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### ‘Polish, Hungarian, Cousins Be’: Comparative Discourse on Muslims and the Refugee Crisis in Europe

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## ‘Polish, Hungarian, Cousins Be’: Comparative Discourse on Muslims and the Refugee Crisis in Europe

**Abstract:** Hungary and Poland used to have much in common, as the saying in the title suggests. Yet, it seems that in recent years, this phrase has acquired new meaning as both countries became *enfants terrible* in EU politics. One of the earliest and most significant indicators of this change was their stance towards Muslims and refugees during the 2014 crisis in Europe. The paper analyses how the similar historical development in both countries and ethnic interests shaped their domestic and international policy towards symbolic and real benefits from the crisis even though the refugees in Hungary left at the beginning of 2016 and Poland had not even been touched by it. For that purpose, the political and social discourse on Muslims and the refugee crisis in Hungary and Poland were compared. Interestingly, both countries lack any significant Muslim or refugee communities and so their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiments have to be framed around an EU narrative. Thus, Hungarian and Polish membership in the EU seems to be modulated in relation to the refugee crisis and European Muslim communities and used to further the national political agenda.

**Keywords:** Hungary, Poland, Islamophobia, Muslims, EU, refugees

### Introduction

There is an old proverb that probably originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that points to the exceptional closeness of the Polish and Hungarian peoples. Yet, after over 200 years, this saying has acquired new meaning and significance. In 2010, Viktor Orbán became the prime minister of Hungary and five years later, Andrzej Duda the president of Poland. Their respective parties—Fidesz and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, or PiS)—gained the majority of votes in their parliaments. Both politicians and their parties are considered conservative

and perceived as Eurosceptic, but also populist and authoritarian, by their critics. This rise of right-wing parties coincided with the refugee crisis in Europe, which followed the Arab Spring and peaked in 2014.

In the wake of the refugee crisis, Hungary was in the headlines of global media because of the national government's extremely tough position on keeping refugees out of the country. About 170,000 asylum-seekers passed through Hungary between 1 April and 15 September 2015. In the second quarter of 2015, Hungary had the highest refugee total in Europe, with 3,317 refugees per million residents, compared with Austria (2,026), Sweden (1,476) and Germany (997). The EU average at that time was only 26. The number of asylum-seekers in Hungary grew dramatically, by 13 times compared with the same quarter of 2014 (Eurostat 2015). The migrants originated mostly from Syria (21%), Afghanistan (12%), and Iraq (6%). The gender and age profile of the new refugee flow was also peculiar. Most were young men, age 16-25.<sup>1</sup> The Hungarian authorities very quickly and even violently sealed the border with Serbia and Croatia, treated refugees as illegal migrants by changing Hungarian legislation, and persuaded the asylum-seekers to continue on to other countries.

Contrary to Hungary, Poland has been hardly affected by the European refugee crisis. While the country recorded its highest number of asylum-seekers in 2015, it was still marginal compared to Hungary or even the EU average, at just 8,000 applicants in 2014, and 11,000 in 2015. Even the national profile of the refugees indicates that Poland is far from the mainstream of the European refugee crisis, as most applicants came from Russia (Chechnya) and Ukraine, with only around 400 Syrian refugees in these two years.<sup>2</sup> Despite that, many Poles opposed EU quotas and express negative sentiments towards refugees, especially Muslims.

- 1 I. Molodikova, 'Guardian Opinion. The refugee crisis is waking old fears in central Europe', *The Guardian*, 20 September 2015, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/20/refugees-hungary-croatia-muslims-tensions](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/20/refugees-hungary-croatia-muslims-tensions) [2018-08-08].
- 2 Polskie Radio, 'Rośnie liczba wniosków o status uchodźcy w Polsce' [The number of asylum applications in Poland grows], *Polskie Radio*, 26 December 2015, [www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1562174,Rosnie-liczba-wnioskow-o-status-uchodzcy-w-Polsce](http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1562174,Rosnie-liczba-wnioskow-o-status-uchodzcy-w-Polsce) [2018-08-08]; cf. A. Visvizi, 'Querying the Migration-Populism Nexus: Poland and Greece in Focus', *IED Discussion Paper*, July 2017, Brussels: Institute of European Democrats (IED).

The aim of the article is to highlight how similarities in the historical development of both countries and the commonalities in the perception of their ethnic interests by the ruling elite have shaped their domestic and EU policy to gain both symbolic and real benefits from the refugee crisis, even though the refugees had left Hungary by the beginning of 2016 and Poland had not hardly been touched by the crisis. For that purpose, we analysed and compared the political and social discourse on Muslims and the refugee crisis in Hungary and Poland. Because both countries actually lack significant Muslim or refugee communities, their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiments have to be framed into something other than portrayals of real human beings. For both countries, this framework was linking these issues to the EU. Thus, Hungarian and Polish membership in the EU seems to be managed in relation to the refugee crisis and European Muslim communities.

Our argument is based on qualitative research and selective excerpts from the rich pool of statements related to refugees or Muslims in both countries. We aim primarily to show the narratives, rather than analyse their quantitative impact. At the same time, we support our argument with quantitative data from a variety of opinion polls. Last but not least, while we are aware that the word 'Muslim(s)' ought not to be equated to 'refugees', these two labels very often overlap in the examined public discourse.

## **1. Historical approach to the Hungarian and Polish national discourse**

The history of nation-building in both countries clearly indicates the crucial position of the ethnic dimension in both national and international policy. Moreover, the process of nation-building in both countries was severely influenced by different external powers through history. The most important historical benchmarks in these similarities started around the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when both nations were part of large empires (Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian) as semi-independent entities until WWI and the collapse of those empires. Their collapse and revolutions that followed turned to independence for both countries. Hungary lost about two-thirds of its historic territory while Poland was created from the remains of the Austro-Hungarian,

Russian, and German empires after the Versailles agreements. Both countries had experienced ethnic homogenisation after WWII, with forced resettlements of Germans and exclusion of Jews. In parallel, both countries came under the Soviet system with limited opportunities for national state-building.

History had brought both countries under the umbrella of the USSR against their will and cut part of their nations from their homelands. Unsurprisingly, the political elites of both countries formed a special attitude toward their kin-minorities. In Hungary, this was reflected in its constitution, which claimed the state's responsibility for kin-minorities in neighbouring countries. A similar attitude can be seen in the three acts on Polish citizenship adopted in 1920, 1951(8) and 1962, respectively, which were based primarily on ethnic criteria.<sup>3</sup> After Hungary and Poland's liberation from the grip of the Soviets, both countries became attracted to another global power—the EU—although, one in which they have only managed so far to gain a peripheral position.

This more than a century and a half struggle has significantly influenced Hungarian and Polish national identity-building. As the result, the cultural (ethnic) 'body' of Hungary and Poland was cut apart by different rulers, against the nations' will, leaving it still much bigger than the political one. As a consequence, Hungarian and Polish politicians try to create a balance of the two by developing classical nationalistic ideology as described by Gellner.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, Sereghy has argued that the traditional self-presentation of Hungary as an ethno-religious uniform Christian nation-state prevails as a result of its relative linguistic and cultural isolation and a national psyche based on historical 'victim narratives' of subsequent foreign invasions and the constant struggle for national survival.<sup>5</sup> Poland also supports this 'victim narrative', as the notion of the martyrology of the Polish nation has been a crucial element of Polish literature as well as contemporary political discourse. These historical 'victim narratives' induce the necessity to build their own identity and pride, especially since both countries belong more to the EU periphery.

3 A. Górný and D. Pudzianowska, *EUDO Citizenship Observatory Country Report: Poland*, June 2013.

4 E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell 1991.

5 E. Bayraklı and F. Hafez, *Introduction*, in: E. Bayraklı and F. Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2014*, SETA, Istanbul, 2015, p. 7.

The Hungarian politicians of the ruling Fidesz party and of the Polish PiS have used the mass-migration and refugee crisis for their respective party's benefit, playing on nationalistic sentiment and putting forward the historical narrative of divided nations<sup>6</sup>. Thus, despite a marginal number of Muslims in both countries, Islamophobia functions as a successful means to mobilise people, which we will present in a greater detail in the following sections. However, one has to bear in mind that both countries have had a relatively long history of Muslim presence on their soil. Thus, the engagement in Islamophobia for political benefit is something new.

## 2. History and structure of Muslim populations in Hungary and Poland

The history of the Muslim presence in Hungary is a long one, even though their number nowadays is marginal. The first Muslim communities originated in the aftermath of the Golden Horde invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; however, the most significant wave came later, during the end of the Ottoman Empire. Hungary was partly under Ottoman rule for one and a half centuries (mid-16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries). When Ottoman rule disappeared, some Turks left Hungary but others were assimilated. After almost two centuries, the issue of Islam was brought up again, this time in discussions over the destiny of Bosnia-Herzegovina after its annexation by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1908.

It is hard to estimate the number of Muslims who today live in Hungary, and it ranges from 2 400 to 5 400 (Molodikova 2011). There is no unified Muslim community in Hungary, and the main divide is between ethnic Hungarians (who converted to Islam) and migrant Muslims (low-skilled labour force and refugees). They operate in their own ethnic environment and are represented by small communities of different diasporas. There are three main Sunni Muslim 'churches'<sup>7</sup>

6 *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

7 According to Hungarian legal practice, all religious organisations, Christian or other, seeking recognition by the state are referred to with the term 'church' (*egyház*), originating from Christian ecclesiastic practice.

registered by the state<sup>8</sup>: Church of Muslims of Hungary (Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza), Hungarian Islamic Community (Magyar Iszlám Közösség), and Islamic Church (Iszlám Egyháza). The first one represents a kind of Hungarian national Islam, which is linked to the Hungarian consciousness and identity. The second one aims to create a European Muslim identity. The last one is neither interested in Hungarian nor European identity but presents a rather essentialist stance on Islam.

The Muslim community in Poland is also diverse and has a long history. The first Muslims on Polish soil were the Tatars, who just a few years ago celebrated their 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of arriving to Poland. Today, there are about 3 000 to 5 000 Tatars, who are referred to as autochthonous Polish Muslims. In 1936, the Muslim Religious Union (Muzułmański Związek Religijny), an Islamic religious community established by the Tatars, became the official representative authority of Muslims in Poland. Until the end of World War II, the Tatars were the only Muslims in Poland. This soon started to change with small and slow, but still visible immigration from Islamic socialist countries. They were mainly Middle Eastern students who arrived to Poland to pursue their studies, and some of them decided to settle down in the country. After 1989, when Poland opened its borders, the immigration flow became bigger, and soon the migrant Muslims outnumbered the Tatars. This is not to say that there are many Muslims in Poland—estimates range from 30 000 to 40 000 in total—but it was still a lot compared to the much smaller Tatar community. While relations between these two groups were mutually beneficial in the beginning, this started to change when the Tatars began feeling challenged by the growing Muslim population. The separation was constituted in 2004 when the Muslim League (Liga Muzułmańska), another Islamic religious union founded by migrant and converted Muslims, was registered.

8 R. Szentágotay, 'Magyarországi Szunnita Muszlim közösségek az ideológia, integrációs politika, és a radikalizáció megelőzésének tükrében' [Hungarian Sunni Islamic community – ideology, integration policy and preventing radicalisation], *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2015, <http://www.magyardiplo.hu/index.php/mitiokitthon/565-magyarorszag-i-szunnita-muszlim-koezoessegek-az-ideologia-integracios-politika-es-a-radikalizacio-megelzesenek-tuekreben> [2018-08-08].

Both countries share many similarities when it comes to their Muslim population. First, there were historically present autochthonous Muslim populations that became fully integrated with the mainstream Christian society. Second, these communities were challenged by an immigrant Muslim population (after WWII) and refugees (after the collapse of the USSR), and they are still alien to each other. Third, the geographical location of Hungary and Poland on the external eastern border of the EU makes them vulnerable to refugee inflows, as demonstrated during the 2015 crisis in the case of Hungary. However, most refugees do not consider these new EU member states to be countries where they want to settle or even apply for asylum.<sup>9</sup>

### **3. The rise of the conservative face: 2010 and 2015**

The rejection of refugee flows by the Hungarian government was widely criticized all over the world; nevertheless, this behaviour was closely related to the previous policy of Fidesz. The rhetoric of Hungarian national pride and traditions has been a Fidesz mainstay. With the first free elections (1988-1990) returning a majority (two-thirds) in parliament, that gave Prime Minister Viktor Orbán the opportunity to enormously strengthen his own and his party's capacities by changing the constitution, challenging the freedom of Hungarian media, the rights to freedom of conscience and religion, and the independence of the judiciary, which were all criticised by the European Parliament.<sup>10</sup>

In Orbán's second turn as prime minister, parliament adopted the law *On dual citizenship* (2010), which allowed simplification of naturalisation of kin-minority. The same year, a strict detention regime was introduced for asylum-seekers at the first stage of application. Islam has never been the political narrative in Hungary, even for Fidesz, but in 2011, the new law *On Religious Freedom* (2011) was adopted. It abolished privileges for all Muslim 'churches' because it recognised only 11 Christian and 3 Jewish denominations as 'churches'. This act automatically cut Muslim church access to the 1% of tax donations of

<sup>9</sup> Molodikova, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament, *Report on the situation of fundamental rights: standards and practices in Hungary (pursuant to the European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2012), (2012/2130(INI))*, 24 June 2013.



parishes. At the same time, the Act XVII (1916) has not been abolished and so it still recognizes Islam as a state religion. The Muslim ‘church’ called for the restoration of the rights of the Muslim community as an official religion in Hungary, which happened after a court hearing involving parliament in 2012.<sup>11</sup>

In May 2015, in Poland, Andrzej Duda, a member of PiS, was elected to the presidency. After five months, in October, his party won 235 out of 460 seats in parliament, i.e., just over half of all seats. In less than half a year, Poland had experienced a dramatic political shift, with PiS acquiring outright control of two out of three state powers—the executive and legislative.

In Poland, PiS has been known for its right-wing, conservative, and nationalist agenda since it was founded in 2001, especially during its rule in 2005–2007. However, after gaining power in 2015, it started a wide and complex change of the Polish system. One of the most striking examples is the crisis around the Constitutional Court, and the judiciary in general. While for some people the changes ordered by PiS are just a natural part of the proposed wide-ranging reform and getting rid of an ‘old’ system, others see the party’s actions as a threat and attempt to take power from the judiciary, the last branch of government not dominated by the ruling party.

Islam and refugees became a secondary, but still significant element of the PiS narrative. For the very first time, the terms ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’ had been used in a political rally. The leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, stated that refugees “transmit parasites and protozoans in their bodies, and both are dangerous for Poles”<sup>12</sup> and that in Italy they “treated churches as toilets”<sup>13</sup>. Both statements evoke primal fears or play on core Polish values. Moreover, they raise the limits on acceptable public discourse on Muslims and refugees very far—as will be

11 HVG, ‘Nyilvános a lista az elismert egyházakról’ [Official list of recognized churches], 23 April 2012, [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120423\\_elismert\\_egyhazak](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120423_elismert_egyhazak) [2018-08-08].

12 Gazeta.pl, ‘Jarosław Kaczyński boi się, że uchodźcy sprowadzą zarazę? Tak mówił na wyborczym wiecu’ [Jarosław Kaczyński is afraid that refugees will disseminate plague], *Gazeta.pl*, 13 October 2015, [wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19014711,kaczynski-boi-sie-zarazy.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19014711,kaczynski-boi-sie-zarazy.html) [2018-08-08].

13 Gazeta.pl, ‘Debata o uchodźcach. Kaczyński: „We Włoszech kościoły traktowane są jak toalety”. Kopacz nie wytrzymał’ [Debate about refugees. Kaczyński: “In Italy churches are treated as toilets”. Kopacz cannot stand it], *Gazeta.pl*, 16 September 2015, [wyborcza.pl/1,75398,18830888,debata-o-uchodzcach-kaczynski-we-wloszech-koscioly-tractowane.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,18830888,debata-o-uchodzcach-kaczynski-we-wloszech-koscioly-tractowane.html) [2018-08-08].

presented below—making such coarse rhetoric permissible, and even encouraging it.

## **4. Attitudes towards Muslims and refugees in a comparative perspective**

Unlike the old EU member states, neither Hungary nor Poland have ever been countries with a significant Muslim population or experienced a serious refugee inflow. Despite that, both Hungarians and Poles show strong anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiments, unlike many EU countries. These sentiments are clearly visible in a number of international opinion polls that include both countries.

Asked about the consequences of the refugee crisis, Hungarians and Poles are the most concerned about the burden to their countries out of respondents in 10 EU countries sampled by the Pew Research Center in early 2016.<sup>14</sup> Over 70% of Hungarians and Poles agreed that refugees will increase the probability of terrorism in their countries, compared to just over 40% of Spaniards and French, or over half of Britons, Greeks, or Swedes. Germany, which hosts the biggest number of refugees in the EU.

Asked if refugees take away jobs and social benefits from citizens, 82% of Hungarians and 75% of Poles agreed with this statement. Again, the difference between the rest of the EU was quite striking, at just over 30% of Germans or Swedes who agreed with this statement. However, it is not only the absolute number that puts Hungary and Poland at the top of the EU charts of fear of refugees. It is also the lack of any significant number of refugees<sup>15</sup>. In other words, Hungarians and Poles fear the consequences of something that is not even there.

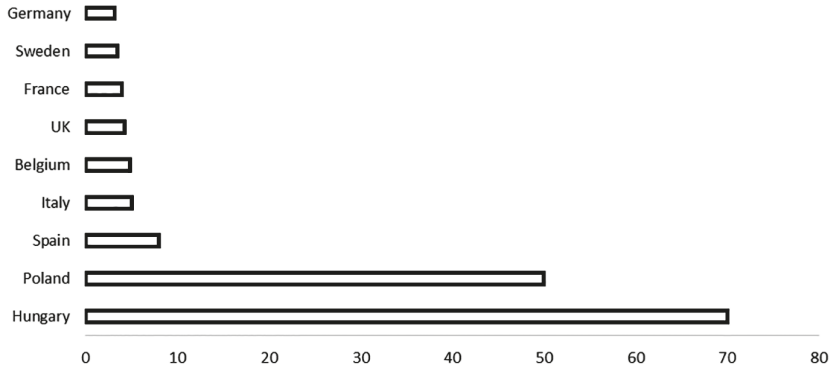
The subsequent picture provides a partial explanation for this fear. According to IPSOS surveys, Poles and Hungarians tend to overestimate the actual number of immigrants in their countries by 4.5 and

14 Pew Research Center, *Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs*, 11 July 2016, [www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/) [2018-08-08].

15 By the time of the survey, most of the refugees had already left Hungary.

3.0 times, respectively<sup>16</sup>. Asked about the number of Muslims, they overestimate the actual number by 50 or even 70 times as many, much more than in any other European country surveyed<sup>17</sup>.

Figure 1: Average estimate as a multiple of the actual number of Muslims



The dotted line indicates 1.0 x.  
Source: Own illustration based on IPSOS data.

Not only is the number of Muslims overestimated but also the attitude toward this community is far from positive. According to the Pew Research Center poll, Hungarians and Poles hold negative views of Muslims that are much worse than respondents in the older member states and similar to those in the countries of southern Europe that have been experiencing an ongoing influx of Muslim refugees. Hungary tops the unfavourable views of Muslims with 72%, followed by Italy (69%) and Poland (66%). For comparison, only around 30% of Britons, Germans, or French expressed such views.<sup>18</sup>

The negative views of Muslims or refugees ought to be placed in the wider picture, and this is presented in a study carried out by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in several EU countries. Hungarians and Poles scored much higher than any other nation in the group-focused enmity index,

16 IPSOS, *Perceptions are not reality: Things the world gets wrong*, 29 October 2014, [www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3466/Perceptions-are-not-reality-Things-the-world-gets-wrong.aspx](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3466/Perceptions-are-not-reality-Things-the-world-gets-wrong.aspx) [2018-08-08].

17 IPSOS, *Perils of Perception 2015. A 33 Country Study*, 2015, [www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-perils-of-perception-charts-2015.pdf](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-perils-of-perception-charts-2015.pdf) [2018-08-08].

18 Pew Research Center, op. cit.

especially in terms of racism, sexism, and homophobia. In the case of Islamophobia, the scores of Poles and Hungarians are comparable to those of Germans and Italians (again, despite the actual lack of Muslims). Remarkably, nearly every second Pole (47%) and two-thirds of Hungarians (61%) claimed that there are too many Muslims in their countries while two out of three Poles and Hungarians believed that Muslims are too demanding.<sup>19</sup>

Putting all the data into one framework, one can observe two interlinked issues. First, Hungarians and Poles express a strong fear towards an abstract profile of a Muslim or refugee, which comes more from the transplanted experience of the older member states than from real experiences of interacting with Muslims and/or refugees. Second, both nations have a strong need for maintaining their own cultural identity without letting in any type of 'others'. What is more, the anti-refugee and anti-Muslim discourse seems only to strengthen the cultural and national autarkies. In the following two parts we will present specific cases of how these sentiments are used in Hungary and Poland. While there are many similarities in the way the narratives are constructed, we decided to keep the subchapters separate so that the national political context is not lost.

## **5. Managing EU identity through the refugee crisis in Hungary**

The refugee crisis has been reflected in the external and domestic policy of every EU country. In this context, Hungary's foreign policy position in Europe has changed substantially. The government has shown unwillingness to follow the migration policy of the European Commission. Orbán's arguments on the need for restrictive border control policy with time have found more supporters among some member states and especially those in the V4 states that also rejected the decision of the EU institutions to support the quota scheme. Orbán openly stated: 'it's not a secret that the Hungarian government

19 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination. A European Report*, Berlin 2011. Cf. C. G. Mazzucelli and A. Visvizi, R. Bee, 'Secular States in a "Security Community": The Migration-Terrorism Nexus?', *Journal of Strategic Security* 9(3), Fall 2016, pp. 16-27, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.3.1545>.

refuses migrant quotas'. He argued the quota system would 'redraw Hungary's and Europe's ethnic, cultural and religious identity, which no EU body has the right to do'<sup>20</sup>. He criticised 'bureaucrats in Brussels' for wanting to 'let the refugees in' and argued that 'the EU has lost its adaptability, and we have no right answer to migration and terrorism'<sup>21</sup>.

Many times, Orbán has recalled historical moments to buoy his opinion about Muslims: 'I think we have a right to decide that we do not want a large number of Muslim people in our country [...]. That is the historical experience for us'<sup>22</sup>. At a Brussels news conference, he invoked Hungary's 150 years under Ottoman rule as a reason why 'Hungarians don't want to live with Muslims again'<sup>23</sup>. The leader of Fidesz's parliamentary club, Antal Rogán, warned of a future 'United European Caliphate'<sup>24</sup>. The former Secretary of State László L. Simon invited Hungarians to return to their Christian spirituality and have more babies to counter what he described as the negative cultural effects of mass migration, such as the envisioned 'impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture'<sup>25</sup>.

The government's open anti-migrant campaign in Hungary began after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris in January 2015. Orbán, in his speech commemorating the memory of the people assassinated in the attack, pledged not to let in any migrants. Soon after, a government billboard campaign was launched. It presented a visual message in public spaces referring to threats from refugees with the following slogans: 'We want to remain a clean Hungary'; 'We won't give away

20 Magyar Idők, 'Azt akarjuk, hogy unokáink egy európai kalifátusban éljenek?' [Do we want that your grandchildren live in a European caliphate?], *Magyar Idők*, 14 November 2015, magyaridok.hu/belfold/azt-akarjuk-hogy-az-unokaink-egy-europai-kalifatusban-eljenek-5035/ [2018-08-08].

21 Deutsche Welle, 'Outcome – Visegrad leaders: Merkel meets European critics of her refugee policies', *Deutsche Welle*, 26 August 2016, www.dw.com/en/visegrad-leaders-merkel-meets-european-critics-of-her-refugee-policies/a-19504957 [2018-08-08].

22 Al Jazeera, 'Hungary awaits Muslim tourists while promoting anti-refugee rhetoric', *Aljazeera*, 31 December 2015, america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/12/31/hungary-awaits-muslim-tourists-while-promoting-anti-refugee-rhetoric.html [2018-08-08].

23 Z. Sereghy, 'Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2016', in: Bayraklı and Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report*, p. 236.

24 Magyar Idők, op. cit.

25 Bayraklı and Hafez, op. cit.

our jobs', and 'You have to abide by Hungarian laws'<sup>26</sup>. In media, Islam was presented as the main threat to Christianity because of ISIS and Muslim extremism and images of refugees was quickly replaced by depictions of terrorists.

## 6. Polish selective EU membership and the Muslim question

Like Hungary, Poland joined the EU in 2004, so over a decade ago, but still not been enough time to catch up economically with the older EU member states. While Poles are among the strongest euro-enthusiasts<sup>27</sup> and their country is also one of the biggest recipients of EU funding, Poland (and Hungary) still lag the older EU member states in a variety of socio-economic indicators. This results in a sort of cognitive dissonance, i.e., the discrepancy between the expected and actual state of life: Poles probably would love to become as European as possible, but at the same time they are aware that they still belong to one of the poorest EU member states, even if Poland has been recording significant economic growth in recent years.

This dissonance had been minimised for many years as Poland benefited from the EU membership economically and financially and was striving to catch up and cover the convergence gap. But with the refugee crisis, the new government reconsidered the EU's role in Poland's development. Newly appointed Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski (2015-2018) argued: 'From getting an Association Agreement in 1992, we had to wait 12 years [to join the EU], during which time the old union benefited. And then, for each euro we get from Brussels, 70 or 80 cents go back to Western Europe because we are buying [its] technology'<sup>28</sup>. The last year has shown that Poles now favour a rather selective membership. While it accepts EU funding and mi-

26 Sputnik, 'PR Gone Too Far: Hungary Politicians Capitalize on Refugee Tragedy', *Sputniknews*, 11 October 2015, [sputniknews.com/europe/20151011/1028324726/hungary-refugee-pr.html](http://sputniknews.com/europe/20151011/1028324726/hungary-refugee-pr.html) [2018-08-08].

27 Top 5 according to Eurobarometer, right after Romania, Ireland, Lithuania, and Bulgaria. Interestingly, all but one top 5 euro-enthusiasts are new member states. See: Eurobarometer, *Public Opinion in the European Union*, European Commission, 2015, p. 8.

28 Carnegie Europe, 'Witold Waszczykowski and the new sound from Warsaw', 16 March 2016, [carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=63057](http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=63057) [2018-08-08].

gration possibilities, they seem to be reluctant to participate in the refugee crisis. The Poles do not favour European solidarity in the crisis, with two-thirds claiming that Poland ought not to accept any refugees from European countries that already have a huge number of refugees within their borders<sup>29</sup>. Consequently, the Polish parliament in April 2016 voted against the quota system for refugees proposed by the EU and claimed that all instruments of refugee and migrant policy should belong only to the Polish state. Moreover, refugees were blamed for increased social tensions in Europe<sup>30</sup>.

Not only is there reluctance to accept refugees who arrived to EU countries, but the refugee crisis is used to strengthen Polish national identity. Poland is presented as a proud nation that has opposed an 'EU dictate'. Arguments similar to ones made by the Hungarian leader against a 'German dictate' were presented by Waszczykowski: 'We would like to change the way the EU is developing [...]. The EU has developed around a triangle: Berlin, Paris, Brussels. We are on the periphery [...]. We would like to focus more on the region [...] as a kind of lobby inside the EU and NATO to pay more attention to the sensitivities of our region'<sup>31</sup>.

At the same time, selective EU membership is justified, this time by PiS chairman Kaczyński, by 'the fact that some people spend some very small amounts compared to their national income and we benefit from it, doesn't mean that we so cheaply ought to renounce our most fundamental rights'<sup>32</sup>. In other words, Poland can proudly benefit from EU funding and at the same time (also proudly) refuse any responsibility in the refugee crisis. This only indicates that the issue of Muslims is associated with Europe, of which Poland is a part but at the same time treats it as an external problem.

29 CBOS, *Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców* [Attitude of Poles towards accepting refugees], Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), Warszawa, 2016.

30 Gazeta.pl, 'Sejm przegłosował: Nie dla uchodźców. To oni są powodem napięć' [Sejm has voted: No to refugees. They cause tensions], *Gazeta.pl*, 1 April 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,19851173,sejm-przeglosowal-nie-dla-uchodzcow-to-oni-sa-powodem-napiec.html> [2018-08-08].

31 Carnegie Europe, op. cit.

32 A. Stankiewicz, 'Niechęć do UE nową doktryną PiS' [Aversion toward the EU the new doctrine of PiS], *Rzeczpospolita*, 31 January 2016, [http://www.rp.pl/euroscptyczny\\_pis](http://www.rp.pl/euroscptyczny_pis) [2018-08-08].

## Conclusions

In this paper, we tried to investigate and explain how the refugee crisis is used in the national political discourse in Hungary and Poland in shaping their position against the EU and domestically. In the first dimension, i.e., the discourse on the EU, both countries have applied a very pragmatic stance on the refugee crisis. With the *de facto* failure of the EU Schengen system that resulted in loss of border control and protection against irregular entry to the EU, Hungary changed its law to stop the flow of asylum-seekers. Poland's PiS party employed strong anti-refugee rhetoric, actively engaged in the quota discourse, and in the end refused to accept any Muslim refugees. In parallel, the crisis cemented V4 politicians' opposition to the EU institutions in this issue and to the dominance of the German leader. Their weight in the decision-making process might be reconsidered after the Brexit results.

Apparently, the leaders of the V4 came together to increase their weight to counterbalance the older member state heavyweight politicians who did not consider the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in the political decision-making process. This discourse was used with a historical perspective (oppression under the Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian empires, and then Germany and the USSR) and in the modern situation (oppression by the supranational power of EU bureaucrats and by 'big brother' Germany's 'moral imperialism').

With the weakening of EU capacities in the decision-making process and failure of EU security policy, the window of opportunity was opened for the CEE countries to implement (or at least to try) their own will. In the future, this could change the architecture of the relations of the EU countries through the redistribution of material and symbolic resources, and maybe even gaining more power by these periphery countries through bargaining on economic (e.g., the development of a nuclear power plant in Hungary) or military issues (the allocation of some NATO resources to Poland). Both countries' ruling elites have some symbolic and material capital thanks to their victim narratives and call for the return of control by their national elites.

The second dimension refers to mobilisation of people through the use of Islamophobia, which is linked to the refugee crisis in both countries. Looking back at Hungary and Poland's history, one could have hardly expected that the issues of Muslims and refugees would be used for such national mobilisation. Both the Muslim or refugee



‘other’ seemed too distant to become a real tool in the hands of local politicians. Although there had been some latent form of Islamophobia in both countries, it had never materialised into any concrete actions, nor used in political agenda until recently.

It seems that two processes—one external and one internal—have opened a Pandora’s box of Hungarian and Polish Islamophobia. The external one was the rise of ISIS, followed by the European refugee crisis. They fuelled Hungarian and Polish fears of Muslims, Islam, and refugees. Although these fears were powerful and ignited public imagination, there was hardly any chance to juxtapose them with any real experience with refugees of a Muslim background. Neither Hungary, nor Poland have any significant Muslim population. The internal process was the political shift to right-wing nationalism, evoked by the results of elections in 2010 and 2015. Both governments found they could easily build political capital on anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The variety of narratives used in the political and media discourse only indicate how much potential the refugee crisis has for the public imagination in both countries. Since there are hardly any Muslims, it can be fuelled by all kind of fears and worries, even those unrelated to the refugee crisis. If one looks at Hungary or Poland through the lens of the older EU member states with a significant Muslim population, it is difficult to explain rationally, but it becomes clearer if one considers the troublesome history and contemporary political realities. One does not need to have real refugees or Muslims in a country to use them in the national political game. All that is needed is a sense of belonging to the EU (which hosts a lot of refugees), and at the same time a longing for complete independence (which means washing one’s hands of the refugee problem). Only these two contradictory impulses taken together can explain the paradox of the Hungarian and Polish stance on the refugee question in Europe.

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