immediately to the change. Although the construction of the fence behind the quick-install barrier was not completed, the trafficking route had already relocated partially to the Hungarian-Croatian border section. In response, the Hungarian government ordered in its resolution No. 1665/2015 issued on 21st September 2015 the preparation and construction of a temporary security barrier at the external border of Hungary (which is also the Schengen border) with immediate effect in order to halt movements through the green border (Magyar Közlöny 2015e). This also means that the construction of the technical border barrier was extended to the Hungarian-Croatian border section, where, by 16 October 2015, a series

of fences and/or quick-install wire barriers was installed along a section of around 120 km. In fact, this completed the closure of the Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian border sections, which are quite difficult to protect from the impact of migration. After this, 'illegal migrants' could only enter the territory of Hungary through the transit zones built from containers at the border crossing points of Tompa and Röszke in September 2015, and the transit zones of Beremend and Letenye, which were set up on the Hungarian-Croatian border in October 2015.⁴ It must be noted, however, that the installed wire lines, or even the fence, are not insurmountable obstacles, people often reach the Hungarian side by climbing through, straining the fence, or by cutting and damaging the wires. For this reason, and in preparation for the prevention of the passage of an increasing number of 'illegal migrants' from crossing the Hungarian green border, a second row of fences was built on the Hungarian-Serbian border section under the greatest pressure by the end of April 2017 (Kui 2017). This fence, erected by 700 prisoners in around two months, has a wire mesh which is also reinforced with a degree of damage-resistant 8 mm diameter small-hole steel flat mesh and stretches for 155 km behind the first fence. At the same time, the external fence was improved to a 900 V smart fence with a vibration or cut-off detection optical cable and equipped with thermal and laser motion detection cameras, reflectors and an acoustic alarm system. In the event of any damage or intrusion, this sends a message through the established communication network to the Border Guard Centre. At the same time, the spotlights at the intrusion point are illuminated, the cameras turn in the direction of the alarm, and the acoustic signal system warns of border violation in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, English and Serbian. Within minutes of the alarm, the nearest police or military patrol unit in charge of security arrives at the scene. The arrested 'illegal migrant' is then escorted in the presence of the police to the nearest gate of the border fence, where they are released on the outside of the fence, facing Serbia, but still in the territory of Hungary. This faster response is aided by a manoeuvring route between the fences, built with steel-frame bridges over the cross-border water channels. On one side, high observation points have been set up, from which the movements on the Serbian side can be properly observed.

However, the construction of the double fence does not mean that the Hungarian-Serbian border section is completely covered by the technical barrier line, as in Bács-Kiskun County in the part below Hóduna on the Mohács Island, at an approx. 10.5-kilometre long section, no border barrier was built.

4 Those arriving at these locations were able to submit their asylum applications here, and also had to wait at the same location for the end of the procedure, which they were not allowed to appeal. Until the decision was made, the asylum seeker could only leave the transit zone in the direction of Serbia, but this also led to the automatic rejection of the asylum application. After the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that the placement of asylum seekers in transit zones was considered illegal detention, the Hungarian government closed them in May 2020.

Although this area is the floodplain of the Danube, it is easily accessible from Bezdan in Serbia. Accordingly, increased manpower makes up for the absence of a temporary security barrier in the area. Similarly, on the Hungarian-Croatian border section, west of Beremend, where the Drava River constitutes the state border, additional guarding is necessary.

Figure 3: Technical border barrier system along the Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian border

Although the fence (as seen above) was continuously improved by the Hungarian government, it became clear before the complete closure of the southern green border that police forces would not be sufficient to effectively guard the technical barrier system, and that Hungarian Defence Forces were also needed. However, as there was no legal basis for deploying soldiers to the border for some time, the army carried out the redeployment of soldiers and technical equipment in the framework of the military exercise named 'Definite Action 2015' (Honvédelem 2015) from 6th September 2015. The practice was communicated as a method of preparing soldiers to master their tasks related to mass immigration until legislative changes were adopted. The Hungarian government then declared a state of emergency caused by mass immigration in Csongrád and Bács-Kiskun counties on 15th September (Magyar Közlöny 2015f). Finally, on 21st September, the aforementioned legislative change also enabled the Hungarian Defence Forces to use arms in assisting the police during a state of emergency caused by mass immigration, in order to protect the borders, to implement the measures necessary to resolve conflicts directly threatening the order at the borders, and mass migration, and also to mitigate any violent acts breaching order at the borders. In March 2016, the state of emergency was first extended for six months and applied to the entire country (Magyar Közlöny 2016b), and then extended repeatedly when it expired.

Soldiers deployed to guard the border and assist the work of the police were initially placed in camp conditions. On many occasions, under conditions less than ideal and in rented properties, dozens of soldiers were housed together in place of suitable accommodation. Similar problems arose at first with the police, but there were also many issues with the equipment and catering provided to the police. The latter was obviously due to the fact that the police, unlike the army, were not prepared for the camp conditions. As an additional difficulty, the facilities rented for accommodation purposes were often located some distance from the border section concerned, so that the journey to and from the long 12-hour service period further extended the time at the beginning and end of the shift. The police eventually housed their staff in existing police barracks that provided adequate conditions. In order to improve the situation, the Defence Forces built four Border Guard bases in Bács-Kiskun County. The first was inaugurated in Kelebia on 7th February 2017. This was followed by the ones in Bácsalmás and Madaras, then Hercegszántó, which were first inhabited by soldiers on 20th March 2017. The selection of the four locations was according to the seats of districts of the Border Police offices in Bács-Kiskun County.

All four camps were built in exactly the same way, with Austrian assistance, on the model of NATO bases. The bases, built from 90 containers, each accommodate 150 soldiers (an infantry company), where the soldiers are housed in four-person containers. Each of the residential containers is air conditioned and has stand-alone heating. The camps have a laundry room, kitchenette, sanitary unit, cafeteria, their own medical unit, sports and leisure area and warehouses.

The Border Guard Bases and their commanders were placed under a temporarily established command headquarters of the Hungarian Armed Forces, seated at the Zrínyi Miklós barracks in Hódmezővásárhely, and named Alföldi Ideiglenes Alkalmi Kötelék (Great Plain Temporary Force). This Force has no permanent personnel, they are replaced in two-week shifts. The staff number of the four border patrol companies under the command headquarters and the number of service personnel is constantly changing with migratory pressure. In the Transdanubia region, the Dunántúli Ideiglenes Alkalmi Kötelék (Transdanubian Temporary Force) was established according to the same system, with command headquarters located in the barracks of the 64th Boconádi Szabó József Logistics Regiment in Kaposvár. As there is no major migration pressure on the Hungarian-Croatian border section, this Force is not operating at the time of writing. So, in this area police officers are serving, a smaller number of soldiers is only present in the vicinity of Homorúd in Baranya County, but they are also under the Hódmezővásárhely command.

Volunteer reserve soldiers also take part in the work of the border patrol companies. Their deployment in border protection is ideal for several reasons. On the one hand, one of the objectives of creating the reserve system was precisely to enable the Hungarian Defence Forces to perform not only permanent but also

periodic tasks. On the other hand, by calling them in, a larger number of permanent servicemen can be exempted from border control tasks by continuously adapting the number of activated reservists to the changing migratory pressure. It should also be noted that, since patrol and surveillance activities cannot be considered complex military tasks, the training of reservists is sufficient for such operations, under the supervision of professional soldiers. However, it is a disadvantage of the reserve system, in our experience, employers in Hungary are less than tolerant of their employees undertaking voluntary military service. The wage compensation paid by the Defence Forces to the employer does not mitigate this issue.

In summary, the Hungarian government established a technical barrier on the southern Schengen border from July 2015 that has been capable of diverting and reducing illegal migration with significant police and military manpower. The Hungarian Armed Forces played a major role in this work, supporting police efforts, continuously increasing the share of the volunteer reserve force in the operation. The defence efforts of the police, the professional and reservist soldiers also provided a basis for the communication of the government to emphasise the 'European bastion' metaphor.

Hungary as the 'bastion of Europe', and the new fortress captain

The attacks of conquerors arriving from the East sometimes reached Hungary, on the south-eastern corner of the 'Christian Empire' (*Imperium Christianum*). Rulers and popes referred to Hungarian kings and warlords as 'defender of the faith' (*defensor fidei*) and 'soldier of Christ' (*athleta Christi*), and Hungary became the gateway to the West and the 'bastion of Christianity' (*propugnaculum Christianitatis*) in the European perception. Although this role was reduced to the front wall (*Vormauer*) of 'Germania' with the Ottoman Turk conquest, the concept still remained alive in the memory in the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, this topos was reinvigorated following the Treaty of Trianon, which ended the First World War for Hungary. These reinforced and stabilised the images of the unnecessary blood sacrifice of the previous centuries, the desolation, Hungary being betrayed by the West in the Hungarian public consciousness. This imagery once again highlighted that Hungarians stood guard in the East for centuries in defence of Western culture. They sacrificed their lives for others, enabling them to live and prosper safely, while Hungarians suffered. This contributed to the notion that without these efforts and sacrifices, Hungary would not be a small nation, but one of the greatest in Europe. *'And how did they thank us? How did the Christian people in Western Europe say thank you for this unprecedented heroism and self-sacrifice?'* an author wrote in 1928. *'We remember. Trianon expresses the ingratitude and injustice of Western Europe...'* (Bereczky 1928). This popular perception was not allowed in Hungary in the Socialist

era, but it was able to flourish among émigrés during the decades following the Second World War. These émigrés claimed that the Trianon Treaty destroyed Europe's bastion, depriving Hungary and the Hungarian nation of its ability to fulfil its historical calling, the protection of the West (Eckhardt 1965/1980 etc.; Endrey 1979 etc.). This idea then enjoyed a renaissance in 2015: the old Hungary, the bastion of the West, has been in ruins for 95 years, if it had not been for Trianon, no illegal migrants could have entered the European Union through Hungary (Tóth 2015).

Knowledge of the perception outlines is necessary to understand what was the basis and how the concept of the 'bastion' could be revived with the construction of the southern technical border barrier from 2015, according to the political actions of the Hungarian government, and also how the concept of 'Hungarian military people' was made relevant again, together with the valiant image of the frontier fortress soldier evoked through the soldiers and police officers guarding the border. In this new situation, according to the communications of the Hungarian government, Central and Eastern Europe, and more precisely the Visegrad Group (V4), i.e. Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, have again become the guardians of Christian Europe and paradoxically the defenders of a Western Europe that 'supports the settlement of immigrants'.

After Hungary had physically closed its border with Serbia, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first emphasised that he was the fortress captain (*Grenzschutzkapitän*) of Bavaria, then of Germany and also Europe (meaning Western Europe). In his words, the medieval and early modern era topos reappeared: by defending Hungary's southern border on its own, it is defending not only itself, but also Germany. In other words, the Hungarian Prime Minister basically 'warned' Germany: in the 16–17th century, the role of the Hungarian 'Vormauer' (front wall), often mentioned by the Germans, was revived, and this 'front wall', built in reality as the southern technical barrier, protects Germany from the arrival of thousands of 'illegal migrants' every day. With this, the Hungarian Prime Minister consciously (also: as we are going to see, mainly for domestic political purposes) revived the already mentioned 'soldier of Christ' and 'Hungary as the bastion of Europe' topos, and at the same time formed a bridge of continuity between the Ottoman Turk era and the present situation.

In government communication, in this context, the Prime Minister has emerged as a leader with a sense of mission and responsibility for the fate of Europe, which he has taken on consciously. According to the analogy, he is the contemporary equivalent of the border captain (soldier of Christ), who is an important part of Hungarian national identity and plays a significant role in Hungarian history, fighting against the Muslim Turks to the last or stopping the mass of Muslim immigrants in the present. Although he does not say it explicitly, the statements of leading government officials suggest that Orbán

Table 1: Operation of the Hungarian communications machine: Examples of the revival of the “soldier of Christ” and “bastion of Christianity” topos from 2015

Mediator of the topos	Date, event, place/venue of the statement	Content of the statement
Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister	September 2015, Kloster Banz, meeting of the legislative group of the CSU	<i>‘... the southern borders of your country [...] can be defended at the southern border of Hungary. I have told the Prime Minister [Horst Seehofer] that from a certain perspective I am one of his fortress captains at the border (M1 2015).’</i>
Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister	January 2018, CSU Bavarian state meeting at the Seeon Abbey	<i>‘... please continue to see me as a fortress captain protecting the borders of Bavaria, since the actual southern border of Bavaria as at the Serbian-Hungarian border... (Miniszterelnök 2018a).’</i>
Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister	June 2018, Budapest, speech at the first anniversary of the funeral of former chancellor Helmut Kohl	<i>‘... we are exclusively using our own resources to defend our southern border – and thereby Germany – from the arrival of some twelve thousand migrants per day. We have not let down either Germany or Europe. As we have said, we are the captains of border fortresses, and we know our duty (Miniszterelnök 2018b).’</i>
Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister	July 2018, Berlin, joint press conference with chancellor Angela Merkel	<i>‘...German people can rest assured that while Hungary acts as a border fortress captain, it is not only protecting Hungary, but Germany as well [...] It is the strategic objective of Hungary to defend Europe (Echo TV 2018).’</i>
Levente Magyar, Foreign Affairs and Trade State Secretary	June 2015, session of the National Assembly	<i>‘As it has so many times before, against the pressure on civilisation from outside of Europe, whether from the South or the East, Hungary has once again become the bastion of Europe (Gyopáros 2015).’</i>
Sándor Fazekas, Minister of Agriculture	August 2016, awards ceremony in the Ministry of Agriculture	<i>‘Hungary is still the bastion of Christianity today, as it has been countless times throughout our history (FM Sajtóiroda 2016).’</i>
Szilárd Németh, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence	July 2019, Buda Castle, memorial day of the Belgrade victory of János Hunyadi	<i>‘As today, so back then [in the days of János Hunyadi] the responsibility of the defence of the Christian Europe fell on Central Europe, and as we accomplished this mission at Nándorfehérvár, so we fulfil this duty today through the protection of our borders (Honvédelem 2019).’</i>
Miklós Soltész, State Secretary for Ecclesiastical and International Affairs of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office	September 2019, Segesd, where king Béla IV initiated the reconstruction of the country following the Mongol invasion of Hungary; inauguration of a renovated church	<i>‘...while Hungary previously protected against the Tatars and the Turks, today it is the defence against the flood of Muslims (Magyar Nemzet 2019).’</i>

is Hunyadi's 'successor' considering that the two most heroic former border fortress captains are János Hunyadi and Miklós Zrínyi (Nikola Zrinski). The former is chosen because – however heroically – ultimately Zrínyi/Zrinski failed to protect the fortress of Szigetvár from Sultan Suleiman and the Turks in 1566 (Kitanics – Pap 2019). However, in 1456, Hunyadi won a huge victory at Belgrade (Nándorfehérvár), halting the expansion of the Turks in Central Europe for more than half a century.

The basis for the parallel is the memory of János Hunyadi and his son, King Matthias I. The Hunyadi myth surrounding the family lives on today and has not been forgotten after more than 500 years. In fact, it is even experiencing a renaissance. Most Hungarians still remember the Hunyadi family and their deeds. Of course, the fact that hundreds of thousands of copies of the Hunyadi book series have been sold from 2008 (written by popular author Mór Bán) have also contributed to this. Indeed, Human Capacities Minister Miklós Kásler announced the launch of casting for the movie based on Bán's books in January 2021, highlighting that the Hunyadi film is going to evoke an age when Hungary '*was the protective bastion of European and Christianity in Europe against Muslim, Turkish attacks*' (Híradó 2021). An animated film about the triumph of Belgrade was also already made in 2014, earning more than 1.3 million views on the most popular video sharing site (TAE 2014). The government also recently founded the Institute of Hungarian Research, which supports the identification of the DNA profile of the Hunyadi family and was announced to be successful in February 2021, using the last Hunyadi descendants buried in the Lepoglava Monastery in Croatia (MKI 2021). Thus, it also now seems viable to identify the remains of Mátyás Hunyadi among the bones buried the royal tombs in Székesfehérvár. This also creates an opportunity to ceremonially rebury the son of János Hunyadi, King Matthias I. (an actual 'athleta christi'), during the term of Viktor Orbán. Thus, these communications establish the connection between the family that governed and reigned in the most successful period of Hungarian history, that preserved the country's sovereignty and even expanded its sphere of authority, and the current Prime Minister and cabinet, as part of their continuously expanding national identity policy.

In the effective government communication regime, the analogies of 'soldier of Christ', 'front wall' and 'bastion' adopted by the Prime Minister where then repeated several times by government officials ('the captain's lieutenants') in interviews with national media at major events to integrate it into public thinking as much as possible. And finally, these ideas, which are easy for Hungarians to comprehend, were expressed at local events by civil and church leaders of local communities, so that they were also echoed in the local media (Szekszárdi Vasárnap 2018; Komlói Újság 2018; Sümegi Önkormányzat 2019 etc.).

Also, the typical narrative of the interbellum period has returned, with an extended scope of the topos. The former was powerfully evoked by the speaker

of the National Assembly, László Kövér who declared in June 2020 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Treaty: in 1920, Hungarians gave their blood and two-thirds of their country for taking their role as a bastion against the Turks seriously (Baranyai 2020). The Hungarian government also actively contributed to the latter, as it first established a deputy state secretariat and then a state secretariat to help persecuted Christians in 2016 (Hungarian Government 2016/2018). This way, as a new element of the topos, Hungary was already able to emerge as the crutch of a Christianity that is threatened all over the world, and at the same time a helper and bastion of Christians persecuted on different continents.

However, while the idea of ‘Hungary as the bastion of Christianity’ spread throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age, the topos rebuilt from 2015 barely resonated outside of Hungary and found no understanding. This has been confirmed by the Polish poet and essayist living in Hungary, Konrad Sutarski, and also the liberal-conservative philosopher Chantal Delsol. According to the former, the Hungarian nation is still the bastion of the West (as it was in the past), although this has never been appreciated or is being rewarded by Europe (Sutarski 2018). The latter emphasised in connection with the analysis of how the migration crisis was managed in Central Europe: the West barely knows and understands what the concept of the bastion expressed by the Hungarian government means (Delsol 2018). Apart from the Eurosceptic and anti-Islamic Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch far-right Freedom Party, there have not really been politicians abroad who understood and adopted the bastion analogy (Wilders 2017).

The revival of the topos, however, was not intended to have an international but a well-planned domestic political role. From October 2014 to February 2015, support for the governing parties among the voter population decreased significantly, with around 1.1 million voters leaving the camp of Fidesz-KDNP (Alliance of Young Democrats and Christian Democrats) (HVG 2015). Of course, there were deep-rooted reasons for this, such as the delay in reforming major budgetary systems, but the short-lived fall in support in October and November 2014 was caused by the U.S. banning scandal and the plan to tax internet access. In the former case, US authorities banned Hungarian officials from entering the United States for indications of tax fraud and corruption, while tens of thousands protested and protested against the latter, joined by groups dissatisfied with government policies. Although it was finally revealed that the US authorities had no concrete evidence and the internet tax plan was also withdrawn, the popularity of Fidesz-KDNP fell by 12 % in one month, according to opinion polls (Glieb – Pap 2016). This dramatic loss of popularity, and at the same time the rise of the opposition party Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) which was repositioned from the far-right toward the centre, were finally halted by the migration crisis and the Hungarian government’s response and communications offensive.

Following the terrorist attack on the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, the Hungarian government launched a national consultation in the spring of 2015, which linked the issues of migration and terrorism. According to government communications, a large majority of the more than one million respondents (90%) believed that a stricter immigration policy should be implemented. The results of the consultation were summarised in parliament by Viktor Orbán as follows: ‘the Hungarian people have decided, the country must be defended’ (Magyarország Kormánya 2015). A billboard poster campaign with this title was launched in September, in parallel with the installation of the southern border barrier. This enabled the Hungarian government (building on instinctive fears of people from anything new or different) put the slogan of defence in focus: Hungarian people must be protected from migrants and the effects of migration; the culture of Hungary and Europe with their Christian-Jewish heritage must be prevented from being changed by large-scale, mainly Muslim migrants. How to achieve this? On the one hand, a well-guarded fence must be maintained on the southern border to make it impossible to enter the territory of Hungary, and, on the other, the compulsory distribution quota of those already in Europe must be prevented.

Table 2: ‘Defence’ and the relevant context in the communications of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán from 2015 to 2020

Date, event, place/venue of the statement	Content of the statement
December 2015, Budapest, speech at the 26th congress of Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance	<i>‘... our great goal is to ensure that Hungarians do not have to live in fear [...] We protect our borders, we protect the Hungarian people from criminals, terrorists, illegal immigrants (Miniszterelnök 2015).’</i>
December 2016, Budapest, interview for the Mediaworks newspapers	<i>‘Those who entered Europe illegally must be transported back, borders must be protected [...], we asked people for their opinions and we defended the country against illegal immigration in 2015 and 2016 (Miniszterelnök 2016).’</i>
February 2017, Budapest, 19th state of the country address	<i>‘We resisted, drew a line, built fences, recruited border patrols and stopped them, defended Hungary and, incidentally, Europe (Miniszterelnök 2017).’</i>
September 2018, Strasbourg, speech in the debate on the ‘Sargentini Report’	<i>‘We defend our borders and only we can decide who we live with. We built a fence and stopped hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants, defended Hungary and defended Europe (Miniszterelnök 2018c).’</i>
November 2019, Budapest, speech at the international conference on the persecution of Christians	<i>‘Hungary is on the route of the Muslim immigration invasion, it has to defend itself, and everyone here in Hungary knows that (Miniszterelnök 2019).’</i>
August 2020, Budapest, speech at the inauguration of the Unity memorial site	<i>‘... the peoples of Central Europe are reinstating the original authority of ancient instincts of life and the liberating power of Christianity [...], therefore we protect our borders and leave our country to our own children instead of migrants (Miniszterelnök 2020).’</i>

In connection with the latter, in order to strengthen its position, the government also held a referendum in October 2016 on whether the European Union should be able to require the compulsory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary without the consent of the National Assembly. The opposition blocked the vote, and since the referendum was invalid due to lower turnout, it could also be interpreted as a government failure. Still, the governing parties communicated success, underlining that almost 3.3 million people agreed with their position of rejection.

In October 2017, the government launched another national consultation campaign on migration. In this, George Soros, the Hungarian-born businessman was mentioned as a force supporting migration processes and the mandatory resettlement of migrants, as well as the dismantling of the Hungarian border fence and the weakening of nation states. According to government communications, of the more than 2.3 million returned questionnaires, almost all responses were in favour of the Fidesz-KDNP position on migration. It should also be noted that despite the fact that Jobbik has supported strict action against refugees since 2015 and no opposition party has strongly argued for the dismantling of the fence, the Hungarian government has assigned all opposition parties as facilitators and participants in the 'Soros Plan'. Moreover, unlike other radical right-wing parties in Europe, Jobbik was not able to take advantage of anti-Muslim sentiment either. Fidesz-KDNP was able to effectively keep on the agenda the idea that until the beginning of the refugee crisis, Jobbik pursued an openly pro-Muslim policy (Pap – Glied 2017). Based on this and the fact that other opposition parties initially downplayed the gravity of the migration issue, did not reject the principle of compulsory refugee distribution and constantly criticised the government's strict measures against migrants, the governing party alliance conveyed to the electorate that it was the only force capable of protecting Hungarians and European Christian culture from Muslim migrants. From a communications perspective, the fact that the Prime Minister was compared to a border fortress captain fighting the Ottoman advance in the 16th and 17th centuries, who led Hungary and the Hungarians and protected Europe as a bastion, was quite a successful effort.

Thanks to the above, the government managed to keep the issue of migration in 2015 on the agenda of public discourse (Glied 2020). The decline in popularity between autumn 2014 and early 2015 was reversed from the summer of 2015 as a result of the government's actions and communications. By the end of 2015, the Fidesz-KDNP party alliance had significantly increased its lead (Kisistók 2016), and maintained its leading position in the following years, winning two-thirds of the parliamentary seats in the 2018 elections.

Summary

Hungary's southern border has been and still is the most accessible and vulnerable border of the state for centuries. As such, from time to time, it was toughened and militarised as a frontier zone to various degrees. When the state was stronger, the border zone for defence purposes also extended to the buffer zone of the Northern Balkans, when it was weaker, it was formed in the interior of the state, with varying depths.

During the 2015 migration crisis, the southern Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian border sections toughened again. Following other European examples, the Hungarian government set up a technical barrier between July and October 2015. This was first supplemented by an 8 km border strip, from where captured trespassers were escorted back to the Serbian or Croatian side of the border, and then this practice was extended to the whole country. The practice was also expanded with increased control of roads and junctions and full checks inside the country's border zone. It was also an important effort by the Hungarian government to help establish migration protection lines in the Balkans, South of the Hungarian border, mainly at the Macedonian-Greek, Serbian-Macedonian and Serbian-Bulgarian borders. By 2020, this also included support for Greek border protection activities on the Greek-Turkish border.

The aforementioned southern technical barrier was extended by April 2017 into a double fence on most of the Hungarian-Serbian border exposed to greater migratory pressure, with high-tech equipment used to make it significantly more difficult for migrants to enter Hungarian territory and facilitating their capture. In contrast, on the section of the Hungarian-Croatian border up to the Drava River, only a single-row fence was installed. It soon became apparent that, in addition to police officers, the military was also needed to patrol and operate the technical barrier system. The servicemen, for whom Border Guard bases were also established, have been assisting the work of the police in a legislatively regulated manner since September 2015, with voluntary reserve soldiers playing a major role in southern Hungarian border defence over time.

The Hungarian cabinet did not keep any information about the construction of the fence confidential at all, but reported regularly on major developments. They took efforts to endow the technical barrier with additional meaning, converting it into a means of communication, and using it as a political argument in domestic and international political life. Within the framework of this, the Hungarian government also revived the concept of 'Hungary as the bastion of Europe'. According to Hungarian government communications, the Visegrad Group became the custodians of Christian Europe and the defenders of Western Europe. In the context of the bastion, and according to this message, the Hungarian Prime Minister, who defined himself as a border captain, appeared as a mission-conscious leader responsible for the fate of Europe, stopping the

Muslim ‘invasion’ and ‘modern migration’ with his fence, police force and soldiers. The bastion analogy in the effective government (Fidesz-KDNP) communication machinery was also expressed by some members of the cabinet, and then by the civil and church leaders of the local communities associated with the government, in order to make it more organised in public thinking. The popular narrative of the interbellum period also returned, and, according to this topos, the ‘reward’ of the Hungarians was the Treaty of Trianon for taking their role as a bastion seriously for centuries. Additionally, through a newly established body of the Prime Minister’s Office, as a new element of the topos, Hungary has also emerged as a supporter of a Christianity in decline worldwide, and a helper of persecuted Christians.

The idea, renewed by the Hungarian government from 2015, did not resonate internationally. The revival of the topos, however, was not intended to play an international but rather a domestic political role in the communication offensive linked to the migration crisis, which halted the governing party’s loss of popularity. From the spring of 2015, the motto of “defence” was placed in the focus of communication: Hungarians must be protected from Muslim migrants, from the impacts of migration, and the culture of Hungary and Europe must be defended. It was in line with this process that George Soros, a Hungarian-born businessman, was portrayed as a power in support of migration processes and threatening sovereignty. According to government communications, the opposition is a supporter of the ‘Soros Plan’, while the Fidesz-KDNP party alliance with its ‘border captain’ the Hungarian Prime Minister is the only force capable of protecting Hungarians and European Christian culture from Muslim migrants.

The above communication offensive, with the concept of defence at its heart, successfully reversed the negative trend of political preferences, halted the government’s loss of popularity, and allowed the parties forming the governing coalition to significantly increase their advantage for the years to come.

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