



# **HUNGARY TURNS ITS BACK ON EUROPE 2.**

DISMANTLING  
CULTURE, EDUCATION,  
SCIENCE AND THE MEDIA  
IN HUNGARY  
2020–2021





# FOREWORD

With this volume, we continue our "Hungary turns its back on Europe" report, which was finalised in autumn 2019 and published in January 2020, "compiled by independent Hungarian intellectuals to bring the Hungarian and international general public, as well as European institutions up to speed on the serious damage caused to education, science, culture and media in Hungary by the Orbán regime that has been sitting in power since 2010."<sup>1</sup>

The reason for carrying on with our work is that, in the meantime, the situation in Hungary has exacerbated: the authoritarian features of the Orbán regime have been further strengthened, dismantling of the rule of law has continued, and the government's "cultural warfare" has moved up a gear and is increasingly destructive in the domain of culture. It is our common experience that Hungary, using European Union funds, has built an openly anti-European, 21st century autocracy, which has taken the state captive, dismantled the checks and balances essential to the rule of law, turned democratic institutions into an empty shell, invaded the media and made corruption systemic.

The Orbán regime, however, has recently shown signs of erosion. Fidesz has become isolated within the European Union and is being squeezed in a grip by domestic opposition that, by now, has come to its senses. The approaching 2022 parliamentary elections are predicted to be a close contest, pushing the government into increasingly unscrupulous and irresponsible actions. Perhaps the most important development of the past two years is that Fidesz has built a "parallel state" that allows it to control certain areas even in the event of electoral defeat. The key tools for the transfer of power are the new type of foundations – in fact, trusts equipped with public functions – into which the government is in the process of diverting an astonishing amount of public money and assets. It is also the fear of losing power that motivates the increasingly militaristic rhetoric of government propaganda, covert surveillance, slander and smearing of the opposition using fabricated corruption allegations.

In the second volume of our report, we will attempt to summarise what has happened over the past two years and to complement our previous work by presenting areas that have not been covered in our former analysis. In a separate Gender chapter, for example, we will take a look at the Orbán regime's policy on women and the dramatic deterioration of the situation of LGBTQI people. There will be a chapter on the re-convergence of church and state, and in a separate chapter we will dwell on the controversies of how the government is handling the Covid epidemic. In the Education section, we will analyse the changes in public and higher education over the last two years, and this time we will also review developments in vocational and adult education after 2010, while in the Science segment we will elaborate on the issue of innovation, as well. Obviously, we do not aim to be exhaustive this time either but try to summarise the developments and focus on the key issues.

This report, like the previous one, has been prepared by researchers, academics and professionals working in the areas concerned, many of whom are also involved in NGO activities.

The following civil organisations and ONGs participated in the compilation of the text: Hungarian Academy Staff Forum (Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma), Civil Platform for Public Education (Civil Közoktatási Platform), Eötvös Károly Policy Institute (Eötvös Károly Közpolitikai Intézet), FreeSZFE Society (Freeszfe Egyesület), Mertek Media Monitor (Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely), Association for Historic Building Conservation (Régi Épületek Kutatóinak Egyesülete), Stadium 28 Circle (Stádium 28 Kör), Society of Hungarian Authors (Szépirok Társasága).

The effort has been initiated and coordinated by the Hungarian Network of Academics (Oktatói Hálózat)<sup>2</sup>.

We would also like to thank all those individuals who have donated to the publication of this book. Special thanks to the Marion Dönhoff Foundation for supporting the work of two of our authors with scholarships.

1 Our previous report can be downloaded from our website: <http://oktatoihalozat.hu/>.

2 The Hungarian Network of Academics is an autonomous organisation of teachers and researchers in Hungarian higher education.



# SUMMARY

## THE EXPANSION OF AUTOCRACY

Over the past 12 years, we have witnessed the emergence of a 21st century autocracy in Hungary, a member state of the European Union. Fidesz-KDNP, in government since 2010 with a two-thirds majority, has created the conditions for the personal – unrestrained and arbitrary – exercise of power by the Prime Minister, by systematically eliminating the checks and balances of the rule of law and by the unparalleled concentration and centralisation of power. Corruption has become a fundamental feature of state functioning, benefiting the holders of political power, oligarchs close to them and clients loyal to the regime.

After Fidesz's victory in the general elections in spring 2018, a contradictory situation emerged: on the one hand, the Prime Minister reached the peak of his power, but the system started on a path of erosion, internal decay and external isolation, on the other. In local elections in autumn 2019, the opposition parties won the mayor's seat and gained majority in the general assemblies in a number of major Hungarian cities, including the capital city. In the autumn of 2021, the opposition parties that maintained their alliance held successful primaries, and the 2022 parliamentary elections are forecast to offer a chance to topple the Orbán regime. The regime has lost a significant part of its external support in Europe, and the ruling party is now floating in a vacuum in the EU. Orbán is no longer the "strong man of Europe", but a local autocrat, who is trying to dismantle the EU from within, and whose double-talk has been recognised in the EU.

Over the past two years, the autocratic elements of the regime have become more visible, more palpable, more threatening, and even the external attributes of liberal democracy have begun to disintegrate. One sign of this process was the introduction of governance by decrees in the spring of 2020, under the pretext of the pandemic, with a series of laws and decrees restricting political freedoms and facilitating the expropriation of public funds and assets.

As the parliamentary elections are approaching, Fidesz's political strategy is focussing on ensuring the survival of the system in the event of an electoral defeat. The preservation of political and economic power is being carried out by new means compared to the methods the party used in the past. A number of state cultural institutions and the vast majority of Hungarian state universities have been placed under the management of "public interest asset management foundations performing public tasks" with boards of trustees loyal to FIDESZ. Institutions performing a public function and using central budgetary resources are thus placed under the control of a "parallel state", and their operation becomes uncontrollable.

## NEW TYPES OF FOUNDATIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF POWER

Public interest asset management foundations performing public tasks (KEKVAs - AMFPPTs) were set up by legislators to outsource public assets with the aim to place entire sectors under the control of pro-government cadres for the long term. These new types of foundations have been set up mainly in the areas of higher education and culture: two thirds of the 33 KEKVAs created by the end of 2021 will manage institutes of higher education previously run by the state. The KEKVAs have received capital injections in the order of HUF 1,000 billion from public assets, including thousands of immovable assets and company shares. The boards of trustees of the KEKVAs are largely composed of officials loyal to the current political party in power; many of them are or were members of the government or are senior government officials. At the same time, the boards of trustees are authorised to exercise founding rights, thus future governments are deprived of the power of having a say in the composition of the boards. The state thus also waived its right to intervene in or control the operation of foundations established with public funds in the future. At the same time, it undertook a long-term commitment to finance the operation of the KEKVAs from the central budget. As the creators of this model consider the KEKVAs to be entities governed by private law, it is likely to be difficult to apply public control over their operations.

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### IDEOLOGICAL OFFENSIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF ECLECTICISM AND MILITARISATION

Prime Minister Orbán's system is characterised by total pragmatism in ideological terms: every symbol, myth, narrative is used in public communication, if its use promises potential benefits for the regime in some way. The symbolic facade of the NER (i.e. the "system of national co-operation") is thus very diverse: values that are often in conflict with each other can coexist peacefully: "Christian" and "ancient Hungarian", "national" and "one with Turkic consciousness", "popular" and "bourgeois", "conservative" and "radical", etc.

After Viktor Orbán's third victory by two-thirds majority in the 2018 general elections, he announced his "cultural era change" programme, which suggested that Fidesz wanted to transform culture as a whole in a voluntaristic way, to shape it to its own image. In the last 2-3 years, the pro-government press has been proclaiming a "Kulturkampf – culture war", calling for a more committed right-wing-nationalist role of the state, a more militant-partisan support policy, and the replacement of the old cultural elite, which is labelled "leftist liberal". However, the occupation of the cultural sphere continues to take the form of crude moves of power – budgetary, organisational and personnel decisions – and the reluctance and growing alienation of professional elites from the power.

We are witnessing the simplification and obfuscation of centralised messages and discourses in the area of the intertwined state and party propaganda. Fidesz, which is becoming increasingly isolated both externally and internally, addresses primarily its own supporters: it tries to keep its camp together by primitive fear-mongering and by reinforcing the psychosis concerning the image of Hungary as a "besieged fortress". This is achieved by direct and crude politicisation of all important social issues (e.g. the pandemic, the economic crisis or migration), by framing them as a life-and-death struggle between "us" and "them". Linked to this is the apparent militarisation of government communication. Alongside the idea of a sovereign "strong state", there is also a barely concealed irredentist agenda of increasing military self-defence and dominance over the Carpathian Basin. A new element is that in Orbán's speeches, the male figure of the dutiful, self-sacrificing soldier appears more and more often as a symbol of the patriarchal command-and-control system.

### CHURCH AND STATE – REVERSING SECULARISATION

The Orbán government's attitude towards churches and Christianity has remained essentially unchanged compared to what it was during its terms in governance following 2010. The government's political communication focuses on the closely intertwined bonds of faith, family and nation. It uses the churches as a source of political legitimacy and Christianity as an identity narrative that signals above all a political attachment to conservative nationalism and the tradition of Christian nationalism.

Parallel with this practice, the political discourse and symbolic politicisation that define the Hungarian state as a "Christian-national" state are increasingly assertive, by questioning the modern principle of separation of church and state and is increasingly pointing towards "resacralization" of the political arena and everyday life.

The withdrawal of the state from the provision of public and welfare services is a process that is typical of the whole of Europe, but the involvement of the churches in this process is a specifically Hungarian phenomenon. Since 2011, the established churches have been incentivised by generous funding and regulatory instruments to maintain their institutions, and, as a result, the outsourcing of public and welfare services by the state is taking place in an increasing number of areas. In the meantime, the uncertain position of the non-established churches involved in providing public services has become even more uncertain. The transformation of the church-state relationship permeates the churches with politics and the task imposed on them to maintain a vast number of institutes is increasing their vulnerability and dependence on the state.

### PRO-GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA AND HEGEMONY IN THE MEDIA

As we have already indicated in our previous report, after its victory in the general elections in 2010, Fidesz gradually occupied almost the entire Hungarian public sphere, and is now able to almost constantly push its



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political agenda. In the past few years, and especially during the scandalous pandemic management, it became clear that Fidesz sees governance as a communication activity. Government members and leading politicians are increasingly selected on the basis of public relations considerations as their primary task is to represent power to the public, a task which is supported by huge communications staffs. Fidesz is keen to use social platforms, which are particularly suitable for mobilisation, and is also consciously redirecting public information into these personalised virtual spaces.

Since 2019, the media monopoly of the governing party in Hungary has been further strengthened, the loss of space for independent and opposition media and the restriction of free access to information has continued. Free access to information has become increasingly difficult, while the huge funds spent on public media and the Fidesz media empire, the Central European Press and Media Foundation, are essentially used for government propaganda and to discredit the opposition and non-governmental organisations. The state is the largest advertiser in Hungary, and 85 % of its spending on advertisements has been allocated for pro-government media companies, making it financially impossible for independent media to operate.

With the 2020 government takeover of Index, formerly the most popular independent internet portal, the two largest of the three leading online media outlets are now under the influence and control of the government.

Since 2010, the radio market has shrunk significantly, with all of the major radio stations entertaining a larger audience now in the hands of pro-government owners. Since the last opposition regional radio station Klubrádió was deprived of its broadcasting rights by the authorities, it can only be accessed on the Internet. Meanwhile, the Media Council has done everything in its power to prevent the spread of digital radio broadcasting in Hungary.

In the market for television stations that also broadcast public content, there is also a complete predominance of pro-government broadcasters. The only politically independent television station is RTL Klub, owned by Bertelsmann, which is essentially entertainment-oriented and whose programmes on public affairs account for only a few percent of its airtime. The only TV channel with a public life focus (ATV) is owned by a fundamentalist church, which is also heavily dependent on government subsidies provided for churches.

Printed press, which is already in a steady decline, suffered the heaviest losses during the pandemic. Demand for the hundreds of press products that had already been merged into the Fidesz-affiliated media foundation has fallen spectacularly. The distribution of the two remaining independent dailies has been discontinued by the state-owned Magyar Posta Zrt., making it difficult for them to reach subscribers.

The central budget funded Hungarian news agency (MTI) and the so-called public service media, openly operating as sounding boards under total government control, are but mouthpieces for propaganda. The most important public event of the past period, the opposition primaries, practically received no coverage at all.

Restricting access to information during the pandemic had serious consequences: the government obstructed the provision of information to the population by withholding information, manipulating data, concealing the real situation and propagandising for success. This may also be a factor that caused Hungary to rank in a leading position among countries in the COVID 19 deaths per capita.

### POLITICAL PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

Although the first and second waves of the coronavirus epidemic in Hungary were relatively mild, the third and fourth waves led to a severe health crisis, and Hungary to the top of the list of countries concerning COVID 19 deaths per million people.

How the epidemic was handled showed the weaknesses of the NER in a concentrated way: the management of the epidemic was subordinated to short-term foreign and domestic policy objectives and the always prevailing financial gain, while professional aspects and the opinions of professional organisations and independent experts were neglected). The government's handling of the epidemic was unprofessional, ill-considered, hasty and, at the same time voluntaristic: health data were concealed and manipulated; decision making centres were multiplied

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and the system made opaque; some issues were handled centrally, responsibilities blurred and obscured; popular measures were used for propaganda purposes, unpopular decisions were delayed or passed on to various other institutions (municipalities, schools, companies, etc.).

Irresponsible and bad governance in the case of the pandemic is hard to be compared to the damage done in the cultural field. In this area the loss is measured in human lives. At the end of December 2021, when our report was finalised, nearly 39,000 Hungarian citizens had already died of coronavirus infection – 395 per 100,000 inhabitants.

### **CONSERVATIVE FAMILY IDEALS, SELECTIVE FAMILY SUPPORT, GENDER BIAS**

Women policy conducted during the Orbán regime can be characterised by deceptive features: on the surface, it may appear to be implementing the aspirations of feminism, as it has incorporated some of the demands of women's movements into its rhetoric, for example, the ones on women's employment. However, in reality, it runs contrary to the emancipationist objectives, favouring only demographic considerations and reinforcing the subordination of women in a society that prefers male domination.

The NER's women policies are not primarily about women, but about the family – in which 'the mother is a woman, the father is a man' – where the women's traditional role of carer and servant is taken for granted. The NER is trying to influence through two-faced state regulation: on the one hand, it encourages the birth of more children, preferably middle-class, by providing a wide range of support for families in employment, and, it keeps vital universal benefits for the poorest families with children at extremely low levels, on the other.

The discourse and practice of gender equality, like the concept of gender, has become a subject of witch-hunt over the last 10 years and a leading issue in opposing related trends in the European Union. In 2018, courses to acquire Master's degree in Social Gender Studies were removed from the curricula of Hungarian universities, thus totally neglecting university autonomy. At the same time, the discourse and policy of "gender equality" was abolished.

Although public policy supports and even expects women to work – for example, by linking substantial family allowances to labour market participation – in the absence of gender equality policies, an increasing number of female employees are trapped in degradingly underpaid jobs and often in public employment. Women are doubly exploited: they have to carry out the unpaid household and care tasks that fall on them, and they also have to participate in paid work, without being supported in the labour market by either structural conditions or gender equality values. Women's earnings in Hungary are still 16 % lower than those of men's, with the result that the difference between men's and women's pensions is 10 % in favour of men.

The NER's growing maternalistic, natalist, exclusionary, anti-gender and anti-diversity policies over 3 terms led to the point that the pro-government MPs in majority in the Hungarian Parliament voted against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2020.

The Fidesz leadership is often criticised for operating as a closed male party. In the past 12 years of the party in power, during some periods there were no female members of the government at all, and the number of female ministers has never exceeded three. In 2020, Hungary had the lowest proportion of female MPs in parliament in the EU: 12.6 %. Recently, the NER has been trying to make its rigid public image more attractive by promoting a few highly qualified young female politicians to high political positions.

### **ATTACK AGAINST SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES**

Fidesz started restricting the fundamental rights of LGBTQI people as soon as it came to power in 2010. The Basic Law contained provisions that banned marriage between same-sex couples (2011), and two years later it was also enshrined in the Basic Law that marriage constituted the foundation for the family. This also excluded same-sex couples in civil partnership from the concept of family.

Linked to the government's practice of labelling more and more social groups as Hungary's enemies, the LGBTQI minority was again targeted following a relatively calm period after the migration wave in 2015, and the



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government launched a propaganda campaign against them in 2019. In May 2020, a law banned transgender people from getting their names and gender legally recognised. In autumn 2020, a storybook entitled "Fairyland for All", which included LGBTQI characters, was shredded at a press conference by a politician representing an extremist right-wing dwarf party named "Our Country". The action of a female member of this party was met with loud approval by the Prime Minister and pro-government press. On 15 June 2021, the National Assembly, by adopting a law on the fight against paedophilia, restricted the activities of NGOs in educational institutions to raise awareness of the LGBTQI phenomenon, and restricted the availability of LGBTQI content in media and films to people under 18. The pro-government media portrayed experts and human rights activists who opposed the law as supporters of paedophilia.

### CULTURAL WARFARE

The cultural policy of Fidesz is above all about power politics. The framework of power politics in the area of culture is defined by its narrow concept. It is an intellectual policy in so far as it selects and supports among competing intellectual groups "nationally committed" ones and makes them clients of the government. It is institution-centred, in that it sees cultural institutions run by elites as centres of power and ideology. Fidesz assumes that the institutions it controls can get their ideological messages across to the whole society, and it finds a means to do so primarily in popular culture.

The discourse on power during the past two years has been dominated by the expression and rhetoric of "Kulturkampf or culture war". The main reason for this was that the Fidesz's power apparatus realised that while it had succeeded to a large extent in imposing its will on structures and actors in economic areas, the judiciary system and the media, the same could not be said of a significant number of some important actors in the cultural sector. Nor did the party succeed in transforming the world of Hungarian culture in any meaningful way by forcibly occupying institutions, excluding independent artists, rewarding politically loyal intellectuals disproportionately in relation to their performance, demanding a "change of canon", etc. Thus, even today, in the 12th year of Fidesz's political rule by two-thirds majority, this sector still has a small, but not entirely negligible potential for resistance in terms of its social impact.

In the past two years, centralisation has continued in the area of literary politics, with the appointment of leaders fiercely loyal to the Prime Minister to leading positions of state institutions, and the reduction of resources and making the operating conditions of organisations and forums that are considered oppositional difficult. The management of literary organisations and support systems was taken over by Szilárd Demeter, writer and editor, notorious for his provocative statements, and his appointment in 2019 signalled an intensification of the culture war and the expiry of power of moderate actors on the governing party's side, who are now being replaced by radicals. Demeter, as the government's "strong man", is gradually extending his power to an even larger area of culture. The institutional structure built around him is more and, in some respects less like a ministry of culture, since it covers nearly the whole cultural area but the cultural empire under his leadership that functions in a legal status as a public benefit asset management foundation, therefore it is outside the control of parliament.

In theatre arts, certain trends identified in the previous report have continued, such as the manual management and centralisation of the area, with generous state support for certain programmes, while other trends have intensified, such as the support of institutions openly loyal to the government from a support scheme that replaces the abolished Tao subsidy (system of corporate income tax support considered by the Commission to be investigated as for its market-distorting impact and whether prohibited state support is involved), and the appointment of people loyal to the government to senior positions. However, there is a suspicious silence on some issues—such as the funding of independent theatres, a "thorn under the nail" on the government's side for decades, the status of which is planned to be rethought from scratch, "of course" without consulting those affected.



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At the same time, the cynical dismantling of the autonomy of the University of Theatre and Film Arts finally reached far beyond the tolerance level of the public: the performative actions of those who protested against this measure provided feed for thought for the whole of Hungary.

As the government has not supported freelance artists in any way during the COVID period, nor the non-profit institutions that provide them with venues of inspiration, poverty and existential tension among artists is increasing. The community of artists critical of the government is becoming even more isolated, as it finds neither resources nor sustainable operating models in the current cultural political climate. Discriminatory regulations affecting LGBTQI people also affect some areas of arts, creating the possibility of direct censorship, while structural censorship inherent in state institutions is also gaining ground.

In 2020, a year after the death of former government commissioner for cinematography, Andy Vajna, the system of state funding for Hungarian cinematography was radically remodelled. Under the supervision of a new government commissioner, state funding for film production was placed in the hands of a single organisation. Preliminary declarations and the subsidies allocated so far indicate that support for cinematography is also being provided as determined by "Kulturkampf", serving the cultural aims set by the government.

The majority of Hungarian museums were severely affected by Act XXXII of May 2020, under which the status of civil servants in museums, archives, libraries and cultural institutions was abolished on 1 November 2020, and replaced by public employment status. There were also shifts of emphasis in the very structure of museums. In 2021, a third player joined the two existing priority museum centres, the Museum of Fine Arts, which is also in charge of the Liget Budapest project, and the Petőfi Literary Museum, which was created by extending the competences of the "new literary powerhouse" linked to Szilárd Demeter. In April, László L. Simon, former Undersecretary and Fidesz MP, was appointed Ministerial Commissioner for Museum Integration. His tasks included the renewal of the Hungarian National Museum, the centralisation of the archaeological and artefact conservation activities of Hungarian museums and the renewal of the entire museum sector. He was also partly assigned with the issues of museum investment projects and museum relocation in Budapest, which may entail serious issues not only for the present, but also for the future. A few months later László L. Simon was also appointed Director General of the National Museum, and his candidature, as well as his previous directorship reflect a desire to ensure that museum exhibitions are in line with the government's current memory policy.

In December 2018, the Fidesz government decided to move the Hungarian Museum of Natural History from Budapest to a provincial town named Debrecen because the National University of Public Service claims to use its buildings. This decision was confirmed in January 2020, despite public protests. To implement its plan, the government appointed a new director to head the museum. Under this dictatorial leader, who has no academic degree, the museum began to erode. The museum staff gradually disintegrated, with dozens of professionals leaving the institution, including the heads of some collections.

With the abolition of the central state institution of heritage protection in Hungary in 2012, the organisation and professionalism of heritage protection has been completely dismantled, and professional decisions that go against the political will of the government cannot be made. In this context, the ideological and economic interests of the government are increasingly determining the management of World Heritage sites, especially in Budapest and Lake Fertő, and this has led to the withdrawal of the bid of the Limes of Rome in Trans-Danubia from the application process for the status of a World Heritage site.

### **EDUCATION – REGRESSION, MICRO-MANAGEMENT, SEGREGATION**

The main trends in education policy illustrate how Orbán's regime seeks to shape society according to its own established ideas. The function of education to promote social mobility has virtually disappeared: from primary to higher education, it is becoming increasingly difficult for disadvantaged groups to access quality education and thus to progress. In recent years, ethnic segregation has increased, the already small room for manoeuvre for teachers and institutions has been restricted, and the elimination of autonomy has become almost complete.

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There is increasing ideological interference in the content of education, and the imposition of 'national and Christian' content in line with the dominant conception of nation.

Although the protests of teachers in 2016 resulted in a more modern National Core Curriculum (NAT), from 2018 the new core curriculum was revised in an offensive to increase the intellectual influence of the authorities, leaving out the professional organisations that had expressed their wish to participate in the process.

After the ideologically motivated revision of the NAT, aimed at strengthening national identity, a new basic curriculum was rapidly adopted, followed by new textbooks. These contained a number of very outdated values and they lacked expert support. In literary education, more space than before is devoted to authors associated with extreme right-wing ideologies between the two world wars, who were included in the NAT during the second Orbán government. At the same time, the amount of knowledge to be taught in many subjects has been increased, making it impossible to achieve modern pedagogical goals of active learning, competence development and literacy.

Over the past decade, Hungarian public education has undergone a process of privatisation due to the expansion of a network of schools operated by various churches. This reorganisation was not triggered by an increase in demand for church education but was in fact the result of deliberate and targeted government interventions serving political ends. Between 2010 and 2018, the share of church-owned private schools in primary education roughly doubled, and in secondary education it increased by two and a half times. The expansion of church-owned education has led to increased educational inequalities (social selection and segregation of Roma pupils), a deterioration in the efficiency of the school network and, in a large number of municipalities, a violation of parents' rights to provide their children with types of education that are in line with their religious, philosophical or pedagogical beliefs.

After 2020, following suit with the previous FIDESZ governments' measures to reduce quality in education, the conditions for pedagogical development work in nursery schools deteriorated, and the duration of teacher training was reduced from six to five years.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, education managers were reluctant to involve some education stakeholders in the development of protective measures. In the absence of effective government action, children from disadvantaged families, especially Roma families, often faced insurmountable difficulties in accessing digital education. The epidemic also highlighted the difficulties many teachers face in using digital tools.

No progress has been made since 2010 to modernise the Hungarian school system, including vocational education. Contrary to international trends, the duration of general education has not changed and, in fact, in vocational schools with 20 % of all the students, both the total duration of education and the time devoted to general competence development have been significantly reduced. VET, like education as a whole, is outdated and not adapted to generational characteristics. The specialisation of students at the age of 14 into school types with significantly different life chances leaves room for selection by social background. The preference for vocational education and training from the age of 14, without professional consultation, increased the burdens of teachers due to shortages of teaching staff and central requirements, and the lack of appreciation of their work has exhausted them. Although the 2020 reform of vocational education and training in principle offers the possibility of some modern solutions, the implementation of such reforms is highly improbable.

Hungary is lagging far behind in participation in adult learning, especially concerning employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, and in the area of participation of people with low educational attainment and those living in disadvantaged areas, as well as in the digital skills of the population. Although many training courses have been delivered with EU support, their effectiveness is undermined by protectionism in the selection of trainers and the lack of information and services to help individuals and companies make their own training choices; even previous training opportunities are declining.



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The government's management of adult learning does not reflect the strategic role of this area. Adult learning is an area of specialisation with no dedicated apparatus within the Undersecretary's Office for Economic Strategy. Fragmentation and a lack of coordination, monitoring and results-based quality assurance hamper the effectiveness of actions and improvements. Adult learning is essentially funded in line with central budgetary policies without empowering individuals and enterprises.

Two major changes happened in the domain of higher education. The first was a further serious decrease in the number of applicants to higher educational institutions as a result of government measures, and the second, which transformed the structure of Hungarian higher education in the long term, was the reorganisation of four-fifths of Hungarian state-operated higher educational institutions – two-thirds of state-run higher educational institutions in terms of student numbers – into foundations. This means that the vast majority of universities are now outside the control of the government of the day and – as the legislators intended – can be governed by the vassals of the government in power at all times, both ideologically and economically. This transformation was carried out without a publicly debated programme and without any democratic debate, taking full advantage of the situation created by the pandemic, which made it easier to adopt laws and difficult to organise protests. However, unanimous opposition from teachers and students at the University of Theatre and Film Art nevertheless resulted in a large-scale protest, which did not prevent the government from reshaping the institution to its liking. After that, most of the previous faculty and students left and the university's former intellectual assets were transferred into a freshly registered association. In the meantime, the government embarked on a joint project with the Shanghai Fudan University to establish a branch of Fudan in Budapest, on terms that are strikingly unfavourable to Hungary.

### SCIENCE UNDER ENHANCED GOVERNMENT CONTROL

In recent years, there have been a number of major transformations in the university and research sectors. In addition to the traditional basic research sites (universities, former Hungarian Academy of Sciences – MTA research network), several other institutes have received significant public research funding. The largest basic research network in Hungary (that of MTA) has been placed under the supervision of a new funding body, and the status of researchers as civil servants has been abolished: a period of uncertainty and constant change has started.

The proportion of open, independent, peer-reviewed proposals has declined, and government funding of domestic scientific research is often based on opaque and subjective decisions, leading to institutional and personal dependency, censorship and self-censorship. In the evaluation of the remaining basic research proposals, the supervising minister has also applied non-scientific criteria. Generally speaking, in science funding, political, business and ideological considerations weigh heavily alongside scientific excellence.

The government is willing to influence the structure of basic research in several ways: the transformation of universities into "endowments", through the lack of an alternative term; the creation of national laboratories, or the "nationalisation" of the MTA's research network, where research topics have to be pre-approved, are all steps in this direction.

Hungary devoted significantly fewer resources to R&D funding between 2010 and 2020 than, for example, Poland and the Czech Republic, which have a very similar historical-political legacy. More than half of Hungary's Gross Expenditures on Research and Development (GERD) came from the business sector and about one sixth from foreign sources. The share of enterprises engaged in innovation activity is also low compared to other Central European countries and is steadily declining. The government has failed to base its science, technology and innovation policy on scientific analyses and consensus in professional debates but subordinates it to the day-to-day political interests of non-scientists. Opinions and possible criticisms by groups of professionals are branded as political attacks and are ignored.

Over the past two years, new elements have been added to the historiography and memory policy that serve the purposes of the power of the government. In the re-evaluation of certain events in Hungarian history, the

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proposals, the supervising minister has also applied non-scientific criteria. Generally speaking, in science funding, political, business and ideological considerations weigh heavily alongside scientific excellence.

The government is willing to influence the structure of basic research in several ways: the transformation of universities into "endowments", through the lack of an alternative term; the creation of national laboratories, or the "nationalisation" of the MTA's research network, where research topics have to be pre-approved, are all steps in this direction.

Hungary devoted significantly fewer resources to R&D funding between 2010 and 2020 than, for example, Poland and the Czech Republic, which have a very similar historical-political legacy. More than half of Hungary's Gross Expenditures on Research and Development (GERD) came from the business sector and about one sixth from foreign sources. The share of enterprises engaged in innovation activity is also low compared to other Central European countries and is steadily declining. The government has failed to base its science, technology and innovation policy on scientific analyses and consensus in professional debates but subordinates it to the day-to-day political interests of non-scientists. Opinions and possible criticisms by groups of professionals are branded as political attacks and are ignored.

Over the past two years, new elements have been added to the historiography and memory policy that serve the purposes of the power of the government. In the re-evaluation of certain events in Hungarian history, the consensus in historiography is being disregarded. In the evaluation of history, war propaganda is practised: victories are exaggerated, defeats are excused, and are almost considered as victories. Statements falsifying historical facts have also been incorporated into school textbooks. Xenophobia is further fuelled by the re-interpretation of historical events. Alongside existing research institutes, ones with the same research orientation but promoting Fidesz's historical narrative have been set up.

The endeavours for the total occupation and ideological exploitation of culture is equally prevalent in the protection of monuments, the dismantling of the professional autonomy of theatres, museums and public collections, in the transformation of the architectural and sculptural symbolism of public spaces, as it is in disintegrating the research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the total disenfranchisement of university senates.



OKTATÓI HÁLÓZAT  
HUNGARIAN NETWORK OF ACADEMICS

