

AN ANALYSIS OF HUNGARY GOVERNMENT POLICIES FROM TRANSITION TO ORBAN IN THE EU CONTEXT

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Abstract

One component of the weakness in question is the populist policies that the Orbán Government has pursued within the framework of its nationalist and conservative approaches since coming to power in 2010, which do not coincide with normative cornerstones of the EU. In this context, Orbán Government has adopted 800 laws from 2012 to 2022 that do not match the value-based normative interpretations of EU and has pursued illiberal policies that contradict understanding of the rule of law. The study will first focus on the characteristics of the transition process, then public administration in mentioned process and the public administration reform in the (EU) harmonization process will be discussed. Although public administration reforms will be discussed primarily in terms of the transition period, non-liberal practices of the Orbán government in EU period will also be touched upon. The third and last subheading will directly pertain to the analysis of bureaucracy.

Keywords: Hungary, Transition, Orbán Government, European Union, Democracy.

JEL Codes: P11, P21, P31.

MACARİSTAN HÜKÜMET POLİTİKALARININ GEÇİŞ SÜRECİNDE ORBAN DÖNEMİNE AB BAĞLAMINDA ANALİZİ

Özet

Söz konusu zayıflığın bileşenlerinden biri, 2010 yılında iktidara geldiğinden bu yana Orbán Hükümeti'nin milliyetçi ve muhafazakâr yaklaşımları çerçevesinde benimsediği, AB'nin normatif temelleriyle örtüşmeyen popülist politikalardır. Bu bağlamda, Orbán Hükümeti 2012 ile 2022 yılları arasında Avrupa Birliği'nin değer temelli normatif yorumlarıyla uyuşmayan 800 yasa kabul etmiş ve hukuk devleti anlayışıyla çelişen liberal olmayan politikalar izlemiştir. Bu çalışma, öncelikle geçiş sürecinin temel özelliklerine odaklanacak; ardından söz konusu süreçteki kamu yönetimi ve Avrupa Birliği (AB) uyum sürecindeki kamu yönetimi reformları ele alınacaktır. Kamu yönetimi reformları ağırlıklı olarak geçiş dönemi bağlamında inceleneceler olsa da, Orbán Hükümeti'nin AB sürecindeki liberal olmayan uygulamalarına da degeinilecektir. Üçüncü ve son alt başlık ise doğrudan bürokrasının analizine ilişkin olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Macaristan, Geçiş Süreci, Orbán Hükümeti, Avrupa Birliği, Demokrasi.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine the effects of political regime change on public administration in the case of Hungary. As is known, socialist regimes have collapsed one after

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another since 1989. The process of collapse of socialist regimes and the construction of political regimes open to the world capitalist system is called the “transition process”, and the economies of these countries are called “transition economies”. In general, transition processes are the moments when a new state is established in place of a state that is disappearing during social upheavals, revolutions, and counter-revolutions. In this period in particular, factors such as high corruption rates, low trust in state institutions, and weak participation in the election process in transition countries have made the transition process more complicated (Ahmed and Aref, 2019).

Hungary, the focus of this study, is described in European Union (EU) reports as “democratic regression” or “unfree regression”; however, Hungary is one of the few countries where the transition process has been peaceful. Nevertheless, despite not experiencing a devastating civil war, the transition process has been quite problematic. Studies on the Hungarian transition process frequently encounter definitions such as “authoritarian populism”, “erosion of the rule of law” and “crony capitalism”. Attacks on the media and civil society, as well as widespread corruption, are among the main indicators of the transition pattern in Hungary (Hajnal and Boda, 2021).

In this study, firstly the characteristics of the transition process will be focused on, then the public administration in the mentioned process and the non-liberal practices of the Orban government in EU period will also be discussed. The third and last subheading will directly belong to the bureaucracy analysis.

1.1. Transition Period (1989-1994)

The administrative reforms that started in the transition process in Hungary have been quite controversial and problematic since the beginning of the 1990s. Agh (2014) evaluates this process in Hungary as a "Ferris Wheel" journey, where Hungary was initially the best performing and trend-setting country, but now it has become the laggard and worst performing country in Eastern and Central Europe.

The political actors that left their mark on the transition process began to emerge in 1987; the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, MDF) is one of them. Following the mass protests that took place in 1987 and 1988, the Union of Young Democrats (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, FIDESZ) was founded in March 1988. Janos Kádár, who had come to power in 1956 through the direct intervention of the Soviet Union, was overthrown in 1988. The democratic opposition movement, which was established in the same year under conditions of secrecy, transformed into the Union of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SZDSZ). The basic ideas of the 1956 Revolution, which was considered a “counter-revolutionary” attempt by the Soviet administration and suppressed by direct military intervention, were reconsidered and the concept of a multi-party system was accepted by the ruling party in 1989 (Bozoki, 1993).

The period from March to November 1989 was a period of a kind of compromise revolution, and the opposition forces began to function as political parties; the Communist Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) could not avoid entering into negotiations with these forces. The mass demonstrations held on March 15, 1989 chanted slogans such as “freedom,” “free elections,” and “resign” (Hofer, 1992). March 1989 was also the date of the establishment of the Round Table. Finally, the tripartite talks began on June 13, 1989. The main body of the tripartite talks was concluded on September 18, 1989. In November 1989, the Communist Party transformed into the Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP). The fundamental laws and the proclamation of the Republic were passed by the Parliament on November 21 and 23, 1989.

The transition process was not the result of reformist steps taken from above despite the passive popular segments. On the contrary, the Hungarian people advocated active political participation. Indeed, the state, which could not fulfill its function of meeting common needs and was virtually lost, was gradually replaced by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Union of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), which are the most well-known in society (Bozoki, 1993).

Non-governmental organizations such as the MDF and SZDSZ, which also assumed the de facto administrative function, expressed the idea that power was based on popular sovereignty and that this sovereignty could not be monopolized by political forces (Bozoki, 1993; Bozoki, 2001). The connotation of this view in terms of the government system was a multi-party, freely elected parliamentary system. There was no difference of opinion among the parties, including the communists, regarding multi-party, freely elected elections. The debate was about both the timing of the elections and whether the government system would be parliamentary or presidential/semi-presidential. However, the parties continued their work on specialized areas: economic crisis management (inflation, debt burden); social policies; property reform; land issue and collective farms; state budget reform; socio-economic consequences of the crisis, competition and antimonopoly law studies were carried out under conditions where the disagreements regarding the transition process had not yet been resolved and the new administration had not been officially determined (Bozoki, 2001). In addition, the following subcommittees were formed: The topics covered were constitutional issues (president, constitutional court, etc.); legislation from party and finance to political parties, election law, modification principles of criminal law; information policies and safeguards for non-violent transition.

The MSZMP announced that presidential elections would be held as soon as possible, before the parliamentary elections. The Round Table was of the opposite opinion; they feared that the general elections that would follow the presidential elections would affect the number of seats the parties had in parliament (Bozoki, 1993).

The presidential election debate led to different views emerging among the opposition groups in July 1989. One group was in favor of holding parliamentary elections first. FIDESZ and SZDSZ resisted this view. They were committed to the MDF's position. After some reservations, the MDF changed its position. Although it defended the principle of the president being elected by the parliament, it agreed to make an exception for the first presidential election (Bozoki, 1993).

Another controversial issue was the Workers' Militia; the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) suggested that the Workers' Militia should be transferred to the national defense area. The Round Table argued that the Workers' Militia was a symbol of the party-state dictatorship and had no place in a democratic state governed by law. The Round Table argued that the Hungarian Army was sufficient for the rule of law (Bozoki, 1993).

1.2. Government Policies in the Transition Period

In the early 1990s, Hungary was a pioneer in public administration reforms. It was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to undertake "civil service reform." At first glance, Hungary seemed to have started the process well, because in the 1980s there had been some positive changes in public administration aimed at greater professionalization and less politicization (Agh, 2014; Meyer-Sahling, 2006). During the transition period, healthy, albeit partial, reformist steps in public administration were interrupted during the Antall-Boross (1990-1994) and Horn (1994-1998) governments; these were years when politicization was high on both the right and the left, but professionalization was weak. During the first Orbán government (1998-2002), Hungary returned to a negative "plunder" system. Various forms of

patronage continued in the governments of Medgyessy (2002-2004), Gyurcsány (2004-2006, 2006-2009) and Bajnai (2009-2010). But the worst began with the Second Orbán Government (2010).

The Hungarian public administration is today described as a perfect “closed” patronage system. The infrastructure of this system is seen to be based on the reforms of the 1990s. The laws that re-established the state in 1992 were made with a Weberian understanding. In this sense, a clear distinction was made in terms of political and administrative positions in public administration and the aim was to introduce a stable management structure with a lifelong career system. The relevant laws were further strengthened with the additions in 2001, 2006 and 2007 (Agh, 2014).

The institutional transition process in Hungary was completed with the second round of elections of the post-communist government in 1994. But the socio-economic transformation of the country was still ongoing. There is no doubt that the Kádár administration, which ruled the fate of Hungary for many years, and the Kádárist socio-economic and institutional legacy had a great impact on both the institutional and economic transition process. The Kádárist legacy included practices that were not easily erased in terms of change through elites, post-communist socio-economic trends, institutional performance and public perception (Tökes, 1996).

In the 1980s, the fundamental legitimacy problem of the old regime was socioeconomic rather than political or ideological. New and renewed political institutions were created with the stroke of a pen. According to Tökes (1996), the transitional rules could neither heal the stagnant economy nor the pathology of the sick society. The newly created political “superstructure” would be articulated on the Kádárist socioeconomic foundation.

Public administration reforms in Central Eastern European countries are classified as follows (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler, 2019).

1. Post-communist transition (1989-1996): It includes comprehensive political, economic and administrative reforms and legal adaptations and institutional administrative framework, the public administration paradigm is new public management (NPM).
2. EU accession period (1997-2004/2007): It is shaped by the fulfillment of EU criteria and conditions. The paradigm here is post-NPM and even sometimes the Weberian reconstruction process paradigm.
3. Post-EU period (2004/2007 and later): Central and Eastern European countries focused on “fine-tuning” the public sector in this phase. Paradigms such as the new Weberian state model and new public governance and joint management (joined-up) came into play.
4. Today (2020s): In these years, concepts such as innovation in the public sector, e-governance in developed countries and smart cities are also in effect in transition countries.

This periodization belongs to Guy Peters, who has an institutionalist perspective with his book *Politics of Bureaucracy* (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler, 2009). What is striking in Peters' analysis is that he conceptualizes public administration as a political institution, just like parliament and political parties.

In the early 1990s, Central and Eastern European countries had a weaker profile compared to countries with deep-rooted administrative traditions and administrative cultures. Indeed, the main problem in the transition process was formulated as a lack of good, qualified, motivated civil servants (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler, 2019).

1.3. Bureaucracy in the Transition Process

During the transition period, the administrative system in Hungary is described as a system based on loyalty rather than merit (Hajnal and Boda, 2021). Having played football together and gone to school together have been valid references for public employment. The cadres have revealed the importance of personal loyalty. "Manager X is placed in one place, then people who are subordinate to that manager are placed in subordinate positions. When manager X is transferred to another place, the subordinate cadre goes to the same place" (Hajnal and Boda, 2021).

While personal loyalty is the dominant relationship pattern in bureaucracy, the superordinate loyalty motif that conditions it is political loyalty. In the transition process, political loyalty is seen as the starting point of state administration in Hungary. In appointments other than very technical specialties, professional competence and competence are not decisive (Hajnal and Boda, 2021). Moreover, according to the research conducted by Hajnal and Boda (2021), it has been revealed that politicians show "an emotional hostility towards expertise and institutions". Despite the peaceful and gradual transition process in Hungary, could this negative attitude towards the bureaucracy be due to the transition process?

The transition process has shown some differences from country to country; the political history, economic institutional history, cultural heritage and social values of the countries have played important roles in the regime changes in each country. In addition, the position of the bureaucracy is also one of the determining factors of the transition process. The political beliefs and values of the bureaucratic elite and senior managers have affected their relations with the governments of the transition process. This effect has changed depending on whether the interests and values of the bureaucrats coincide with the new regime. It has been observed that as the interests and goals of the bureaucrats and the political figures who manage and manage the transition process and take part in the construction of the new regime are united, the bureaucrats are more positively involved in the transition process and are more involved in the policy-making process (Ahmed and Aref, 2019).

The socialist regime collapsed in 1989, but the Hungarian state apparatus continued its existence by changing its function after the regime change. Among the functions undertaken by the state mechanism are; increasing the efficiency of the state administration, creating a more operational center than the executive body, and bringing an order to the administrative structure on the central administration and territorial assets in accordance with the new regime. In this process, also called the reform process, structural transition priorities such as decentralization of public administration and the construction of civil society, as well as operational regulations such as modernizing the bureaucracy through computers and developing its administrative functions were among the aims of the state administration reforms. As seen in Central and Eastern European countries, the reforms that took place after the regime change were experienced as a rugged process that ebb and flow and sometimes ended in failure (Agh, 2014).

During the transition period, the new regime relied heavily on bureaucracy because the administrative experience of the political subjects of the new regime was still very limited. (Ahmed and Aref, 2019) The role of the bureaucracy in the transition process is twofold: The first is related to formulating the goals and policies of the new regime. The second is related to providing decision-makers with the necessary information and data to form the policies of the new regime. (Ahmed and Aref, 2019). In this context, bureaucracy has priority areas such as international agreements and contracts, working methods of state units, structure and system operation, communication between state units and opening units according to their business network functions.

The function of bureaucracy in the transition process has inevitably brought up some questions. It is about how bureaucracy is defined. Is bureaucracy an extension of the administrative organs of politicians, as is often assumed? Or is it a professional group with a certain autonomy? The New Public Management approach is mostly based on the first assessment. According to the understanding that sees bureaucracy as an autonomous group, almost as a different class, bureaucrats are not servants of politics, but professional colleagues whose actual authority is decisive, although the minister has the final say in the event of official conflict (Byrkjeflot and Engelstad, 2018).

2. THE ACCESSION PROCESS OF HUNGARY TO EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all post-communist nations faced the challenge of redefining their statehood (Fowler, 2004b). These countries opted to orient themselves towards the West, with a particular focus on the European Union. The decision to seek membership in the EU posed significant challenges for these nations (Bozóki and Karácsony, 2003). This challenge involved completing the process of “returning to Europe” and reforming their social, political, and economic systems (Bozóki and Karácsony, 2003). The concept of a “return to Europe” emerged as a prevalent theme among Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), signifying their aspiration to be recognized as part of a broader pan-European cultural community (Bretherton and Vogler, 2002). Therefore, it can be posited that a collective identity played a crucial role in shaping interstate relations during this enlargement phase. As constructivist theory suggests, the initiatives related to national interests of states have been significantly influenced by their identities.

The CEECs and the EU shared economic and political objectives that aligned with the mainstream enlargement strategy. The accession of these nations to the EU would enhance their democratic frameworks, leading to greater stability in their market economies (Yilmaz, 2014). However, the EU did not prioritize the promotion of democratization in its dealings with the post-communist countries (Dimitrova and Pridham, 2004). Through this enlargement process, the EU aimed to address certain security concerns and foster a more peaceful continent (Dimitrova and Pridham, 2004). Furthermore, by incorporating these nations, the EU would reinforce its identity structure, recognizing them as integral parts of its framework. Consequently, the European Union offered economic assistance and instituted the Copenhagen Criteria to facilitate the economic and political adaptation of Eastern European nations to align with the existing EU member states, all while upholding the standards of the Union (Karadeniz, 2020).

Prior to delving into the analysis of Hungary's progress towards EU accession, it is essential to present an overview of the country's historical context. Situated in the heart of Europe, Hungary is a landlocked nation (Commission, 1997a). The Hungarian poet Endre Ady characterized Hungary as a “ferry boat country, commuting between East and West without being able to anchor at either side” (Rapcsák, 1994). This designation of “ferry country” allows Hungary to leverage its geographic and political position to its advantage (Varga, 2000). The Kingdom of Hungary was established around the year 1000 by the Magyars, who had migrated to the Carpathian Basin during the ninth century (Commission, 1997a). In the centuries leading up to the Ottoman conquest in 1526, Hungary strengthened its connections with Western Europe. Following a period of Turkish dominance and subsequent division into three parts, the Habsburgs took control of Hungary in the late 17th century, eventually uniting the territory. In 1867, Hungary achieved equality within the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the establishment of the Dual Monarchy (Commission, 1997a). As a long-standing ally and collaborator with

Austria, Hungary was integral to the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, which lasted from 1867 until 1918 (Printer, 2008).

Following its defeat in World War I, Hungary experienced a harsh communist regime that was dismantled in 1919. Additionally, the 1920 Treaty of Trianon resulted in Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia acquiring over two-thirds of the territory that Hungary had possessed prior to the war. As a result, three million Hungarians found themselves living as minorities in these newly expanded nations. Racial minorities beyond Hungary (Cottee, 1995) faced various challenges. During World War II, Hungary aligned itself with Germany before seeking to aid the Allies, a decision that ultimately resulted in the occupation of the nation by Germany (Printer, 2008). Subsequently, the Hungarian People's Republic was founded under a constitution that was formulated by the communist party in Hungary (Printer, 2008).

In 1956, the Hungarians, who had lived under the influence of the Soviet Union, attempted to challenge the established order; however, their uprising was ultimately suppressed. This insurrection was met with a violent reaction to the oppressive tactics of General Secretary Matyas Rakosi, leading the party to adopt a coercive regime from 1956 until 1962 (O'Neil, 1996). Following the suppression of the October 1956 Revolution, Janos Kadar, who led the party from 1956 to 1988, was forced to establish the most liberal variant of state socialism in response to the persistent struggle against the Soviet external empire (Agh, 1998). By the 1980s, socioeconomic and political transformations had already begun in Hungary, culminating in 1989-1990, which marked the onset of a new phase of democratization and marketization (Agh, 2000). In summary, Hungary experienced a democratic transition due to a combination of factors, including the decline of the Soviet Union, international pressure, and negotiations between the government and opposition forces (Printer, 2008).

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, Central and Eastern European (CEE) nations faced a series of security challenges that were largely comparable: the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the ramifications of Germany's unification, the instability along their Eastern and Southern borders resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the reconfiguration of their relationships with Western nations, and the necessity to update military equipment originating from the Soviet era (Cottee, 1995). In the wake of the Soviet Union's disintegration, Hungary, akin to other Central and Eastern European countries, opted to pursue membership in the European Union. Western Europe was perceived as a region characterized by democratic governance, security, prosperity, and stability, where the rule of law, constitutionalism, democratic political culture, and human rights were upheld (Navracsics, 1997). Consequently, Hungary's foremost foreign policy aim became the integration into Western institutions, with European integration identified as a strategic objective to transform the nation into a modern and democratic state (Palánkai, 1999). It was anticipated that EU membership would enhance Hungary's commercial, economic, cultural, and political collaboration with European nations while attracting foreign investment to the country (Commission, 2003a).

The notion of a "return to Europe" has been a prevalent theme for Hungary and other Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). This idea sought to illustrate that each nation belonged to a broader pan-European cultural collective (Bretherton and Vogler 2002; Hughes, Sasse, and Gordon, 2005). Specifically, the Hungarian populace held the belief that they were part of "Europe" (Bozóki and Karácsány, 2003). In this context, the term "Europe" transcended mere geographical classification for Hungarians (Navracsics, 1997). Normative influences significantly shaped the interpretations of this term. While Europe is geographically defined as the continent situated between the Atlantic and the Urals, the political-cultural understanding among the Hungarian public often narrowed its definition to encompass only Western Europe

(Navracsics, 1997). Consequently, the concept of a European identity embodied the acknowledgment of Europe as a “common cultural homeland” for Hungarians, symbolizing that, despite political divisions, Europe constituted a unified cultural entity with various connections that even the Cold War could not entirely disrupt (Neumann, 1999).

In January 1990, Václav Havel, the president of the Czechoslovak Republic, appealed to the parliaments of Hungary and Poland, urging collaboration to “return to Europe” (Poláčková, 1994). Subsequently, Hungary and the European Union finalized an Association Agreement, known as The Europe Agreement, on December 16, 1991. The chapter concerning free trade was temporarily enacted on March 1, 1992, while the Agreement itself became effective on February 1, 1994, following ratification (Tsounis and Kiss, 1999). In September 1992, the governments of the three Visegrád countries jointly requested the EU to assess their advancements towards potential enlargement into the Union by 1996 (Palánkai, 1998). The discussion regarding the Commission’s report, titled “Towards a Closer Association with the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe,” which was slated for the European Council meeting in Edinburgh on December 11 and 12, 1992, was deferred until the Copenhagen meeting in 1993. In June 1993, the Central and Eastern European associates that had signed the Europe Agreements were officially recognized as potential full members of the EU in Copenhagen (Palánkai, 1998). In the preamble of these agreements, the primary aim for CEECs is to achieve full membership, which, while ultimate, is not an automatic objective. Nevertheless, the EU did not make a formal commitment to this aim; it merely acknowledged it (Duponcel, 1998).

The European Union, which allocates funding through the European Commission and bilateral initiatives from its member states, has historically been the leading external provider of assistance to Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) (Grabbe, 2001). The ten nations that applied for membership were incorporated into the "PHARE" aid program, which stands for Pologne, Hongrie, Assistance à la Réstructuration Economique - Poland-Hungary: Aid for Reconstruction of the Economy-accession drive program (Grabbe, 2001). This program primarily aimed to enhance the capabilities of applicants to implement EU legislation and prepare for participation in EU policies (Grabbe, 2001). Between 1990 and 1999, the PHARE initiative allocated €1.030 million to Hungary (Commission, 1999a). As the enlargement process emerged as a tangible prospect during 1996-1997, the PHARE aid incentives, along with other pre-accession instruments such as SAPARD (support for agricultural and rural development) and ISPA (cohesion fund for environment and transport), were bolstered by the significantly greater potential advantages of substantial development assistance from EU structural funds (Hughes et al., 2005). From 2000 to 2002, Hungary was projected to receive annual financial support amounting to €96 million from PHARE, €38.7 million from SAPARD, and €87.7 million from ISPA (Commission, 2000a). Furthermore, Hungary has the opportunity to engage in Community programs as stipulated by the Additional Protocol to the Europe Agreement. Its participation would commence with initiatives such as Youth for Europe, Socrates, and Leonardo. Beginning in 1988, Hungary would also be permitted to take part in MEDIA II, Ariane, Kaleidoscope, LIFE, SAVE, SME, and health-related programs (Commission, 1997a).

Orbán asserts that the social framework of Europe is grounded in Christian morality (2013d). He emphasizes that the bedrock of Western civilization comprises Christian culture, traditions, and religion (2013d). In his discourse, Orbán often frames Christianity as a matter of identity, highlighting Hungary’s pride in its Christian heritage and asserting that Europe similarly embodies this identity (2015d). Consequently, the notion of a collective historical narrative (such as Christian Europe and Enlightened Europe) has influenced the official narrative regarding Hungary’s identity within Europe. Furthermore, Orbán has also addressed Hungary’s relations with the EU based on this perspective. Regarding identity, he asserts that

the defense of free, Christian, and independent nations in Europe, along with their mutual geographical and geopolitical interdependence, gender equality, freedom coupled with responsibility, healthy competition alongside solidarity, as well as pride balanced with humility, justice, and mercy, is of paramount importance (Orbán 2016a). He expressed, "This is Europe. Europe is Hellas, not Persia; it is Rome, not Carthage; it is Christianity, not a caliphate" (Orbán, 2016a). Additionally, Orbán (2016a) stated, "Our Europe is built on Christian foundations, and we are proud that it has accomplished fulfillment of human and spiritual freedom."

Orbán (2015d) asserted that it is impossible for Europeans to eradicate Christianity from their consciousness. The biblical narrative particularly that of redemption, cannot be forgotten. While our interpretations of this story and its figures may differ, and some may even regard it as a work of fiction, one certainty remains: it is highly improbable that we can act as though this narrative is absent and not influencing the thoughts of Europeans. For us Europeans, the story of Christianity serves as our primary foundation of civilization and embodies the moral significance that this narrative holds.

2.1. The General Framework of Bilateral Relations after Membership (2004-2010)

The membership on 1 May 2004 was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Hungarian society and thus Hungary successfully concluded its journey of returning to Europe. At this point, the ideological stances and perspectives of the parties playing a role in Hungarian political life are factors that affect their approach to the EU. At this point, it would be appropriate to re-emphasize that, as mentioned above, the political parties in Hungary have a common perspective on the country's membership in the Union (European Commission, 2002). Many of the coalition parties and opposition parties in the country's administration have shown European integration among their foreign policy goals (Batory, 2002b). However, in order to understand the political parties' approach to the EU, it is necessary to include their ideologies, beliefs and perspectives.

In the period between the years 1998-2002, the ruling party in Hungary was the coalition government of Fidesz-MPP, MDF and the Independent Smallholder Party (Batory, 2002b). During this period, the main opposition party was the Hungarian Socialist Party. Fidesz-MPP and the Hungarian Socialist Party displayed a pro-EU approach and these two parties constituted 80% of the seats in the Parliament. When we look at the Hungarian Socialist Party, it is seen that it has a more federalist, EU-oriented ideal, liberal and secular view (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). In addition, this party, together with the Free Democratic Alliance, which was a coalition partner between the years 1994-1998, was considered to be 'European' (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). The Free Democratic Alliance, on the other hand, has been seen as the party that approaches the EU most positively among Hungarian political parties, and has been labeled as the party that sees Union membership as its main goal. It is emphasized that this party, which is in line with liberal and cosmopolitan values, supports the free market economy and human rights (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002).

Another pro-EU party is the MDF, which played an important role in post-independence Hungarian political life. Focusing on the socio-cultural dimension of Europe, this party seems to support EU membership and European integration. However, the party's approach also included the fear of losing national sovereignty and concerns about the rapid integration of the country into the Union (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002).

It is observed that in addition to the parties with a positive approach towards the EU, there are also negative, skeptical and pragmatic parties (Batory, 2002a, 2002b; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). Firstly, the Hungarian Justice and Life party, which has a nationalist stance, has been skeptical about the country's EU membership and has perceived European integration as a form of globalization as a threat to the Hungarian nation. In fact, it has evaluated European

integration as a conspiracy of cosmopolitan forces. Secondly, it is seen that the Christian Democratic People's Party (KNDP) also has a Eurosceptic line. Although the Christian Democratic Party is essentially pro-European, it has been more hesitant about the EU, especially after losing its representation in the Parliament in the 1998 elections. In this context, although the KNPD supported the country's accession to the EU, it evolved into a Eurosceptic position due to concerns about sovereignty (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). Thirdly, the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP), which was officially seen as a pro-EU party, appeared to have a nationalist stance in practice (Batory, 2002b). In this context, it is seen that the FKGp did not support the ideas in the European integration process. The FKGp perceived political integration as a threat to Hungary's national interests and emphasized that economic integration posed a threat to its rural voters (Batory, 2002b). On the other hand, it supported the country's accession to the Union for pragmatic reasons and its agricultural ministers made efforts to implement EU legislation.

Another party that is considered both pro-Union and sometimes mildly Eurosceptic in its approach to the EU is Fidesz, led by Viktor Orban. The Fidesz Party initially started politics as a liberal student movement and adopted an anti-communist approach (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). In parallel with this, Fidesz evaluated the EU as an economic community that proved the superiority of Western values over Eastern values. In this context, it is observed that the Hungarian Government led by Viktor Orban in the period 1998-2002 displayed a pro-EU approach and continued significant efforts for the country's membership in the Union (Batory, 2002b). The ideological stance of Fidesz and Viktor Orban was shaped by liberal, nationalist approaches that looked after national interests and conservative approaches that emphasized Christian values (Batory, 2002a, 2002b; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002). The nationalist approaches in question became visible with the 2002 elections (Batory, 2016). Viktor Orban has displayed a protectionist approach based on the country's national interests regarding the liberalization of lands that are part of the Union's free movement of capital.

As a result of the 2002 elections, Fidesz lost the election and was replaced by a coalition of the Alliance of Free Democrats and the Hungarian Socialist Party, and socialist Peter Medgyessy was elected Prime Minister of Hungary. Medgyessy's presidency was a period in which all other political party groups agreed on Hungary's membership in the Union and the country joined the EU (European Commission, 2002). In this context, at the Copenhagen Summit on 12-13 December, the full membership of ten candidate countries, including Hungary, was approved, and the slogan 'From Copenhagen to Copenhagen' symbolized the meaningful 'return to Europe' of Hungary in particular and CEECs in general (Dinan, 2013). On April 12, 2003, a referendum on EU membership was held in Hungary and the Hungarian people approved EU membership with an overwhelming majority of 83.76% (European Commission, 2003). On April 16, 2003, Hungary signed the Accession Treaty with the EU and officially became a member of the EU on May 1, 2004.

In the post-membership period, Hungary experienced economic problems and Peter Medgyessy, who was the prime minister during the membership process, resigned and handed over his post to Ferenc Gyurcsany. During Medgyessy's term, Hungarian-EU relations progressed smoothly and there was no noticeable change in the government's foreign policy orientation towards the EU (Güngören, 2010). However, in the period leading up to 2010, two fundamental developments, namely domestic economic problems and the global financial crisis, led to serious changes in Hungarian domestic politics. In particular, the economic reform packages during Gyurcsany's rule led to criticism from opposition parties and referendum campaigns were launched. In addition, the leaking of Gyurcsany's speeches to the press that the public was being lied to also brought about deep social and administrative unrest (BBC, 2007). As a result, the above-mentioned campaign efforts were successful and the Hungarian Supreme

Election Council decided to hold a referendum on economic programs. As a result of the referendum, the Hungarian people voted against the reform package that undermined their social and health security. Secondly, the global financial crisis that began in 2008 triggered a change of power in the Hungarian government. This crisis that began in 2008 and the Eurozone crisis that followed caused problems such as budget deficits, debt problems, and unemployment in the Hungarian economy, and Prime Minister Gyurcsany, who accepted his political failure, resigned (New York Times, 2009).

When we focus on the political life of Hungary in the post-membership period, we see a polarized political atmosphere. In this context, while a Eurosceptic position is observed in the right-wing Fidesz and other conservative parties, the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats have pro-integration, secular and cosmopolitan perspectives (Batory, 2016). When we look at the issue from the EU perspective, the questioning of values and norms became visible with the Orban government that came to power in 2010. However, this does not mean that value and norm problems did not exist in Hungary before 2010. It can be understood from the Commission progress reports that Hungary has not fully internalized EU values and norms, especially minority rights and good governance principles (European Commission, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). In parallel, the conservative, populist and illiberal policies implemented by the Orban government in Hungary in 2010 have led to a perception of threat to the normative foundations of the Union (European Parliament, 2022). In this context, new changes made at the constitutional, legal, and rhetorical and policy levels indicate a tendency to move away from fundamental EU norms such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The following section of the study will examine Hungary's tendency to move away from EU values by taking the aforementioned changes into account, using qualitative data.

2.2. Non-Liberal Practices of the Orban Government

The Orban government came to power in 2010 with the victory of the Fidesz-KNDP alliance in the elections and has systematically violated the fundamental values and norms on which the EU is based in line with the policies it has adopted (European Parliament, 2018). The illiberal, ethnocentric, conservative, populist policies of the Orban government, which adopt the principle of majoritarianism rather than pluralism, symbolize concrete examples of norm conflicts and show that the life cycle of norms in Hungary has not yet been completed. In this context, although the carrot of EU membership is seen as an expression of the successful transfer of values and norms, the Commission's official progress report for Hungary before membership clearly stated that deficiencies continue in some areas. Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that the life cycle of norms in Hungary has not been successfully completed. Because, according to Finnemore and Sikking, internalized norms are no longer questionable (Finnemore and Sikking, 1998). In parallel, the Orban government's pursuit of measures that are not in line with the Union standards since 2010 shows a tendency to move away from EU values and norms. At this point, norm conflicts have occurred in the triangle of the EU, Hungary and the value chain, and the concepts of sovereignty and supranationalism have been seen as the main elements of the legitimacy bases. The remaining part of the study will try to explain which normative principles of the EU have been moved away from by explaining the aforementioned norm conflicts with qualitative data.

2.2.1. Undermining the Independence of the Judiciary

When the changes in Hungary are examined from a general perspective, the Orban Government has adopted approximately 800 draft laws that undermine the normative foundations of the EU from 2012 to 2022. One of the normative shifts in question is the illiberal changes that undermine the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary within the country (Kochenov and Bárd, 2018). In this context, it would not be wrong to accept the beginning of

the illiberal practices of the Orban Government as the 'Basic Constitution' that came into force in 2012, representing the change of the old Constitution. Fidesz based the justification for this change initiative on the fact that Hungary, like other post-communist countries, has not adopted a new constitution and stated that the current constitution symbolizes the communist legacy (Rupnik, 2012). However, when the way this Constitution was adopted is examined, it is seen that it is far from a participatory and democratic framework. Fidesz did not take into account the views of either opposition parties or civil society organizations in the adoption of the Constitution, but thanks to the two-thirds majority it obtained in the Parliament as a result of the elections, it was able to legally make the change of the Constitution possible. In this regard, the new Constitution adopted has been described as the 'Fidesz Constitution' by some authors (Scheppel, 2015). Therefore, the new changes adopted are also policies based on the majoritarianism produced by the two-thirds vote advantage.

On the other hand, when the new Constitution is examined, it is seen that the executive power is given enormous power, the balance and control mechanisms are eliminated and an illiberal political order is constitutionalized (Bugaric, 2014). When the constitutional amendments that were accepted are examined, it is observed that the independence of the Constitutional Court is undermined. In this context, Fidesz has created a convenient platform to appoint its own candidates and the procedures for nominating constitutional judges have been changed. The number of constitutional judges has been increased from eight to fifteen and seven seats have been filled by its own candidates (Bugaric, 2014). In addition, the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court in financial matters has been limited. Thus, it has been decided that the Constitutional Court cannot review the budget and tax laws adopted in cases where the national debt is more than 50% of the GDP (Scheppel, 2015). Moreover, it is observed that the judicial retirement age has been reduced from seventy to sixty-two. This government policy means that 20% of the Supreme Court judges and 10% of the most senior members of the judiciary have been dismissed.

When the changes in question are compared with EU values and norms, it is seen that the Orban government has seriously violated the principles of democracy and the rule of law (Official Journal of the European Union, 2007, 2016: European Parliament, 1999). Furthermore, regarding the reduction of the age of judges, it does not comply with the EU directive 2000/78/EC, which defines "a general framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in employment and occupation, with a view to implementing the principle of equal rights in the Member States" (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2000). The Commission, as a precaution, brought the issue to the ECJ (European Commission, 2012) and the Court stated that Hungary had not fulfilled its obligations, taking into account the relevant EU directive (European Court of Justice, 2012).

2.2.2. Media Law and Media Council

Another illiberal practice of the Orban government that is not in line with EU values is the adoption of the Media Law and the establishment of the Media Council in its wake. In practice, this law is an initiative that has become apparent as a reflection of governmental relations and contributes to the domination of the public sphere. Because media policies are an important component that constitutes the Orban government's political influence capacity. In this direction, the Orban government introduced the 'Basic Rules on Press Freedom and Media Content' and the 'Media services and mass media' legislative framework within the scope of media policies in 2010 (Polyák, 2019). Indeed, these two illiberal changes have significantly contributed to the government's control over the print and electronic media (Pap, 2017). One of the most important tools of these policies is the establishment of the centralized Media Council,

which is affiliated to the National Media and Information Communication Authority. However, when we look at the practices, the head of the Media Council is nominated by the Head of Government and appointed by the President. In parallel, it is seen that five members of the Media Council were nominated by Fidesz for nine years. When we look at the frequency auctions, the decisions of the Media Council in the media market are of significant importance. In this respect, radio stations that had previously shown successful performance have disappeared from the market due to the Council's decisions (Polyák, 2019).

On the other hand, when looking at the indicators of platforms operating globally, it is observed that Hungary has made some changes in terms of media independence (Freedom House, 2014). In this context, examining the annual reports of Freedom House is noteworthy in order to understand the related regressions. From 2010, when the government came to power, to 2014, the autonomy of media independence in Hungary has decreased by almost 28%. As a result of the developments mentioned above, the media policy of the government has been criticized by many civil society organizations and especially the EU (Sedelmeier, 2014). The European Parliament emphasized that the Hungarian government should re-establish the independence of media governance and stated that pluralism in the public sphere is under threat (European Parliament, 2011). The Representative for Media Freedom of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Dunja Mijatović, also developed a discourse in line with the Parliament and stated that the media law adopted by the Government could pose a risk of political control (OSCE, 2012). The relevant amendments of the Hungarian Government, when compared with EU values and norms, are inconsistent with the principle of pluralism in Article 2 of the EU Treaty (Official Journal of the European Union, 1992), which is common to all members. In addition, the Hungarian Government is also inconsistent with illiberal and centralized media policies with the 'Audiovisual Media Services Directive' 2010/13/EU (Official Journal of the European Union, 2010), which refers to media pluralism.

2.2.3. Central Bank Problem

Another illiberal practice that contradicts EU value norms is the undermining of the autonomy of the Central Bank of Hungary (MMB). In this context, in March 2013, the government's economy minister and at the same time one of Viktor Orban's advisors, György Matolcsy, was appointed as the president of the MMB, and the independence of this institution, which was supposed to be impartial, was weakened. In fact, it is observed that György Matolcsy changed some of the rules in the statute of the MMB before taking over, relying on his ministerial authority (Schepple, 2015).

When this initiative, which ensures the politicization and centralization of the MMB, is compared with EU values and norms, it is seen that the Orban government does not respect the principle of the independence of the central bank. In this context, Article 130 of the TFEU states that any national central bank cannot receive instructions from the Union institutions, agencies or governments of the member states when exercising its powers in accordance with the rules of the European Central Bank System of the European Union and the European Central Bank (ECB) (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012). The fourth paragraph of Article 127 of the same agreement states that the ECB must be consulted on any proposed Union regulation in its areas of competence (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012). As a natural consequence of these principles, the European Commission has initiated an infringement procedure due to the erosion of the independence of the central bank of the relevant country (European Commission, 2012).

2.2.4. Limitations on Academic Freedom

Another link in the chain of illiberal practices observed during the Orban government's rule is the restriction of academic freedoms. According to the Academic Freedom Index data

of 2022, Hungary ranked 132nd among 177 countries between 2011 and 2021, after Somalia, Palestine and Brazil, and was in the lowest 20-30% of the rankings (Kinzelbach, Lindberg, Pelke, and Spannagel, 2022). In particular, it has been observed that the Orbán government has recently pursued restrictive policies regarding academic freedoms (The Conversation, 2018). In this context, it is seen that the head of the government, Viktor Orbán, signed a decree that revoked accreditations for Gender Studies in the country, effectively banning this discipline (The Conversation, 2018). Thus, the Central European University and Eötvös Loránd University were targeted in Hungary, and the accreditation of the Gender Studies programs of these institutions was revoked. Another policy that stands out in limiting academic freedoms is the discriminatory practices applied to the Central European University (CAU), which is labeled as a symbol of liberalism and cosmopolitanism (Zaccagnino, 2020). In parallel with this, it is observed that the Orbán Government made a law change regarding higher education in 2017 (European Commission, 2017). However, although the adopted law is seen as neutral, it reveals another purpose aimed at the level of implementation. This law required universities with foreign accreditation to provide higher education services in their own countries and restricted non-European countries from cooperating with universities in Hungary. When the criteria in the law are examined, it is observed that the Central European University is implicitly targeted (Zaccagnino, 2020). Because, the Central European University is the only foreign university operating in Hungary that does not have a campus in the United States (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2017). In addition, according to the law, in order for the Central European University to meet certain criteria, it is necessary to conclude an international agreement with Hungary and the country of origin, the United States. (Ryder, 2022; Zaccagnino, 2020) In this context, an international agreement must be concluded between Hungary and the United States, as well as between New York and Hungary, since accreditation powers fall under the jurisdiction of state states, within less than a year. However, although the OAU authority has followed the necessary steps to comply with Hungarian legislation, Viktor Orbán has stated that he does not intend to sign the agreement with the state of New York. As a result, the Central European University, one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in Europe and Hungary, moved to Vienna and has continued its academic studies in Austria since the fall semester of 2019. When the general vision of this policy is evaluated, it is possible to read it as an extension of the illiberal policies implemented against enemy representations within the country. Because when the issue is viewed from a rational perspective, it is seen that the academic quality level of OAU is extremely high, the institution is dedicated to the idea of an open society and has a vision of multiculturalism (Bárd, 2020; Helms and Krizsan, 2017; Ryder, 2022; Zaccagnino, 2020). At the same time, it is observed that the aforementioned higher education institution contributes to employment, pays a huge amount of taxes, and is shown to be not a beneficiary of public funds and does not burden the state budget (Bárd, 2020). However, the actor George Soros, who is the founder of OAU and is also presented as an enemy within the country, has been extremely effective in the restrictive policy implemented towards the university. Because, according to Viktor Orbán's discourse and policies, George Soros carries mass migration to Europe through the civil society organizations he supports (Anadolu Agency, 2018). In this regard, the civil society organizations supported by the OAÜ and George Soros represent the subjects that the Orbán Government positions itself against, such as the rule of law, transparency, fundamental rights, liberal democracy and the idea of an open society (Bárd, 2020).

On the other hand, when the reports of platforms conducting research on academic freedoms are examined, the nature of academic freedoms in Hungary can be better understood. In this context, according to the Academic Freedom Index mentioned above, it has been pointed out that academic freedoms have statistically declined in Hungary from 2011 to 2021 (Kinzelbach et al., 2022). In addition, the Global Public Policy Institute evaluated academic

freedoms on a country basis in the report it published in March 2021. In this report, Hungary had the lowest academic freedom score compared to the members of the Union. Hungary, which recorded an academic freedom score of 0.437, remained 0.477 points below the academic freedom average of the Union, which has 27 members.

2.2.5. Campaign to Stop Soros

Another populist practice of the Orban government is the restriction of civil society organizations labeled as the 'Stop Soros Law'. The 'Stop Soros Package' has been shaped as a continuation of the anti-immigrant policies and has constituted a component of the Orban government's securitizing policy measures. As stated in the study, the 'refugee crisis' that accelerated in Europe in 2015 has been extremely effective in the perception of the government's interests. One of the main rationalities underlying this policy is the relationship between the concepts of identity and interests. In this context, it should be kept in mind that identity is a determinant of the interests formed (Wendt, 1999). Thus, the 'refugee crisis' in international politics as a social field has shaped the Orban government's populist policies and the discourse that incoming immigrants pose a threat to national, economic, social and identity-based security has been made.

In parallel with the above elements, the government adopted the Stop Soros Law in 2018. Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros has been one of the main subjects of the representation of the other in Hungary from the migration crisis to the present day and has been accused by Viktor Orban of bringing migrants to Europe. This policy has also made its presence felt at the media level and in 2017 the Hungarian government spent 7.5 billion Euros on the anti-Soros campaign (Polyak, 2019). In parallel with this, the Stop Soros Package, which includes three different bills, symbolized a part of the government's anti-immigrant practices. The Stop Soros Law was adopted after the 2018 elections and restricted the capacity of civil society organizations to assist with asylum requests (Guardian, 2018). It has also been stated that individuals or groups that help illegal immigrants gain the status of staying in Hungary will be subject to imprisonment (Guardian, 2018). The law also stipulates that civil society organizations dealing with immigration issues will be banned by the Ministry of the Interior if they pose a national security risk (Deutsche Well, 2018). Moreover, it is seen that the financial possibilities of civil society organizations are also limited. In this context, it was decided that civil society organizations will transfer 25% of the funds they receive from abroad to the state treasury (Boros, 2018). In reaction to the adopted law, the headquarters of the Open Society Foundation, founded by George Soros, was moved from Budapest to Berlin (Ryder, 2022), and the foundation's president expressed concerns about work safety, emphasizing that the Orban government is "suppressing civil society for political gain" (Open Society, 2018).

When the adopted Stop Soros Law is examined within the framework of EU values and norms, the conflict that emerges is no different from the government's other illiberal populist implementation outputs. In this respect, the Stop Soros Law does not overlap with the EU directive 2013/32/EU on the 'Common Procedures for the Granting and Withdrawal of International Protection' (European Commission, 2019). The second paragraph of Article 8 of the relevant directive states that "member states are obliged to ensure that organizations and individuals providing advice and consultancy to applicants have effective access to applicants at border crossing points, including transition zones at external borders" (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). In addition, the first paragraph of Article 12 of the aforementioned directive states that "applicants shall not be deprived of the opportunity to communicate with any organization that provides legal advice or other consultancy" (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). In fact, in parallel with these inconsistencies, the EU Commission

pointed to Union law and referred the matter to the ECJ on the grounds that Hungary violated the Union directives.

3. EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS OF BUREAUCRACY

The illiberal populist tendency that has been on the rise in Hungary in recent times represents various challenges to the understanding of the rule of law and democratic achievements in the country. The process of devaluing the principled norms has become an important industry for intellectuals interested in this subject and has provided extensive theoretical and empirical data for norm studies research. This thesis is designed to explain and understand the reasons for the Hungarian Government's tendency to move away from internalizing the basic values and norms of the EU, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. From this perspective, the damage to the independence of the judiciary in Hungary, the implementation of practices that do not comply with the principles of equality and human dignity, the disruption of academic freedoms, the weakness of mechanisms such as good governance together with the problems of corruption indicate that the normative validity is not stable in the country. From this perspective, the nationalist and conservative identity adopted by politicians, especially the President of the Government Viktor Orban, has become the determinant of interests. Thus, contrary to the logic of conformity, what should have been done was not followed and material interests took precedence over identity-based approaches compatible with the EU. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the anti-democratic changes that took place in this illiberal regime increased their visibility during the Second Orban Government. Because, Hungary was a candidate country that the EU was concerned about on some issues even before it became a member of the Union. Although comprehensive democratic gains were achieved during the membership process, the normative vision of the Union framed by the Copenhagen Criteria could not be fully internalized. Therefore, it would not be a wrong reading to assume that Hungary has reached the status of a member state without having full democratic standards or without completing the life cycle of the norms.

On the other hand, although Article 258 of the TFEU and Article 7 of the TFEU, which is called the nuclear option, are the Union's leverage forces in the normative sense to restrain Hungary, it has become clear that its institutional toolbox is inadequate. From this perspective, within the framework of Article 258 of the TFEU; the constitutional balance and monitoring mechanisms within the country have been disrupted, the autonomy of the Hungarian Central Bank has been damaged, academic and freedom of expression freedoms have been restricted, inequalities and discriminations have been made in terms of human rights, and in particular, certain directives have been decided within the framework of the EU *acquis*. When Article 7 of the TFEU is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the Union does not have a regulatory power over Hungary. Within the scope of this article and the relevant subparagraphs of the article, the determination of serious and continuous violations of the value-based norms that the Union has built upon is based on consensus, which is deficient in terms of applicability. Indeed, the fact that similar value shifts are also exhibited in Poland weakens the possibility of reviving the nuclear option. Indeed, the fact that Hungary and Poland, as veto players, have reached a common will to support each other makes it difficult to implement the said option. Finally, another transformative capability of the Union is the conditionality mechanism that makes the use of Union funds a condition. Indeed, when the macroeconomic data regarding the country's economy are examined, it is observed that Hungary is a prominent recipient of EU funds and it becomes clear that these funds are of serious importance for the country's welfare. As a result, it is understood that EU funds have a considerable capacity in terms of preserving the normative cornerstones that the Union has in the orbit of the rule of law.

If it is required to state the arguments for and against Viktor Orbán's Policies it can be summarized like below table for the evaluation and analysis of bureaucracy;

Table 1: Arguments For and Against Viktor Orbán's Policies

Policy Area	Supportive Rationale (Orbán's or Supporters' Arguments)	Critical Perspective (Scholarly/EU Concerns)	Overall Analytical Insight
1. Independence of the Judiciary	Reforms viewed as completing post-communist transition, increasing efficiency, and preventing "activist judges" from obstructing democratically mandated reforms.	Politically aligned appointments and structural changes weaken judicial autonomy and undermine rule-of-law principles required by EU membership.	Demonstrates a clash between national sovereignty narratives and EU expectations for independent oversight institutions.
2. Media Law and Media Council	Regulation seen as promoting balanced reporting, safeguarding cultural values, and reducing foreign or oligarchic influence.	Media Council dominated by government loyalists, reducing pluralism, encouraging self-censorship, and limiting press freedom.	Reflects tension between state-led media regulation and democratic needs for independent scrutiny and diverse public discourse.
3. Central Bank Independence	Aligning monetary policy with government priorities framed as enhancing economic stability and democratic accountability.	Political interference threatens institutional independence, investor confidence, and EU treaty obligations.	Highlights conflict between sovereignty-centered economic governance and supranational economic norms.
4. Academic Freedom	University reforms framed as modernization, strengthening national control, and limiting foreign ideological influence.	Interventions restrict institutional autonomy, harm international cooperation, and reduce academic competitiveness.	Illustrates broader struggle between state consolidation of authority and protection of open, pluralistic intellectual environments.
5. "Stop Soros" Campaign	Portrayed as a national security measure defending Hungary from pro-migration NGOs and foreign interference.	Seen as scapegoating civil society, shrinking civic space, and normalizing anti-pluralist rhetoric.	Reveals how sovereignty-based narratives can be used to justify securitizing discourse and constrain civil society.

Source: Author

The table highlights the central tension shaping contemporary Hungarian governance by demonstrating how each of Orbán's major policy areas is defended through a narrative of sovereignty, national security, and democratic mandate, yet simultaneously criticized for undermining liberal democratic norms and EU standards. In every domain—judiciary, media, economic governance, academia, and civil society—government justifications emphasize the need to correct perceived post-communist legacies, reduce foreign influence, or enhance state efficiency. However, the critical perspective consistently points to democratic backsliding, institutional weakening, and reduced pluralism. This juxtaposition shows that Orbán's policy framework is not merely a set of isolated reforms but part of a broader political project grounded in majoritarian sovereignty and state centralization. As the table indicates, the resulting debate is less about the technical details of each reform and more about competing visions of democracy within the EU: one that prioritizes national autonomy and electoral legitimacy, and another that emphasizes checks and balances, liberal institutions, and shared European norms.

3.1. Expanded Analytical Discussion of Key Policy Areas

3.1.1. Undermining the Independence of the Judiciary

Judicial reform under Viktor Orbán is one of the most contested areas of his governance. Supporters argue that restructuring the judiciary was necessary to complete Hungary's post-communist transition, contending that segments of the judicial elite retained ideological and professional ties to the pre-1989 system. They claim that centralizing appointments and revising the judicial hierarchy helped enhance efficiency, reduce case backlogs, and prevent what they describe as "activist judges" from obstructing policies that hold democratic legitimacy through electoral mandates. Framed in this way, judicial changes

are portrayed as efforts to create a more accountable and coherent legal system. Critics, however, argue that these reforms have systematically weakened judicial independence by enabling the government to influence key appointments and disciplinary structures. The introduction of politically aligned leadership, including the head of the National Judicial Office, and the subsequent attempts to lower the retirement age of judges, are cited as mechanisms that consolidate executive control. From the EU perspective, such measures undermine checks and balances and threaten the rule-of-law principles that underpin membership. Thus, the judiciary issue reveals how the government's narrative of efficiency and sovereignty directly conflicts with concerns about democratic erosion and institutional autonomy (Bánkuti, Halmai and Scheppele, 2012; Krekó and Enyedi, 2018).

3.1.2. Media Law and the Media Council

Orbán's media reforms have been justified by the government as necessary efforts to correct perceived biases in the media landscape and to protect the public sphere from foreign influence and concentrated private ownership. Supporters argue that the Media Law and the establishment of the Media Council ensure balanced coverage, cultural protection, and transparency in a sector that had previously been fragmented and vulnerable to external pressures. The government further claims that centralized oversight provides clearer standards and professional consistency across media outlets. Critics, however, describe the Media Council as a regulatory body dominated by ruling-party loyalists, granting the government disproportionate influence over licensing, content standards, and fines. The resulting environment encourages self-censorship and reduces the diversity of voices in public debate. Media watchdogs and the European Commission have raised concerns that such regulatory frameworks undermine press freedom by constraining independent journalism and reducing space for critical reporting. Consequently, the media reforms highlight the tension between state-led efforts to regulate the information environment and the democratic need for pluralism and independent scrutiny (Scheppele, Pech and Kelemen, 2022; Gawron-Tabor, 2016; Wilkin, 2018).

3.1.3. Central Bank Problem

The conflict surrounding the independence of the Hungarian central bank centers on the balance between national economic sovereignty and EU financial governance norms. Orbán's government argues that aligning monetary policy more closely with national political priorities strengthens economic stability and enables coordinated responses to domestic challenges such as unemployment, household debt, or fiscal imbalances. Supporters claim that central bank independence, while important, should not provide a platform for unelected technocrats to override democratic decisions, particularly during periods of financial instability. In contrast, critics emphasize that political pressure on the Hungarian National Bank undermines a core structural principle of the EU's economic system: the independence of monetary authorities. Attempts to influence appointments, shape policy decisions, or merge regulatory agencies are viewed as steps that erode institutional credibility and jeopardize investor confidence. Moreover, EU treaties require member states to maintain central bank independence as a safeguard against inflationary policies and political manipulation of financial instruments. The "central bank problem" therefore illustrates how Orbán's sovereignty-based approach clashes directly with supranational economic commitments and raises broader questions about compliance with EU membership obligations (Enyedi, 2016).

3.1.4. Limitations on Academic Freedom

Academic freedom has become a defining battleground in Hungary's political transformation. The government's narrative frames university restructuring, new governance models, and the relocation of institutions such as the Central European University (CEU) as

necessary steps to modernize higher education and insulate Hungarian academia from what it describes as foreign ideological influence. From this perspective, reforms enhance national control over strategic research agendas and ensure that public institutions serve national priorities rather than external networks or foundations. However, critics argue that these interventions undermine the autonomy of universities and restrict the free exchange of ideas. The forced relocation of CEU, changes in research funding, and the transfer of universities to politically connected public foundations are cited as clear examples of governmental interference. International academic organizations and EU institutions have expressed concern that Hungary's policies weaken scientific independence, harm international collaboration, and reduce competitiveness within the European Research Area. The academic freedom debate therefore reflects broader struggles between state consolidation of authority and the preservation of open, pluralistic intellectual environments (Krekó and Enyedi, 2018; Wilkin, 2018).

3.1.5. Campaign to “Stop Soros”

The “Stop Soros” campaign represents one of the most widely publicized components of Orbán’s political project, framed by the government as a defensive response to perceived threats posed by pro-migration networks and foreign-funded NGOs. Supporters argue that George Soros and affiliated civil society organizations promote migration policies that conflict with Hungary’s national security interests, demographic concerns, and cultural identity. The campaign is also portrayed as resisting external interference in sovereign decision-making. Critics, however, view the campaign as a form of political scapegoating that uses conspiratorial rhetoric to delegitimize civil society, suppress dissent, and consolidate populist support. Legislative measures targeting NGOs—such as increased registration requirements, special taxes, or restrictions on activities—are seen as undermining basic principles of freedom of association and pluralistic democratic participation. International observers have warned that these policies contribute to a shrinking civic space and normalize narratives that undermine trust in independent organizations. As such, the “Stop Soros” campaign encapsulates the polarization between Orbán’s sovereignty-centered justification and broader concerns about democratic backsliding and the securitization of public discourse (Tok, 2018; Wilkin, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

Changes in political regimes have radical effects on the bureaucracy. Every party that comes to power constantly makes significant changes to the bureaucracy. This has also been the case in Hungary. Despite the ongoing changes, the parties in power do not trust the bureaucracy.

Central and Eastern European countries have experienced regime changes many times in half a century. Therefore, their administrative traditions can be characterized by a kind of instability (Meyer-Sahling and Yeşilkağıt, 2011). After regime changes, there is little space left for the administrative tradition to continue due to the regular personnel turnover in public administration. The interaction between administrative traditions and the reform variable can be examined in three dimensions: the first is the interaction with the coordination capacity of the central executive and the party system; the second is the interaction with reforms under economic crisis conditions and finally the interaction with the results of administrative reforms.

In sum, Hungary’s political trajectory under Viktor Orbán illustrates a fundamental tension between national sovereignty and European Union norms, producing a deeply polarized evaluation of his governance. Supporters contend that Orbán has strengthened Hungary’s autonomy by prioritizing border security, resisting supranational interference, and promoting conservative cultural policies that they argue reflect the democratic will of Hungarian voters. These proponents further emphasize his government’s focus on economic stabilization, utility

price reductions, and a strategic approach to migration intended to protect national identity. Critics, however, argue that these same policies undermine liberal democratic principles by concentrating power, restricting judicial independence, weakening checks and balances, and curbing media pluralism. They also highlight that Orbán's confrontational stance toward EU institutions often isolates Hungary, challenges the cohesion of the Union, and raises concerns about adherence to shared democratic values. Taken together, the Orbán era demonstrates the complex interplay between domestic political legitimacy and supranational expectations, revealing both the appeal and the risks of majoritarian, sovereignty-centered governance within the EU framework.

In this context, the main purpose of the study is to answer the question of what are the main reasons for the Orbán Government, which came to power in 2010, to show a tendency to move away from internalizing EU values and norms in line with the illiberal populist policies it implemented. The main methodological approach imposed by the literature in seeking answers to this question is qualitative research methods. In this context, it was attempted to benefit from first-hand and second-hand sources in the literature, both conceptually and empirically, and it was aimed to present a critical perspective on the normative shifts of the Orbán Government. The main claim of the study is that the reasons for the Orbán Government's tendency to move away from normative interpretations on which the Union is built, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, equality and justice, are closely related to the developments experienced at the global level and the nationalist and conservative identity of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

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