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CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - Hungary

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Abstract

This country report, prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action, examines the populism–Euroscepticism nexus in Hungary. It traces how Fidesz, in government since 2010, evolved from a pro-European liberal party into the dominant case of populist radical right Euroscepticism in the European Union, framing its conflicts with Brussels in sovereigntist, civilisational and nativist terms while remaining a net beneficiary of EU funds. The report situates Fidesz alongside other relevant actors—Jobbik and its successor Mi Hazánk on the radical right, the liberal Momentum, and the new centre-right challenger Tisza—and analyses their respective positions on European integration and how they responded to Brexit, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and Trump's re-election. It further considers the strategic responses of pro-European opposition parties and the domestic and EU-level consequences of Fidesz's "sovereignty-focused" Euroscepticism, including Article 7 proceedings, infringement procedures and rule of law conditionality. The report concludes with the watershed parliamentary elections of 12 April 2026, in which the pro-European Tisza Party ended sixteen years of Fidesz–KDNP rule, and reflects on what this signals for the future of the Hungarian populism–Euroscepticism nexus.

Plain Language summary

This article tells the story of how Hungary's relationship with the European Union has changed since the country joined in 2004, and why this matters for the rest of Europe. When Hungary became an EU member, there was widespread public enthusiasm, and most Hungarians have continued to see membership as good for the country ever since. But at the level of government, the picture has been very different. After Viktor Orbán and his party Fidesz returned to power in 2010, the government became one of the EU's loudest critics, regularly attacking "Brussels bureaucrats", liberal values, migration policy and, more recently, EU support for Ukraine. The article explains how Fidesz combined populism, claiming to speak for "ordinary Hungarians" against distant elites, with a kind of

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Euroscepticism that did not actually want to leave the EU, but rather weaken it from inside while still receiving its funds. It also looks at smaller parties: the far-right Mi Hazánk, which goes further than Fidesz and openly toys with leaving the EU; the now-marginal Jobbik; and the youth-oriented Momentum, which is sometimes confrontational in tone but firmly pro-European. A central part of the story is the gap between governing politicians and ordinary citizens: while the government attacked the EU, most Hungarians kept trusting EU institutions more than their own. This gap helps explain the sudden rise of the Tisza Party in 2024, led by former Fidesz insider Péter Magyar, who broke with the government over a child-abuse pardon scandal and built a centre-right, pro-European alternative. In April 2026, Tisza won a landslide victory, ending sixteen years of Orbán's rule and signalling that Hungary is heading back toward the European mainstream. The article argues that Hungary's experience offers important lessons about how populist, anti-EU projects can take root in government and how they can end.

Keywords
Hungary, populism, Euroscepticism, Fidesz, Orbán, European Union, Tisza Party, illiberalism, Mi Hazánk, Central and Eastern Europe.

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1. Introduction

Hungary's relationship with European integration has become increasingly contentious since its 2004 EU accession, when membership represented the culmination of post-socialist transition and a symbolic "return to Europe".[1]

The 2008 global financial crisis severely impacted Hungary's economic stability, necessitating an IMF bailout and subsequent implementation of austerity measures.[2,3] This economic disruption coincided with growing political volatility and the consolidation of power by Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party following its decisive electoral victory in 2010. Since this pivotal election, the role of the EU in Hungarian political debates has undergone a profound transformation, emerging as a central and increasingly divisive issue in national political discourse, primarily fueled by anti-Brussels rhetoric of the ruling party.[4,5] Notably, this elite-level Euroscepticism has not been mirrored by Hungarian public opinion. In the run-up to accession, support for joining the EU was already broad: in the 2003 accession referendum, roughly 84% of those voting endorsed membership, although turnout was modest. Since accession, Hungarians have consistently maintained a moderately positive view of EU membership, with majorities continuing to regard it as beneficial across two decades of Eurobarometer surveys, and trust in EU institutions has typically exceeded trust in domestic ones.[6] The gap between Eurosceptic governing elites and a broadly Europhile public has thus become one of the defining features of Hungary's post-2010 political landscape.[7]

The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action[8] following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines.[9]

2. Populist political actors

Fidesz-KDNP

The most successful populist political actor in Hungary is Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance), which has been in power since 2010, in coalition with its junior partner, the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). Under Viktor Orbán's leadership, Fidesz has undergone a significant ideological transformation from a liberal anti-communist youth movement in the late 1980s to what scholars now classify as a populist radical right party with self-described "Christian-conservative" values[10] or one embracing a combination of left-wing economic policies and right-wing positions on the cultural dimension.[5]

Fidesz's ideological profile combines Hungarian nationalism, traditional Christian values, anti-immigration positions, and opposition to 'liberal elites',[11] mobilizing voters on immigration, sovereignty, and traditional values. Its populist discourse operates through a consistent antagonistic framework that positions Orbán as the defender of ordinary Hungarians against various constructed enemies: transnational corporations, EU bureaucracy, liberal NGOs, migrants, and the figure of George Soros, who has been systematically portrayed as the embodiment of transnational liberalism.[12]

Fidesz maintained membership in the European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament until March 2021, when it preemptively withdrew prior to an anticipated expulsion. Since leaving the EPP in March 2021, Fidesz has joined the Patriots for Europe group (established in 2024), alongside parties led by Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini. While Orbán has cultivated these relationships, full cooperation remains constrained by differing positions on Russia.[13]

Jobbik and Mi hazánk

Another significant populist actor was Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary). Jobbik emerged in the mid-2000s as a radical nationalist party characterized by antisemitic and anti-Roma rhetoric. Initially positioned to the ideological right of Fidesz, Jobbik implemented a "moderation" strategy after 2014, attempting to rebrand as a conservative people's party.[14] This ideological recalibration accelerated following Fidesz's 2018 electoral victory, with Jobbik eventually joining the liberal-led United Opposition coalition in 2022. This transformation precipitated an organizational schism in 2018 when hardline factions established Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland Movement), a far-right party that secured parliamentary representation in 2022 with approximately 6% electoral support.[15]

Mi Hazánk represents the contemporary manifestation of radical right populism in Hungary, combining nativism, authoritarianism, and anti-establishment rhetoric. The party has prioritized anti-Roma sentiment, COVID-19 skepticism, and the forms of Hungarian nationalism embracing irredentism. It maintains limited transnational cooperation but preserves informal relationships with similar extreme-right movements across Europe.[15] Mi Hazánk did not win seats in the 2024 European Parliament elections and thus has no EP group affiliation.

Momentum

Momentum, a youth-centered liberal party established in 2017, has occasionally employed certain populist rhetorical devices targeting political elites, but cannot be classified as consistently populist according to established typologies.[16]

However, Momentum has been significantly impacted by the rise of Tisza, with many young voters who previously supported Momentum switching to Magyar's party in the 2024 elections.

3. Positions on 'Europe' and the populism-euroscepticism nexus

Fidesz's evolution on european integration

Fidesz's position on European integration has undergone a significant transformation over time. Prior to assuming power in 2010, the party generally maintained pro-European positions, supporting Hungary's accession and further integration. However, since 2010, Fidesz has developed an increasingly Eurosceptic stance that scholars have characterized as evolving from "soft" toward "hard" Euroscepticism.[4,17]

Since attaining power in 2010, Orbán has implemented what he has explicitly termed an "illiberal democracy," characterized by constitutional restructuring, media concentration, electoral system modifications, and systematic weakening of independent institutions.[18] These domestic transformations have generated significant tensions with EU institutions, particularly regarding rule of law concerns and democratic backsliding.[19]

Fidesz does not oppose the principle of European integration in absolute terms—indeed, Orbán continues to affirm Hungary's place within the EU. Rather, its Euroscepticism focuses primarily on the practice and future direction of EU development. Fidesz objects to perceived federalist ambitions, supranational authority expansion, and the liberal normative framework underpinning EU institutions.[13] The party's critique targets both institutional structures (the "Brussels bureaucracy" and alleged democratic deficit) and specific policy domains (particularly regarding migration, LGBTQ+ rights, and rule of law conditionality, and more recently, sanctions towards Russia and Ukraine's future in the EU).

Orbán's government has consistently framed its opposition in sovereignty-based terms, arguing that EU institutions have systematically exceeded their legitimate authority and encroached upon national competencies.[20] This sovereignty-focused Euroscepticism enables Fidesz to maintain rhetorically adversarial positions against "Brussels" while simultaneously benefiting from the material advantages of EU membership, particularly through structural and agricultural funds that constitute approximately 3–4% of Hungary's GDP.[21]

The justifications Fidesz articulates for opposing aspects of EU governance are multidimensional. Orbán frequently criticizes the EU for:

1. Cultural imperialism (imposing liberal values on traditional societies)
2. Democratic illegitimacy (decisions by unelected officials)
3. Procedural inconsistency (applying different standards to Hungary than to Western member states)
4. Economic asymmetry (structural advantages favoring Western European economies)
5. Ideological colonization (promoting multiculturalism and progressive values)
6. Warmongering (sending weapons to Ukraine)

Orbán's conceptualization of an ideal "Europe" is characterized by "strong nation-states" rather than a federal union. He has articulated this vision through his conceptual framework of "Christian democracy" or "Christian liberty," positioning it in opposition to "liberal democracy".[22] In his discourse, Europe should function as a loose confederation of sovereign nations cooperating primarily on economic matters while preserving distinct national identities, Christian heritage, and traditional social structures.[13] This vision explicitly rejects multiculturalism and what Orbán has termed "population replacement" through migration.

Mi Hazánk maintains even harder Eurosceptic positions than Fidesz, advocating for potential EU exit and opposing all forms of European integration. The party combines its far-right populism with categorical rejection of EU membership, though its limited electoral success (6%) constrains its influence on this debate. Whereas Fidesz frames its Euroscepticism in sovereigntist and civilisational terms, Mi Hazánk articulates a more outright rejectionist position, openly flirting with the idea of "Huxit" and presenting EU membership as fundamentally incompatible with the preservation of Hungarian ethnic and cultural identity.[15] Its discourse blends ethno-nationalism, anti-Roma and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, and

conspiratorial themes that recast EU institutions as instruments of liberal cosmopolitan domination, locating the party at the radical Eurorejectionist end of the Kopecký and Mudde[35] typology. Momentum, by contrast, illustrates that the populism-Euroscepticism nexus is not automatic in Hungary: although the party occasionally deploys populist rhetorical devices targeting the Fidesz elite, it has remained firmly pro-European, advocating deeper integration, eurozone accession and EU-level rule of law enforcement. Its trajectory thus represents a case of (mildly) populist, but not Eurosceptic, opposition.

Evolution in Response to Key Events.

Fidesz's Eurosceptic discourse has evolved in response to several significant political events:

Brexit: Fidesz adopted a measured response to Brexit, utilizing it as leverage in EU negotiations while avoiding suggestions of 'Huxit'.[23]

COVID-19: The pandemic provided new opportunities for Eurosceptic messaging. Orbán criticized the EU's initially slow vaccine procurement process, engaging in "vaccine diplomacy" by authorizing Russian Sputnik V and Chinese Sinopharm vaccines prior to EMA approval. The government framed this approach as demonstrating the superiority of national sovereignty over bureaucratic EU procedures.[24] Simultaneously, Fidesz accepted EU recovery funds while criticizing the conditionality mechanisms attached to their disbursement.

War in Ukraine: Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has complicated Fidesz's Eurosceptic positioning. While formally acknowledging Ukraine's sovereignty and supporting initial EU sanctions against Russia, Orbán has maintained closer diplomatic relations with Putin than other EU leaders, opposed military aid to Ukraine, and attributed energy price increases to EU sanctions policy rather than Russian aggression.[25] This position has isolated Hungary diplomatically within both the EU and among Central European neighbors, particularly Poland, severely undermining Visegrád Group cooperation.

Trump's Re-election: Orbán was the sole EU head of government to openly endorse Donald Trump during both his 2020 and 2024 presidential campaigns. Following Trump's re-election in 2024, Orbán has positioned himself as a privileged intermediary between the U.S. and the EU, suggesting that Trump's return validates Hungary's political model and will fundamentally reconfigure transatlantic relations.[26] This alignment with Trump has emboldened Fidesz's criticism of EU policies, particularly regarding Ukraine and migration.

Mi Hazánk's positioning on these events: Mi Hazánk's response to these key events has generally been more radical than that of Fidesz, but its limited parliamentary weight has restricted its impact on policy outputs. The party has used Brexit as evidence that EU exit is feasible, although it has stopped short of calling for an immediate "Huxit" referendum. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mi Hazánk distinguished itself through pronounced vaccine scepticism, opposition to EU-coordinated public health measures and conspiratorial framings of the pandemic, going considerably further than Fidesz in this respect.[15] On the war in Ukraine, the party has adopted an openly pro-Russian stance, opposing both EU sanctions and arms transfers, and rejecting Ukraine's prospective EU accession in starker terms than the government. Following Trump's re-election, Mi Hazánk has welcomed the perceived realignment of the transatlantic right and intensified its calls for renegotiating Hungary's position within the EU. Across these episodes, Mi Hazánk thus reinforces, rather than substantively shifts, the broader Eurosceptic discursive space that Fidesz dominates.

Populist framing of euroscepticism

Fidesz has consistently framed its Euroscepticism in explicitly populist terms, emphasizing the antagonistic relationship between "the people" and "elites".[20] This discursive framing operates across multiple dimensions:

1. **National vs. Supranational**: Fidesz portrays itself as defending the Hungarian people against unelected Brussels bureaucrats imposing their will on the nation.[27]

2. **Traditional vs. Progressive**: The party positions itself as protecting traditional Hungarian values against cosmopolitan liberal elites seeking to transform society.[11]

3. **Democratic vs. Technocratic**: Orbán frequently invokes the will of the Hungarian people (expressed through elections and "national consultations") against the allegedly technocratic decision-making processes of EU institutions.[20]

4. **East vs. West**: More recently, Fidesz has developed a narrative contrasting the "declining" liberal West with Hungary's "rising" traditional model, positioning Hungary at the vanguard of a broader civilizational struggle.[28]

These framings appear consistently in government campaigns like 'Stop Brussels' (2017) and anti-migration messaging linking EU policies to security threats.[27]

Specific Variant of Populism Connected to Euroscepticism.

Fidesz's Euroscepticism is particularly connected to its nativist populist radical right ideology. The party's opposition to the EU is fundamentally linked to its defense of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous conception of the Hungarian nation.[11] This nativism manifests in several dimensions:

1. Opposition to EU migration policies, portrayed as existential threats to Hungarian national identity
2. Rejection of multicultural values promoted by EU institutions
3. Defense of Hungary's Christian heritage against secular European liberalism
4. Protection of traditional family structures against LGBTQ+ rights initiatives

Fidesz's authoritarian tendencies also inform its Euroscepticism, particularly in its rejection of EU rule of law mechanisms as illegitimate interference in Hungary's domestic affairs.[19] The party's populism provides the overarching framework that connects these nativist and authoritarian elements, positioning Orbán as the authentic representative of "the real Hungary" against liberal elites both domestic and European.[29]

Non-populist euroscepticism

Non-populist expressions of Euroscepticism in Hungary are limited. However, certain policy-specific critiques of the EU occasionally emerge from economic interest groups (such as business sectors affected by EU regulations) and from environmental organizations challenging aspects of EU agricultural or energy policies. These critiques tend to be policy-specific and lack the antagonistic people-versus-elite framing.[16]

The principal non-populist political alternative to emerge from this space is the Tisza Party (Respect and Freedom Party), which rose meteorically in 2024 under the leadership of former Fidesz insider Péter Magyar following a high-profile presidential pardon scandal that triggered the resignations of President Katalin Novák and former Justice Minister Judit Varga. The party defines itself as a centre-right, anti-corruption alternative to Fidesz, joined the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament after the 2024 EP elections and has since become the principal challenger to Fidesz at the national level. While Tisza's overall stance is firmly pro-European, its profile is best understood as predominantly pro-EU but with selectively Eurosceptic, sovereigntist accents on a narrow set of issues, articulated in a non-populist register that contrasts sharply with Fidesz.

The Tisza Party represents a markedly different approach to European integration compared to Fidesz. Its admission to the EPP in 2024 was endorsed by 97% of votes in the group, signalling Tisza's reintegration of Hungarian centre-right politics into the European mainstream that Fidesz had left in 2021.

The party has demonstrated strong pro-European positions, actively participating in EPP preparations for Ukraine's potential EU membership by 2030. In a poll conducted by the party, nearly 60 percent of Tisza supporters agreed that Ukraine belongs in the European Union. Magyar has positioned his party in an East-West dichotomy where "Orbán leads Hungary towards the East while he would lead it West".[30]

However, the Tisza Party notably supports the Fidesz government's position against sending weapons or troops to support Ukraine after the Russian invasion, suggesting a more nuanced pro-European stance that maintains some alignment with Hungarian sovereignty concerns on specific security issues.

Magyar's rhetoric on the EU has become "increasingly refined" since his political emergence, moving away from early campaign language that "mirrored Orbán's, with terms like the 'Soros plan' and 'Brussels bureaucracy' flowing just as

fluently from his lips".[30] This evolution reflects the logic of political competition and his party's integration into mainstream European center-right politics.

4. Responses to euroscepticism and consequences

Mainstream party responses

The response of traditionally pro-EU parties to Fidesz's Euroscepticism has evolved over time but can generally be characterized as "adversarial" according to Meguid's[36] typology. Opposition parties—including the remnants of the Socialist Party, the liberal Democratic Coalition, green LMP and Párbeszéd, and centrist Momentum—have consistently defended European integration and criticized Fidesz's confrontational approach to Brussels. These parties emphasize EU membership's economic benefits, European values, geopolitical security, and the diplomatic damage from government Euroscepticism.

Rather than accommodating Eurosceptic positions, opposition parties have generally positioned themselves as defenders of European values against Orbán's "illiberal" model.[31] This adversarial strategy has included embracing the European Parliament's criticism of Hungary's democratic backsliding and advocating for stricter EU conditionality mechanisms. Opposition politicians frequently appeal to EU institutions to address rule of law concerns in Hungary, a strategy Fidesz presents as evidence of their "disloyalty" to national interests.[19]

However, this adversarial approach has yielded limited electoral success until 2024. The opposition's pro-European stance had failed to resonate beyond urban, educated demographic segments, while Fidesz effectively portrayed opposition parties as serving foreign interests.[32]

The emergence of the Tisza Party in 2024 fundamentally disrupted this dynamic, with Magyar's party "sucking up almost all the air from the other opposition parties" and "destroyed the entire six-party opposition with his result in the EP elections".[33]

Consequences of populist euroscepticism

The consequences of Fidesz's populist Euroscepticism have been significant both domestically and for Hungary's position within the EU. In the domestic sphere, the government's anti-Brussels rhetoric has contributed to the polarization of Hungarian society along cultural and ideological lines.[20] Political discourse has become increasingly framed in terms of sovereignty, national identity, and resistance to external influence, complicating constructive debate about European policy. Significantly, while mainstream opposition parties have consistently defended EU integration, they have occasionally adopted elements of Fidesz's sovereignty-based discourse when criticizing specific EU policies, particularly regarding economic matters. This reflects the broader normalization of sovereigntist language in Hungarian political discourse.[34]

In practical terms, Fidesz's Euroscepticism has precipitated numerous conflicts with EU institutions:

1. Article 7 proceedings against Hungary for systematic threats to EU values
2. Multiple infringement procedures on issues ranging from media freedom to migration policy
3. Implementation of the rule of law conditionality mechanism triggering the suspension of significant EU funds
4. Recurring confrontations with the European Parliament and Commission

However, Fidesz's Euroscepticism reflects genuine ideological conviction rather than mere political opportunism. While the party instrumentalizes EU conflicts for domestic political advantage, its opposition to aspects of European integration reflects coherent ideological commitments.[13] Orbán's vision of "illiberal democracy" and his emphasis on national sovereignty in cultural domains represent a systematic, if controversial, alternative to the liberal, integration-oriented model of European development.[29]

The consequences for EU politics have also been substantial. Hungary has repeatedly obstructed or diluted EU statements and policies, particularly regarding Russia, China, and rule of law issues. Orbán has strategically positioned Hungary as the leader of an alternative vision of Europe, seeking to construct alliances with other populist forces.[11] While these efforts have yielded limited concrete results thus far, they represent a significant challenge to the EU's capacity to develop coherent common positions on key policy issues.

The rise of Tisza has introduced new dynamics into Hungarian politics, with opinion polls from late 2024 showing the party overtaking Fidesz in voter support for the first time since 2010. This shift in voter preferences was confirmed in dramatic fashion at the parliamentary elections of 12 April 2026, the highest-turnout election in Hungary since the democratic transition. Tisza secured a landslide victory with roughly 57% of the vote and 141 of the 199 seats in the National Assembly, surpassing the two-thirds threshold required to amend the Fundamental Law and ending sixteen consecutive years of Fidesz–KDNP rule. Orbán conceded defeat and announced that Fidesz would serve as the parliamentary opposition. Beyond Tisza and Fidesz, only the far-right Mi Hazánk crossed the electoral threshold, while the remaining opposition parties effectively dissolved or stood down in the run-up to the vote. The result has been widely interpreted as a referendum on Hungary's European trajectory and as a watershed moment for the EU's "problem child", with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen welcoming Tisza's victory as a turn back towards Europe.

5. Conclusion

Hungary represents a distinctive case in the comparative study of populism and Euroscepticism, characterized by the institutional dominance of a populist radical right government that has maintained power for over a decade while consistently advancing an increasingly hard Eurosceptic position. Unlike in many European countries where populist Eurosceptic parties operate primarily from opposition, Fidesz has been able to implement its vision from government, fundamentally reconfiguring Hungary's relationship with the EU.[19]

The Hungarian case illustrates how populism and Euroscepticism can be successfully integrated in a comprehensive political project that maintains electoral support even while generating significant international friction. Fidesz has effectively nationalized European issues, framing EU conflicts as a defense of Hungarian sovereignty rather than categorical rejection of European integration.[13] This "sovereignty-focused" Euroscepticism allows Fidesz to maintain domestic popularity while extracting economic benefits from EU membership.

Finally, Hungary exemplifies how the populism-Euroscepticism nexus operates differently in Central and Eastern European contexts compared to Western Europe. The historical legacies of socialism, the specific economic and political dynamics of post-socialist transition, and the particular form of transnational identity politics practiced by Fidesz all contribute to a distinctive variety of populist Euroscepticism that merits further comparative analysis. Tisza's landslide victory in the parliamentary elections of 12 April 2026, which ended sixteen years of Orbán's rule and delivered a two-thirds supermajority to a centre-right, pro-European challenger, marks the close of this particular configuration of populist Euroscepticism in government. Whether the populism–Euroscepticism nexus will be durably weakened, or merely displaced into new forms of opposition, will depend both on the new government's capacity to repair the relationship with Brussels and on Fidesz's ability to reinvent itself as an opposition force. Either way, the Hungarian case will remain a key reference point for the comparative study of how populist Eurosceptic projects rise, govern and ultimately end.

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Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required. This study did not involve human participants, human data, identifiable personal data, animal research, or any other materials that would require ethical review or informed consent. The report is based exclusively on publicly available secondary sources.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article. This country report is a qualitative, narrative review of the existing scholarly and grey literature on populism and Euroscepticism in Hungary, together with publicly available political documents, party programmes and election results. All sources used are cited in the reference list and are accessible through the publishers, the institutions, or the public domain. No new datasets were generated or analysed.

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Edit Zgut-Przybylska
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences (IFIS PAN), Warsaw, Poland

This well-written, timely and interesting country report provides an up-to-date comparative analysis of Hungarian political parties in the context of the populism–Euroscepticism nexus, following the emergence of the Tisza Party. The strength of the report lies in its broad coverage of the evolution of Fidesz's Euroscepticism alongside the positions of Jobbik/Mi Hazánk, Momentum and Tisza, including major crises and developments, including Brexit, COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the second presidency of Donald Trump. The article brings together these developments and evidence from the existing academic and policy literature in an accessible way. I recommend to approve this report with the following revisions, which I believe would strengthen the project's research output:

1. *Public opinion and EU integration. The opening argument that the elite-level Euroscepticism "has not been mirrored by Hungarian public opinion", should be reconsidered. Support for EU membership is not equivalent to support for further European integration as the 2003 accession referendum demonstrated support for membership but did not establish contemporary attitudes toward the direction or future of European integration. The report should consider recent European Social Survey evidence (from 2022), including the item asking respondents whether European unification has already gone too far or should go further, as well as clarifying the distinction between support for EU membership and support for further integration. (This is where the Hungarian respondents mirrored more concerns about the overarching goal of an "ever closer integration).*
2. *Classifications of Hungarian parties.*
    1. *The classification of Momentum as a party that has "occasionally employed certain populist rhetorical devices" requires stronger empirical justification. Anti-government and/or anti-corruption rhetoric alone does not qualify populism according to Mudde's ideational definition. The report should provide concrete examples demonstrating a people-elite antagonism and/or cite literature that explicitly classifies Momentum as a populist party.*
    2. *Following that logic, it is not entirely clear why Tisza was classified as "non-populist" by the same report.*
3. *Conceptual clarifications*
    1. *The application of Meguid's framework needs further conceptual justification. It concerns mainstream parties' strategic responses to niche parties, while Fidesz is treated by the report*

as a dominant governing/populist radical-right party instead of a niche party. The report should better explain why this framework fits the Hungarian case study and clarify which parties are considered "mainstream."

2. *Terminology concerning the populism-Euroscepticism nexus. The terminology should be clarified and used consistently. The expression "Eurosceptic populism," used in the literature cited by the report, may be preferable when referring specifically to the combination of populist people–elite antagonism and Eurosceptic positions.*
3. *Conceptual overstretch. The report should also use "Euroreject" and "hard Eurosceptic" as interchangeable concepts, since these are derived from different typologies. I recommend the same clarification for the characterization of Fidesz.*

4. *Claims about ideological motivation. The argument that Fidesz's Euroscepticism reflects "genuine ideological conviction rather than mere political opportunism" is not supported by enough empirical evidence. A much more defensible argument would be that Fidesz's positions display considerable ideological consistency while also serving certain domestic political and strategic functions.*
5. *Reference 26 does not exist in its current form. "Zgut E: Trump's victory and its implications for EU-Hungary relations. Hungarian Spectrum. 2024; 5(1): 28–36." The authors should verify this reference and replace it with the original source on which the relevant claim is based.*

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: democracy, populism, Euroscepticism, informality, democratic innovations

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 22 September 2026

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Digdem Soyaltin Colella
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This report explores how populism and Euroscepticism have become increasingly intertwined in a country (Hungary) that used to be a "poster child," alongside Poland, for European transformation (and Europeanization) in the early 2000s.

The report is well written and presents evidence for how the Orbán government framed European issues in a populist way to appeal to national pride and sovereignty and mobilize (even pro-EU) votes over the years.

More could be said about the other factors that sustain the populist resilience of the Orbán government (even among a pro-European society), such as media capture, patronage networks, and authoritarian policies that weakened checks and balances and judicial independence, promoting the populist policies of the government[1,2,3]. I would recommend that the author consider expanding the report to include such factors in the analysis.

This can also help the author to better engage with the existing literature, especially regarding the items listed for Orbán's EU critique. Giving one example for each item could also help the reader understand how populism was connected to Euroscepticism in everyday politics in Hungary. For the war in Ukraine, there is a growing number of studies that could be cited in the report. [4]

Apart from that, a few concepts could be more clearly defined for the reader, such as the illiberal model (inspired by China, Turkey, and Russia) that Orbán sought to follow. It could also be underlined that Hungary's turn away from Western policy also relates to a broader trend of authoritarianism in global politics contesting liberal values, but as an EU member state, Hungary's case additionally challenges the EU's legitimacy from within.[5]

In terms of consequences, the party politics in the EP could be discussed further. Due to rule-of-law disputes, Fidesz was suspended from the EPP, which even resulted in a change to the expulsion rules; Orbán subsequently withdrew Fidesz MEPs. Later, in 2024, Orbán and his far-right Fidesz party formed a new political alliance, Patriots for Europe, with Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Czech ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens). The point is that although Orbán was defeated in the national elections, right-wing populism is very much alive in the EP, becoming louder in its populist rhetoric and anti-EU sentiment, and changing the power balance in the EP. Even the EPP joins the right and far-right groups (ECR, PfE, and ESN) — the so-called "Venezuela majority" [6]— to block certain policies in the EU, such as the EU Deforestation Regulation and the 2025 working group on EU funding of NGOs. This point could be underlined as a consequence for EU politics. This discussion may refer back to soft and hard Euroscepticism, which the report mentions but does not explain thoroughly. [7]

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Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Corruption, regime survival, propaganda and framing analysis, EU politics and good governance, Turkey and South East European politics

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of

expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.