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Comparing Orbánism and Gaullism

The Gaullist Physiognomy of Orbán's Post-2010 Hungary*

ESZTER PETRONELLA SOÓS

INTRODUCTION

After 1989, Hungarian politicians rarely referred to France as a model. However, the right wing Hungarian government instated in 2010, the politicians and intellectuals around the governing party Fidesz – Alliance of Young Democrats, frequently refer to French Gaullism as a source of inspiration. This may either mean that 1) Gaullism and the political figure/work of de Gaulle serve as example to be followed by Hungarian politicians; 2) or that they are simply instrumentalized to the benefit of Fidesz.

When forming his government in 2010, Viktor Orbán stated that the Hungarian situation was similar to France in 1958, because both countries suffered from a leadership crisis¹. In early 2012, Viktor Orbán referred to de Gaulle as a role model, while also mentioning the concept of “*grandeur nationale*” so dear the famous French president². In October of the same year, without however mentioning the French case, Orbán elaborated on the idea of leadership, claiming that a presidential system would be perhaps more able to cope with difficult reforms and decisions than a parliamentary one³. Viktor Orbán is not the only member of government to refer to de Gaulle or to the French case: in August 2012, then Vice-Prime Minister Tibor Navracsics also emphasized the similarities between the Hungarian situation and de Gaulle's

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¹ Quoted by: Tibor Svárkonyi, “A magyar de Gaulle”, *Népszava.hu*, 1 June 2010, <http://www.nepszava.hu/articles/article.php?id=304282>. (Downloaded: 23 January 2014.)

² Balázs Gabay, Levente Bucsy, „Orbán: Ezek a vádak nem méltók Európához”, *mno.hu*, 18 January 2012, <http://m.mno.hu/belfold/orban-ezek-a-vadak-nem-meltok-europahoz-1044517>. (Downloaded: 10 June 2012.)

³ INDEX & MTI, “Orbán: Az elnöki rendszer alkalmasabb a reformokra”, *index.hu*, 10 October 2012, http://index.hu/belfold/2012/10/10/orban_az_elnoki_rendszer_alkalmasabb_a_reformokra/. (Downloaded: 6 November 2012.)

France during the 1950s, their common characteristic being the rapid setting up of a new political system⁴. In December 2012, when students filled the streets of Budapest, protesting against the education reform of the government, a debate about the similarities between 2012 Hungary and 1968 France was engaged in the blogosphere and the press⁵. Last but not least, the de Gaulle-Orbán comparison received international coverage, most notably on the pages of the French *Le Monde* newspaper⁶.

This paper asserts that indeed Gaullism is a viable analogy for better understanding the nature of Orbánism, not because the latter is a Hungarian version of the former, but because the similarities and differences between them can serve a better understanding of Orbánism. Is Gaullism the genuine source of inspiration for Victor Orbán and his party in government, or is it only a piece of a party identity-building strategy? We will not really address this question here, which calls for a thorough qualitative inquiry on Hungarian politics. Instead, we will use the comparison for heuristic purposes.

At first glance, there are striking similarities between the two political movements: the accession to power during a period of crisis, the political weakness of the predecessors, the personal charisma of the leader, the high importance given to the nation and to preserving its sovereignty, a sovereignist conception of the European Union, a tendency to make use of discretionary executive power, the accusations of systemic authoritarianism. These similarities are sufficient reasons for engaging in a deeper comparative analysis. This paper aims makes the first steps in this direction.

Firstly, we will define Gaullism for comparative purposes. Secondly, we will clarify what post-2010 “Orbánism” is. Third, we will draw up the first elements of a comparison between Gaullism and Orbánism, and between de

⁴ HVG.HU & MTI, “Navracsics: Sólyom Lászlónak sem lehetek kétségei”, *hvg.hu*, 18 August 2012, http://hvg.hu/itthon/20120818_Navracsics_Solyom_Laszlonak_sem_lehetek. (Downloaded: 23 January, 2014.)

⁵ See: Zsolt Bayer, “Kultúrkampf”, *Magyar Hírlap*, 18 December 2012, <http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/kulturkampf>. (Downloaded: 3 June 2013); JOTUNDER, “Bayer fenyegeti a diákokat”, *Örülink, Vincent?*, 18 December 2012, http://orulunkvincent.blog.hu/2012/12/18/bayer_fenyegeti_a_diakokat. (Downloaded: 3 June 2013); András Földes, “Bayer Zsolt már Orbán lemondását jósolja?”, *Képviselő Funky*, 18 December 2012, http://kepviselofunky.blog.hu/2012/12/18/bayer_zsolt_mar_orban_lemondasat_josolja. (Downloaded: 3 June 2013.) and Eszter Petronella Soós, “Hogy is volt az az 1968?”, *Francia politika*, 19 December 2012, http://franciapolitika.blog.hu/2012/12/19/94_hogy_is_volt_az_az. (Downloaded: 3 June 2013).

⁶ Yves-Michel Riols, “La posture gaullienne de Viktor Orbán”, *Le Monde*, 12 April 2013, http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2013/04/12/la-posture-gaullienne-de-viktor-orban_3159069_3214.html. (Downloaded on 29 January 2015.) and “Viktor Orbán, l'imposture gaullienne?”, *Le Monde*, 25 April 2013, <http://mediateur.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/04/25/viktor-orban-limposture-gaullienne/>. (Downloaded: 29 January 2015.)

Gaule's France and Orbán's post-2010 Hungary. Finally, we will examine the merits and the limits of the analogy.

Gaullism: A Certain Idea of France

Historians⁷ showed that Gaullism is a dynamic movement and an ideology “compatible with many practices”⁸. The General himself was very pragmatic when it came to policies. For instance, de Gaulle was often considered an anti-American and an anti-British politician. If President de Gaulle was reluctant to postwar US dominance, General de Gaulle stood firmly on the side of the Allies during the war and even considered the possibility of a French-British union in 1940 to be able to continue the war against the Third Reich⁹. The same goes for his allegedly anti-European policies (like the famous “empty chair crisis”), when in truth, the European Community was undoubtedly developing and consolidating during his presidency. His writings are full of pro-European opinions and positions¹⁰. Some historians argue based on such changes and discrepancies, rightly so, that the policies of de Gaulle vary with history.

For René Rémond's classical work, *Les droites en France*¹¹, Gaullism illustrates one tradition of French right-wing thought stemming from doctrines, styles and movements like Bonapartism. To mention some similarities between Gaullism and Bonapartism, Bonapartism asserts that parties divide the nation instead of unifying it, and therefore they are to be exceeded¹². Bonapartism is also authoritarian and anti-parliamentarian, and tries to create a direct relationship with the people by passing around parties¹³, which is undoubtedly true in the case of Gaullism, too. Rémond, though, underlines the fact that no 100% identification is possible.

On the other hand, authoritarian or anti-parliamentary propensities are not exclusive to the Bonapartist-Gaullist tradition: anti-parliamentarian feelings

⁷ For example: Serge Berstein, *Histoire du gaullisme*, Éditions Perrin, Paris, 2012.

⁸ Serge Berstein, *Histoire...cit.*, p. 7.

⁹ See: Charles de Gaulle, *Háborús emlékiratok*, Gondolat, 1973 and Jean Lacouture, *de Gaulle*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1969.

¹⁰ On this topic, see for instance: Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, Plon, Paris, 1999; Krisztina Arató, Boglárka Koller, *Európa utazása. Integrációtörténet*, Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 2009 and András István Túrke, *Charles de Gaulle Európa-politikája. Az európai integráció konföderatív alternatívája*, Europa Varietas Institute, Budapest, http://varietas.visuart.eu/charles_de_gaulle_europa_politikaja. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

¹¹ René Rémond, *Les droites en France*, Aubier, Paris, 1982.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 107.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

were common among French intellectuals and politicians, especially in the inter-war era¹⁴. This is the era when not only right-wing Orléanists like André Tardieu, but also left-wing politicians like Léon Blum called for a stronger executive power¹⁵. Thus, Gaullism revived older political traditions that were not inherent to the Parliament-centered Republican culture¹⁶, but its anti-parliamentarism and its will to create a strong executive cannot be considered as its *differentia specifica*. It is not surprising then that there are scholars and followers who define Gaullism, using the very words of de Gaulle himself, as a “certain idea of France”, the ideal of French grandeur, or as a special approach to political power, meaning a strong executive, lead by the President who also has a direct relationship with the electors. Some others identify Gaullism with the superior interest of France, or as a set of values focused on foreign policy and the international status of the nation¹⁷. Serge Berstein, who wrote an extensive study about the history of Gaullism, also broke the concept down to its “periods”, talking about a wartime Gaullism, the Gaullism of the RPF era, Gaullism in power, neo-Gaullism etc. Analyzing Gaullism by its periods is very logical, as it facilitates the understanding of its pragmatism and its variable nature.

“Variable” does not mean, though, that Gaullism is an unstable ideology: the General’s vision was quite constant throughout the decades. De Gaulle had a clear set of ideas and values by the time he began his political journey: he was already 50 years old in 1940, the moment of the symbolic kick-off of his career. He was a field officer, whose strategic thinking revolved around adaptability¹⁸. He knew that in order to carry out a strategic goal, tactics might vary according to the *marge de manœuvre* and to the tools at hand: this military thinking, which is rarely stressed, is the cornerstone of Gaullism, for it explains the “discrepancies”. For de Gaulle, political power (and the strong executive itself) was a mere tool for the strategic goal: the grandeur of France. Of course, he also needed a few conditions to be met, but these conditions were also subordinated to the strategic goal¹⁹. According to Serge Berstein, these two factors are the ones that are permanently present in Gaullism: the idea of a great

¹⁴ About French intellectuals and their political ideas see: Tony Judt, *Befejezetlen múlt. A francia értelmiség 1944-1956*, XX. Századi Intézet, Budapest, 2008.

¹⁵ Tony Judt, *Befejezetlen múlt...cit.*; René Rémond, *Les droites...cit.*, p. 192; and Zsuzsanna Boros, *Rendszerváltozások Franciaországban*, L’Harmattan, Budapest, 2011.

¹⁶ See for instance: François Furet, Mona Ozouf, “Préface”, *Le siècle de l’avènement républicain*, Gallimard, Paris, 1993, pp. 7-22.

¹⁷ For possible definitions see: Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Le Gaullisme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Que sais-je?, Paris, 1981.

¹⁸ See for instance: Charles de Gaulle, *Le fil de l’épée*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1971.

¹⁹ Gaullism, its goals, conditions and tools are explained by Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Le Gaullisme*, cit.

and an independent France, assured by a strong executive, headed by a quasi monarchic President²⁰.

What is Orbánism?

The personal influence of Viktor Orbán on Fidesz' is tremendous: he is the most important factor that keeps the party together. Due to the fact that this symbiosis is a widely known phenomenon, we will henceforward use the term "Fidesz" as the equal of "Orbánism" and *vice versa*²¹.

There are numerous works on the history of Fidesz²², on Viktor Orbán himself²³, and we can even find a study or two on Fidesz political values and narratives²⁴. But if one wants to explore "Orbánism", or the ideology of Fidesz in its entirety, one has to face difficulties. At first, the most apparent attribute of "Orbánism" is its extreme variability: contemporary historiography rightly points out Fidesz' and Orbán's evolution from liberalism to right-wing populism, going through national liberalism²⁵.

Fidesz started out as a generational liberal party at the time of the Hungarian transition. The party began to shift to the right around 1993-1994, when the other liberal party, the SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats) started to cooperate with the post-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP). This strategic move was all the more justified by the collapse, in 1994, of the then-largest party of the right, József Antall's MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum). The new Fidesz dubbed itself Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz-MPP) and phrased its messages for the "citizens". This national-liberal turn lasted until 2002, when the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition ousted the Fidesz-MDF-FKgP coalition from government with the electoral promise of a "social transition". From then on, Fidesz adopted a more populist approach, going as far as to promise a 14th month pension to senior citizens in 2006.

²⁰ Serge Berstein, *Histoire...cit.*, p. 511.

²¹ By the way, "Orbánism" is a practically non-existent word in Hungarian politics. As Hungarian political science has not explored the ideology of Fidesz and Orbán in a comprehensive research project, the use of the term Orbánism refers to "Orbán-style politics", and its use is for convenience.

²² For example: Attila Wéber, *A Fidesz-jelenség*, Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 1996 and Edith Oltay, *Fidesz and the Reinvention of the Hungarian Center-Right*, Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 2012.

²³ József Debreczeni, *Orbán Viktor*, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2002.

²⁴ Examples: Ildikó Szabó, "A nemzet fogalmi konstrukciója a Fidesz diskurzusaiban 1998 és 2006 között", *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 3, 2007, pp. 129-159; *Idem*, "Rendszerváltás és nemzeti tematika", *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 2, 2005, pp. 89-110; Márton Szabó (ed.), *Fideszvalóság*. L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2006.

²⁵ For a comprehensive history of Fidesz see: Edith Oltay, *Fidesz...cit.*

The history of Orbán's Fidesz is the history of 25 dynamic years. For heuristic purposes, we call Orbánism the post-2010 era, precisely the moment when noticeable Gaullist references appear in Fidesz' discourse. The limits of our analogy have to be clearly stated from the very beginning: while Gaullism is a consistent political resource, "Orbánism" is a very evasive target that does not have yet the benefit of the historical perspective.

In matters of foreign policy Viktor Orbán himself defined his political vision as a military one²⁶. Should we take this at face value? What is the strategic goal of Fidesz politics, how to define and operationalize the "interests of the Hungarian people" so dear to Fidesz politicians? Opponents often depicted de Gaulle as a genuine Machiavellian figure (going so far as to treat the 1958 constitutional change a *coup d'État*), and only time could soften or change this perception. Will it be the case for Fidesz as well?

Last but not least, our inquiry makes use of a diachronic political comparison. Therefore, similarities and discrepancies between the terms compared have always to be considered in their own context: what might have been considered as progressive in 1958, might be considered very conservative in the 2010s.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF GAULLISM AND THEIR PRESENCE IN ORBÁN'S POST-2010 HUNGARY

National Grandeur and the Importance of Foreign Policy

National grandeur is an explicitly stated goal for both de Gaulle and Orbán. De Gaulle's opinion on the matter is well-known: "France cannot be France without greatness". According to the Wikileaks cables, Orbán told U.S. diplomats that "it's not complicated – we are telling the people that we will restore the nation's greatness"²⁷. The political messages and statements are similar, indeed, even if Orbán uttered his message in front of a relatively restricted public, while de Gaulle wrote it down very publicly. But their motivations and the political opportunities available to them differ dramatically.

The idea of French grandeur is more than a simple national idea. It aims at influencing humanity in its entirety and being an important international power. Ever since the Enlightenment, France was in the front line of cultural

²⁶ HVG.HU, "Orbán: "az én filozófiám katonai természetű"", *Hvg.hu*, 30 May 2013, http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130530_Orban_az_en_filozofiam_katonai_termeszetu. (Downloaded: 30 May 2013.)

²⁷ *08BUDAPEST391*, <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/04/08BUDAPEST391.html>

and political innovation in the Western world. France's ambition for influence demands more than the idea of a respectable, independent nation. In the 20th century, Gaullism's major dilemma stemmed from the fact that France seemed to have lost the means to exercise its role as a great power – re-requiring these means would therefore be in the center of all Gaullian efforts²⁸. De Gaulle never turned or argued against the Western world, even when he deemed it necessary to conduct an independent foreign and defense policy.

In turn, Viktor Orbán recurrently argues that the Western world is in decline (a common conservative motive since Oswald Spengler's *The decline of the West*). Orbán says that Hungary has to be in phase with “the Eastern winds” that blow. With this argument, he revives an ancient Hungarian debate about Hungary as a ferryboat-country that floats between East and West but never anchors anywhere²⁹. When it comes to Hungary's foreign policy orientation Orbán has in mind not only economic or political interests of the country, but also values. In 2014, in a widely criticized speech delivered at the annual Summer School held in Băile Tușnad, Romania, Orbán didn't hesitate to criticize Western liberal values claiming that “the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state”, stating that “the most popular topic in thinking today is trying to understand how systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful. The stars of the international analysts today are Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey. And I think that our political community recognised and touched on this challenge correctly several years ago”³⁰. The difference is crucial. While harshly criticizing French politics under the 3rd and the 4th Republics, de Gaulle never gave up on the democratic ideals of his era or on democracy *per se* and never tried to look for foreign, even less for Eastern political models.

This topic can only be interpreted in conjunction with Hungarian history and Central-European identity problems. For nations in Central and Eastern Europe, what was really at stake was not the regional influence or power, but the mere existence as a nation-state. Historians like István Bibó³¹ or Jenő Szűcs³² strongly underlined the differences between Western and Eastern

²⁸ See: Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Le Gaullisme*, cit.

²⁹ Concerning this metaphor, see Tamás Csapody, “Kompország politikusai: Koppányok és Szent Istvánok. A kompország és a Koppány-politikai metafora elemzése”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 1, 2006, pp. 179-200 and particularly p. 187.

³⁰ Viktor Orbán, *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp*, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyossummer-free-university-and-student-camp>. (Downloaded: 25 January, 2015.)

³¹ István Bibó, *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága*. Argumentum Kiadó – Bibó István Szellemi Műhely, 2011, p. 80.

³² Jenő Szűcs, “Vázlat Európa három történeti régiójáról”, *Helyünk Európában. Nézetek és*

Europe as regards to nations' greatness and state resilience, explaining that Eastern European nations always suffered from an existential fear, exhibiting often an antidemocratic nationalism³³. On the contrary, as noticed by Serge Berstein, General de Gaulle created the bases of a democratic, Republican and “modern French nationalism”³⁴.

Some also argue that foreign policy is extremely important for both Orbán and De Gaulle. We should not spend much time with arguing that de Gaulle considered foreign policy as the most important policy of all³⁵. Ervin Csizmadia suggested *mutatis mutandis* the same for Viktor Orbán's Fidesz³⁶, by saying that a “European vision” became a very important point for the post-2010 Fidesz, because adversaries have no such vision – and that this is one of the main reasons why Fidesz and Orbán could remain so popular.

Let us accept the argument that both movements consider foreign policy as (some sort of) an identity-building priority. In this case, we must acknowledge that they cannot use identical methods for acquiring the means for such an international policy. One could argue that stressing the benefits of a “Hungarian-owned economy”, a clear goal for the Fidesz government, is an attempt at acquiring the necessary means. However, in military terms, Hungary relies heavily on NATO's defense capacities, which is, strictly speaking, an unequivocal constraint on national sovereignty. In contrast, de Gaulle knew that international influence and French-style “grandeur” are not possible without a totally independent defense capacity³⁷. Hungary has nor the means, neither the ambition to become a great nuclear power, and, as a Central European middle-sized country, its margin for maneuver is very limited. The “West is in crisis” argument, though, might be able to hide the geopolitical realities of the region. Is it what Bibó called the “deformation of the political character”, meaning that there is no balance between the real, the possible and the desirable³⁸?

This is my central argument against the equals sign between Orbánism and Gaullism. Hungary exercised the role of great power once, but has not done so for a few hundred years (or not without external help, like that of the Hapsburg), whereas France has always been a great power. Even today, as a full member of the Security Council of the UN, France is among the five most

konceptiók a 20. századi Magyarországon (2. kötet), Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986, pp. 515-568.

³³ István Bibó, *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága...*cit., p. 83.

³⁴ Serge Berstein, *Histoire...*cit., p. 45, pp. 57-63, pp. 293-297 and p. 396.

³⁵ See: Krisztina Arató, Boglárka Koller, *Európa utazása...*cit.; Ferenc Gazdag, *Franciaország története 1945-1995*, Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 1996; and Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, Plon, Paris, 1999.

³⁶ Ervin Csizmadia, *A tusnádfürdői év*, <http://www.meltanyosság.hu/node/2422>. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

³⁷ Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Le Gaullisme*, cit.

³⁸ István Bibó, *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága...*cit., p. 88.

influential states in the international system. Thus, though both movements have special regards towards foreign policy, we also understand that their political opportunities are different.

As Béla Bíró explained, Central and Eastern European nationalisms should not be analyzed with the same lenses as Western nationalisms. For Bíró, civic and liberal nationalism is the narrative of dominant groups, while cultural nationalism is the claim of marginalized groups. This should explain why France offers the best illustration of the former and Central-Eastern Europe is predominantly exhibiting the latter³⁹. Moreover, solid, resilient Western nations are more preoccupied by strengthening democracy, while that is not the case in Hungary: only the national issue could serve as a stabilizing factor for prevailing Hungarian political systems in frequent times of crises⁴⁰. Moreover, republican traditions are not yet an inherent part of Hungarian political culture⁴¹ as it is the case in France⁴².

Anti-Liberalism, Populism and “Etatisme”

The critique of the free-market economy is a clear similarity between Gaullism and Orbánism, along with anti-communism and the appeal to social unity. For instance, the Hungarian Constitution (art. XVII. [1]) stresses the need for employers and employees to cooperate in order to ensure a sustainable national economy. During the postwar reconstruction and during his presidency, “workers' participation” was an idea dear to de Gaulle as well. How far this similarity goes?

According to Pierre Rosanvallon, anti-liberalism⁴³ is part of the core of the French political culture. By virtue of a Jacobin tradition, French are attached to the idea of a state which in the framework of a democratic polity, is the organizer of social and/or economic progress⁴⁴: even those politicians will willingly use the powers of the state who are otherwise considered as “liberals”

³⁹ Béla Bíró, “A nemzet mítoszai”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 1-2, 2004, pp. 223-231.

⁴⁰ Ildikó Szabó, “Rendszerváltás és nemzeti tematika”, cit., pp. 95-96.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Sudhir Hazareesingh, „Who Belongs to the French Republic, and to Whom does it Belong?”, *European Journal of Political Theory*, no. 3, 2004, pp. 473-480, <http://ept.sagepub.com/content/3/4/473.extract>. (p. 475.)

⁴³ Pierre Rosanvallon, “A francia „illiberalizmus” alapjai és problémái”, in *Idem, Civil társadalom, demokrácia, politikum. Történelmek és elméletek. Válogatott tanulmányok*, Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, pp. 115-124.

⁴⁴ About French (intellectuals') positive attitudes towards the state as a benevolent actor, see for example: Sarah Waters, „French Intellectuals and Globalisation: A War of Worlds”, *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2011, pp. 303-320, <http://frc.sagepub.com/content/22/4/303>.

(like former president Nicolas Sarkozy, who, in his *Testimony* proudly describes his interventions to market processes as the economic minister of President Chirac⁴⁵ proudly recalls his strategies of economic intervention while he was minister of the Economy under Chirac presidency)

Anti-liberalism, at least in the economic sense, is also an important feature of Hungarian political culture. The legacy of socialism is long lasting when it comes to social expectations towards the state. The majority of Hungarian citizens prefer left-wing economic policies⁴⁶, but at the same time, they are quite mistrustful *vis-à-vis* the state. Fidesz was well aware of this ambivalence when it began to incorporate a social agenda (after 2002-2003) into its program⁴⁷.

What are the differences then? This is an issue where readers should be very much aware of the diachronic nature of our comparison. Orbán and de Gaulle, in a manner of speaking, reflect the expectations and the values of the era they belong to, all the while responding to electoral expectations and internal and external economic pressures. De Gaulle's epoch was the era of rebuilding, of (mostly) Keynesian economics and of the construction of Western welfare states. While de Gaulle indeed had to “accept necessary austerity measures” or liberal policies, the economic environment of his time was dubbed *Trente Glorieuses* and it was consistent with his personal ideas and beliefs. On the other hand, Orbán serves as PM in an era of deep economic crisis, when Keynesian economics and the concept of the welfare state have long since been displaced by the neoliberal paradigm. Globalization and the rise of neoliberalism in the 80s create a special environment for a capitalizing country in transition like Hungary.

Not only the historical setting, but also religious-cultural differences have to be taken into account when drawing a comparison between de Gaulle's and Orbán's policies. While Gaullism is inspired by a Catholic social culture, Fidesz (and Orbán himself) is part of a Protestant one. We do know that these religious differences might have a strong impact on the economic vision of (political) actors⁴⁸, therefore they are worthy of attention.

De Gaulle was and remained a right-wing politician attached to both Christian and social values⁴⁹, even when, for example, he accepted the

⁴⁵ See: Nicolas Sarkozy, *Vallomások*. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 2006.

⁴⁶ About electoral attitudes see: András Körösenyi et al., *A magyar politikai rendszer*, Budapest, Osiris, 2003.

⁴⁷ Ildikó Szabó, “A nemzet fogalmi konstrukciója...cit”, p. 150.

⁴⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Unwin Hyman, London-Boston, 1930, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/weber/toc.html>. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

⁴⁹ M. Géza Szebeni, “Keresztény-szociális elemek Charles de Gaulle társadalmi víziójában”, *Külföldi Szemle*, Summer 2011, pp. 76-90.

necessary austerity measures in 1958⁵⁰. De Gaulle is widely considered as having played a crucial role in the creation of the postwar French welfare state after World War II.

While Fidesz used a populist, left-wing social discourse while in opposition, its economic policy in government is – from an ideological point of view – quite complex. The “unorthodox economic policy” of Orbánism is a mixture of neo-liberal elements (flat tax, severe cuts in social security, total delegation of social responsibilities to local governments, austerity in the education system), populist elements (administrative cuts in household expenses) and state intervention (transformation of markets through regulation, nationalizations, creation of state monopolies, like in the case of the “national tobacco shops”). Strictly speaking, while Gaullism, in an era of economic growth, urged to the creation of the French welfare state, Orbánism, in an era of economic crisis, strove to dismantle the elements of the Hungarian welfare state.

Antiparliamentarism

Both de Gaulle and Orbán⁵¹ seem to think that they have a personal legitimacy that is independent from parliamentary parties, that is valid even when they are in opposition or out of (party) politics (Considering his role played during the war, de Gaulle qualifies for a charismatic leader). But – contrary to de Gaulle or subsequent Gaullist movements – Fidesz is defining itself and it is defined by its leader⁵² as a political party. In this context, but within these limits, *antiparliamentarism and the need for a strong executive* is another trait that might bring together Fidesz and Gaullism. The 1958 French and the 2012 Hungarian constitutions are both institutional responses to political crises.

Viktor Orbán’s response is not as coherent as de Gaulle’s: it does not widen the margin for maneuver of the executive as de Gaulle’s reform did, mostly because the new Hungarian basic law makes frequent use of the two-thirds super-majority rule (for instance, the creation and modification of income tax brackets necessitate a two-thirds super-majority in Parliament). In fact, the “Westminsterization” of the Hungarian politics is not the result of the constitutional revision, but merely the circumstantial outcome of the strong

⁵⁰ Where is the border between tactics and strategic, “necessary measures”? Serge Berstein notes that economic policy was also a means for de Gaulle in the service of “grandeur”, Serge Berstein, *Histoire...cit.*, p. 317.

⁵¹ Ildikó Szabó, “A nemzet fogalmi konstrukciója...cit”, pp. 136-137.

⁵² Viktor Orbán, *Fundamentumok*, 2009.

parliamentary support the current government enjoys⁵³. If the government does not hold this majority, the Parliament (and the opposition) regains its influence, even under the new basic law. Moreover, the new Hungarian electoral system is highly ambiguous: according to researchers, it is more disproportionate than the previous one⁵⁴, and according to political analysts, a steady, 5-6 % lead in the popular vote might easily lead to a two thirds majority⁵⁵. If that is the case, the long term Westminsterization of the Hungarian political system is a clear possibility, but the constant destabilization and redrafting of the political system is not that unrealistic either – such a solution would be the exact contrary to what de Gaulle wished in France.

One can also argue that both de Gaulle and Orbán tried to limit the capacity of independent bodies to control the action of the government. However, the direction is different: in 1958, within the parliament-centered French political culture, the creation of the Constitutional Council was nevertheless a step toward strengthening and widening the separation of powers, while in post-2010 Hungary, the Constitutional Court was stripped of many of the prerogatives it held previously.

Charismatic Leadership and Direct Democracy

Both Orbánism and Gaullism try to create a direct link with the people while circumventing the Parliament, and offer the solution of the *homme providentiel*. Both the French and Hungarian political cultures are keen on strong leaders. In Hungary, the communist dictator János Kádár is still one of the most popular political figures of the 20th century⁵⁶. According to a poll conducted in 2013 in France, 87% of respondents said that the country needed a strong leader to make order⁵⁷. Thus, the image of a strong de Gaulle and of a

⁵³ Péter Ondré, „Westminsteri kirándulás”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 1, 2012, pp. 7-31.

⁵⁴ László Imre Kovács, Péter Bence Stumpf, „Az arányosságról a 2014-es parlamenti választás után”, *Metszetek*, no. 3, 2014, http://metszetek.unideb.hu/az_aranyossagrol_kovacs_laszlo_imre_stumpf_peter_bence_2014_03. (Downloaded: 22 March 2015.)

⁵⁵ Gábor Török, „Aktuális belpolitikai események értékelése”, *Info Rádió – Aréna*, 27 May 2013, <http://inforadio.hu/arena/4725/1/podcasting>. (Downloaded: 3 June 2013.)

⁵⁶ See: MEDIÁN, *A 20. század értékelése*, 29 April 1999, <http://www.median.hu/object.75f7c814-dc6e-4309-b2d5-43c0a8ab2da0.ivy>. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.) and DeDi P., „Kádár zsírját nyögi a magyar”, *Index.hu*, 25 May 2012, http://index.hu/belfold/2012/05/25/kadar_zsirjat_nyogi_a_magyar/. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

⁵⁷ ATLANTICO.FR, „87% des Français attendent un ‘vrai chef pour remettre de l’ordre’: y a-t-il une tentation autoritaire en France ?”, *Atlantico.fr*, 30 January 2013, <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/t-vraiment-tentation-autoritaire-en-france-pascal-perrineau-philippe-braud-maxime-tandonnet-622299.html>. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

strong Viktor Orbán, communicating directly with the people, is not alien to these political cultures.

However, the differences are significant. Most importantly, Orbán makes frequent use of “popular consultations”⁵⁸, while de Gaulle combined the recourse to politically and legally binding referendums with a continuous personal presence among the citizens⁵⁹. The intent may be the same, but the consequences are not. Referenda are verifiable consultations; Orbán's national consultations are not. Referenda have a clear legal status and legally rationalized political consequences, consultations are often fluid. Let us remember that de Gaulle used referendums and general elections in order to strengthen and renew his legitimacy, and once he lost a referendum – in 1969 – he stepped down. In Hungary, Fidesz used referenda only for tactical reasons, when in opposition, like in 2008, in order to gain momentum or to stall government decisions or reforms.

Traditionally, Fidesz is not an adept of direct democracy. Of course, Rousseauism may have its disciples in Hungary too, but they do not count among Fidesz politicians⁶⁰. Traditionally, Fidesz favors parliamentary sovereignty, governmentalism⁶¹, majority decision-making, but not two-thirds majority consensus politics. (Of course, should Fidesz lose an election and retain at least 1/3 of parliamentary votes, Fidesz most probably will insist on consensual policy-making and the two-thirds super-majority rules will force the government in office to cooperate with Fidesz.) Moreover, the new Hungarian constitution makes it more difficult for political forces to initiate a successful referendum, as the participation threshold for successful referenda has been increased to 50% of all voters (former rules stipulated that a referendum is equally successful if 25% of all voters vote in one direction, regardless of participation level).

Legality and Legitimacy

Gaullist and Maurassist ideologies often stress the opposition between the *pays légal* and the *pays réel* – that is, the formal-legal political legitimacy vs. the charismatic-traditional type of legitimacy⁶². In de Gaulle's case, this was

⁵⁸ Mária Melinda Forrai, Erzsébet Király, „Szájer: sikeres volt a nemzeti konzultáció”, *mr1-kossuth.hu*, 3 April 2011, <http://www.mr1-kossuth.hu/hirek/itthon/szajer-siker-es-volt-az-uj-alkotmanyrol-szolo-nemzeti-konzultacio.html>. (Downloaded: 10 June 2012.)

⁵⁹ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *In the Shadow of the General. Modern France and the Myth of de Gaulle*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁶⁰ András Körösnéyi et al., *A magyar politikai rendszer*, cit., pp. 76-79.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁶² Cf. the theory of charismatic legitimacy as offered by Max Weber: Max Weber, *Gazdaság és társadalom – A megértő szociológia alapvonalai I. Szociológiai kategóriáiban*, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1987., pp. 221-225, pp. 248-260, pp. 271-275, and

never a radical opposition⁶³: when he failed to acquire a formal democratic legitimacy on occasion of a referendum he himself initiated, somewhat unnecessarily, he stepped down.

Fidesz also often contrasts legality and legitimacy. One illustrative instance is the party's discourse during the 2006 political crisis or later political declarations about the “illegitimate” Gyurcsány government⁶⁴. In 2002, Orbán declared in a widely-cited speech that the mother country cannot be in opposition. Some even argue that Fidesz promotes a transcendental vision of history⁶⁵, as a fight between good and bad. News articles or news reports sometimes throw light on the origins of this political eschatology. For instance, Viktor Orbán said in late 2013 that he and his party feel the need to introduce detailed policy provisions in the constitution – rules that are not usually to be found in the constitutions –, in order to prevent a future socialist government to change them when in power⁶⁶. This practically means that Fidesz is willing to limit the effect of a democratic election in order to ensure that its policies are maintained in the long term. In another parliamentary speech, Orbán added that in the 1980s he did not fight dictatorship, but the communists, that is the predecessors of the current socialists⁶⁷, thus blurring the line between adversity and political competition.

Moreover, Fidesz often refers to the Socialist Party as a political party who serves foreign interests (Moscow, Brussels), – de Gaulle thought the same about the communists (the difference is that Hungarian socialists might see “Brussels” as a reference, but they are not controlled by it – while the PCF was directly controlled by Moscow). In turn, contrary to what de Gaulle did in 1958, when he overtly limited the possibility of a communist victory by creating the absolute majority electoral system, we should not forget that Fidesz did not make the victory of the MSZP impossible, even if the new electoral system favors the biggest party in the country, which is currently the Fidesz.

Idem, Gazdaság és társadalom – A megértő szociológia alapvonalai 2. A gazdaság, a társadalmi rend és a társadalmi hatalom formái. (Az uralom szociológiája 1.), Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1996, pp. 47-60, 205-250.

⁶³ Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Le Gaullisme*, cit., p. 51.

⁶⁴ “Budapest Police Deny Brutality”, *bbc.co.uk*, 24 October 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6080188.stm>. (Downloaded: 25 January 2015.)

⁶⁵ Zita Draskovich, “Politikai transzcendencia. A Fidesz valóságértelmezése a 2002-es választási kampánytól a Szövetség megszületéséig”, in Márton Szabó (ed.), *Fideszvalóság*, cit., pp. 129-142.

⁶⁶ ERDELYIP, “Alkotmányba foglalja a rezsicsökkentést a Fidesz”, *444.hu*, 20 September 2013, <http://444.hu/2013/09/20/alkotmanyba-foglalja-a-rezsicsokkentest-a-fidesz/>. (Downloaded: 21 October 2013.)

⁶⁷ “Orbán: a szocialisták ne oktassanak minket demokráciáról! + videó”, *fidesz.hu*, 5 November 2012, <http://www.fidesz.hu/hirek/2012-11-05/orban-a-szocialistak-ne-oktassanak-minket-demokraciarol-video/>. (Downloaded: 25 January 2015.)

New Constitutions and their Legitimacies

Both politicians and political movements want(ed) to reshape their countries in terms of politics, institutions and international role. Both politicians had the possibility to do so. For instance, both of them created and offered a new constitution to their country. One is already proven to be stable and long lasting. On the other, the jury is still out.

The Gaullian system is based on a wider legitimacy than Viktor Orbán's new Constitution, as de Gaulle made sure that a binding referendum be organized to validate the text. This is why François Mitterrand accusation of a coup d'État didn't stand against the 1958 Constitution, nor did the allegations against the famous 1962 referendum on the direct election of the president: no constitutional interpretation could outrank the democratic judgment of the electorate and therefore the Constitutional Council did not oppose the entry into force of the direct election of the president⁶⁸.

In turn, the legitimacy of the constitution of Viktor Orbán is solely based on the legitimacy of a parliamentary vote, which is in turn based on an outstanding electoral victory in 2010. While the legality and the parliamentary legitimacy cannot be debated, it does not prevent opposition parties from criticizing the new Constitution as the constitution of one party (as we've seen, without a two-thirds majority, a socialist government's room for manoeuvre would be severely limited by the new constitution). Therefore, the constitution of Viktor Orbán is much more vulnerable than the constitution of the 5th Republic. Should he lose an election, the new government, the new majority might say that the legitimacy of the constitution is void because now the people (the electorate) want something else⁶⁹. Of course, 2015 is just the fourth year of the life of the new Hungarian constitution: again, we have no historical distance to know whether there will be a Hungarian François Mitterrand to make peace with it.

Approaches to History

Perhaps the greatest difference between Gaullism and Orbánism is their approach to history. Gaullism is a highly intellectual ideology, with a deep

⁶⁸ *Décision n° 62-20 DC du 06 novembre 1962*, <http://www.conseilconstitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/les-decisions/acces-par-date/decisions-depuis-1959/1962/62-20-dc/decision-n-62-20-dc-du-06-novembre-1962.6398.html>. (Downloaded on 22 March 2015.)

⁶⁹ Some opposition politicians raised the possibility of a future absolute majority adopting a new Constitution, without (!) possessing a two-thirds super-majority in Parliament – which would be, formally, an evidently anti-constitutional process.

historical perspective. Charles de Gaulle, according to all of his biographies and to his own writings, considered French history in its entirety⁷⁰. For him, Clovis, Louis XIV, the revolution of 1789, Robespierre, Napoleon and the 3rd Republic were equally part of the nation's history. Being born to a family with a clear royalist sensibility, de Gaulle seems to have saddened his mother with the fact that he accepted the republican political system as such⁷¹. In fact, de Gaulle refused to enter the debates between the “two nations”, that is the debate between monarchists and Republicans. His Constitution refers to the Revolution and the preamble of the 1946 Constitution, while his political system is the synthesis of the will of “both nations”. Of course, his synthesis covers up the fact that he believed in one united and undivided nation that is capable of doing and achieving great things in history. In France, there is a consensus when it comes to big issues like the Revolution, the Republic, and since de Gaulle, there is an institutional framework that is an acceptable synthesis to almost every relevant political actor. Since the 1981 election of François Mitterrand, we might call this synthesis the Republican compromise⁷². The Republic in France has a widely-accepted normative connotation, elevating it to the level of “common national values”. Under such circumstances, the debate of the “two nations” seems to be an issue of the past: the Republic has not only a consensual form of government, but a common set of values that penetrated the public as well as the private sphere⁷³.

In turn, Hungary is unable to demonstrate such a compromise concerning the national issue and the past is not closed in terms of common knowledge and interpretation⁷⁴. Not only politicians, but even scholars argue that the “nation” as used by Fidesz until 2003 was a notion that excluded those who were not voters of Fidesz. The party later demonstrated a wider interpretation of the “nation” in order to rise above other parties⁷⁵. Fidesz politicians frequently call their opponents traitors and accuse them of representing foreign interests⁷⁶. (However, this is also circumstantial: the foreign policy of Fidesz is being criticized as “too pro-Russian” since the beginning of 2014, the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict, therefore those harmful foreign interests, as represented by opposition forces, mostly mean

⁷⁰ Maurice Agulhon, „De Gaulle et l'histoire de France”, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 53, Jan.-Mar. 1997, pp. 3-12.

⁷¹ Marc Ferro, *de Gaulle expliqué aujourd'hui*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2010, p. 36.

⁷² Eszter Petronella Soós, „A köztársaság-fogalom értelmezésének szintjei Franciaországban”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, no. 2, 2013, pp. 51-69.

⁷³ Sudhir Hazareesingh, „Who Belongs to the French Republic...cit.”, pp. 473-480, <http://ept.sagepub.com/content/3/4/473.extract>.

⁷⁴ Ildikó Szabó, “Rendszerváltás és nemzeti tematika”, cit., pp. 89-110.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, “A nemzet fogalmi konstrukciója...cit.”, pp. 132-144.

⁷⁶ See: *Ibidem*, pp. 145-148.

“Brussels” and “Washington” in contemporary Fidesz discourse, because Moscow would be too controversial to evoke.)

Fidesz is more likely to “pick” things out in Hungarian history and put them on a pedestal, like the Holy Crown or Horthy's regime, and is more likely to approach the idea of nation in an exclusive manner. The preamble of the new basic law is an example of that vision of history. We are not only talking about rejecting certain dictatorial epochs but whole political traditions in Hungarian history. Therefore, the approach of Fidesz to history is different from the synthetic Gaullian approach. Orbánism is not a synthesis, it clearly takes its stand in the debate of the “two nations”.

Conclusion

During our analysis, all “striking” and “visible” similarities turned out to be differences as well, clearly suggesting that an analogy does not mean identity. The “example” and the “instrumentalization” hypotheses (or a combination of them) are therefore all potentially admissible. The comparison of Orbán's and de Gaulle's attitudes towards democracy, parliamentarism, referenda, majority decision making, super-majority voting and legitimacy is particularly useful for a better understanding of the functioning of the new Hungarian political system and the democratic attitudes of Fidesz, including its subtle and not so subtle attempts at limiting the room for maneuver of any next government.

A further comparative analysis has to focus on four important questions. First, we have to clearly determine the notion of systemic crisis, work on the theoretical relationship between regime change and “crisis”, and define the differences between the pre-1958 France and the pre-2010 Hungary. Second, the political culture of Hungary and France often show similar traits regardless of Gaullism and Orbánism. For instance, both political cultures welcome strong leaders. This is a similarity that needs to be explained and described in details. Third, both movements should be contextualized even more when compared: the relationship of Gaullism with the Republican idea of France and the relationship of Fidesz with the Hungarian conservative tradition cannot be forgotten. Fourth, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz is not the only movement that is compared to de Gaulle and Gaullism. For instance, Vladimir Putin's Russia has also been compared to de Gaulle's France from different aspects⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ For example: Robert Skidelsky, “The New de Gaulle?”, *The Guardian.com*, 5 December 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/dec/05/thenewdegaulle> (Downloaded: 23 January 2014) and, Matthew Evangelista, *Is Putin the New de Gaulle? A Comparison of the Chechen and Algerian Wars*, 2005, <http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/mae10/Is-Putin-the-New-de-Gaulle.pdf>. (Downloaded: 23 January 2014.)

The Gaullist analogy, might be interesting in the case of the semi-presidential Romania as well. Explaining why Gaullism is such a popular comparative basis in the Central and Eastern Europe, might be another important step towards a better understanding politics in the region.