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REDUCING THE EU DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT: A CONDITION FOR SUCCESSFUL CONTINUATION OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Tomáš Žipaj¹

ABSTRACT

The European integration process has recently shown many signs of significant stagnation. Over the past 15 years, there have been no significant changes or reforms in terms of the European Union (EU) primary law. The democratic deficit has been considered as a major challenge, as it is affecting the spreading of negative opinion about the EU and its relevance among the inhabitants of the member states. This article deals with the issue of the EU democratic deficit, arguing that reducing of this democratic deficit can be one of crucial conditions for the successful continuation of the European integration process. To achieve the main aim, a combination of study analyses, public opinion data, and past or ongoing discussions related to this topic was used. The results indicate that such a high degree of democratic deficit within the boarder framework of the EU may play a key role in shaping the European integration process. It contributes to the rise of anti-EU tendencies, a decline in trust towards the EU and its institutions, as well as increased tension among all main integration actors. Therefore, the supranational level should undertake necessary steps and implement reforms aiming at reducing the EU democratic deficit.

Keywords: European Union, democratic deficit, European integration, supranational institutions, integration challenges

INTRODUCTION

The European Union represents a unique supranational organization, often cited as an example of the most successful regional integration. However, even this story of successful integration encountered several obstacles in recent times. Since the failure of the adoption of the EU Constitution and the subsequent

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ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU has been stuck at a deadlock. Stagnation and lack of will to implement most necessary reforms, appear to be among the causes of the weakening of integration development.

One of the problems associated with the current stagnation and the formation of negative opinion about the EU, is the existence of a considerably high degree of democratic deficit. This democratic deficit significantly weakens public support for the EU and its institutions. Moreover, the sense of belonging to the 'European family' is also eroded, as activities at the supranational level often seem distant and disconnected from the needs of member state inhabitants. The EU is also facing challenges with potential future enlargement, which could lead to even more significant deepening of the democratic deficit.

The primary aim of this article is to examine the democratic deficit within the European Union, assessing its impact on the integration process, and to present some potential reforms that could help bridge the gap between EU institutions and its citizens. This article employs a qualitative approach, analyzing both primary and secondary sources, as well public opinion data such as Eurobarometer surveys, along with past or ongoing discussions related to this topic. This combination of analysis and consolidation of the mentioned elements serves to evaluate the existence and implications of the EU democratic deficit and possible ways of its reducing.

This article is based on the scientific assumption that reducing the democratic deficit within the EU should lead to greater public trust and enhanced support for European integration. To explore this scientific assumption, it is necessary to address the following questions:

1. *Is the high degree of democratic deficit one of key elements influencing the future trajectory of European integration?*
2. *What reforms can reduce the democratic deficit to enhance public trust and better support for the European integration process?*

The first chapter defines the term 'democratic deficit' and how this phenomenon manifests within the framework of European integration. The

second section explores the risks associated with the existence of high degree of democratic deficit in the EU, particularly its connection to the level of public trust and rise of anti-EU tendencies. The final part presents possible solutions and recommendations for reducing the EU democratic deficit, focusing on those that are realistic under current conditions.

1 DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In the framework of political science, the term 'democratic deficit' refers to the situations, where political institutions or organizations exhibit undemocratic features in their functioning (Rittberger, 2024). Furthermore, the term can be also applied in cases, where there is insufficient development of basic democratic principles. Similarly, it can be used to describe the democratic functioning of institutions when they are compared with fundamental democratic values, such as transparency, responsibility, and decision-making processes (Letki, 2024). In its latest interpretation, the democratic deficit is associated with the degree of influence that the domestic population is able to hold in shaping of political direction. This includes the possibilities of effective citizen participation, the extent to which their demands are reflected, also the level of trust towards the institutional environment (Warren, 2009, pp. 17-40).

A 'modern' interpretation of democratic deficits stems from five main criteria, which serve as a guideline for analyzing the level of democratic deficit within various polities:

1. to what extent people understand themselves as authors of the laws passed by their representatives;
2. to what extent are people able to exercise public control of public institutions;
3. to what extent are voices of all people equal – in democratic environment the principle one person-one voice is used;
4. to what extent are addressed the needs of people whose voices were 'overruled' and not have their representatives in government;

5. to what extent is able the polity enacts binding acts for all its inhabitants and have power to enforce their compliance (Lord, 2018, pp. 316-340).

The occurrence of the democratic deficit is frequently discussed in association with the EU integration area. However, when we are talking about the democratic deficit and its connection with the EU, it is necessary to contextualize it beyond the traditional political definitions. In the discourse about the democratic deficit, the EU cannot be considered as an undemocratic entity that operates against the basic democratic principles. The fundamental elements of the EU functioning are based on the promotion of basic democratic values, the existence of the rule of law, as well as the observance of human rights (Aims and Values...). Within the context of the European integration, the democratic deficit has its basis in the complicated relationship between the supranational level and the level of the member states.

The discourse surrounding European Union governance often centers on the tension between concepts of intergovernmentalism and institutionalism. Intergovernmentalism emphasizes the role of sovereign member state as the primary actor in the integration process, advocating for a higher level of national autonomy. In contrast, institutionalism promotes stronger supranational bodies and highlights the need for cohesive, more centralized decision-making to enhance efficiency and foster unity of the EU (Diez, Wiener, 2018, p. 32). The ongoing debate between these two paradigms shapes policy discussions, influencing the balance of power within the EU and determining addressing of complex issues. This tension significantly impacts the democratic deficit, as intergovernmentalism can lead to perceptions of limited transparency and public involvement, while institutionalism may be viewed as overreaching and disconnected from national interests of member states (Brack, Coman, Crepsy, 2019).

In the context of the EU, the democratic deficit can be understood among three main lines. The first line is based on the lack of transparency in decision-

making processes and rather complicated institutional arrangement. Complex decision-making mechanisms introduce opacity into political processes, which is perceived negatively by the general public (Ondarza, 2023). This issue also arises from the differences in the institutional structure, as it does not copy the classical distribution of power at the state level. The different institutional network causes some troubles with the identification of political responsibility, for specific measures among residents of member states (Kelbel, Navarro, Neihouser, 2020). Consequently, this situation results in a lack of interest in European affairs, as many citizens struggle to navigate within models of European governance.

The second line of existence of high democratic deficit within the EU, is based on the perception that despite the citizens of the member states can directly participate in the composition of the EU Parliament, its position in the institutional framework remains weak. The functioning of the Parliament is largely dependent on other EU institutional parts, especially the Commission and the Council of the EU. Within the 'legislative' or 'power' triangle, the Parliament holds the weakest position among participating institutions, resulting in a lack of autonomy (Kelbel, Navarro, Neihouser, 2020). The increase of the democratic deficit also stems from the fact, that the MEPs are elected to political groups (factions), rather as representing their 'home' member state (Members, bodies and activities...).

The third line characterizing the democratic deficit of the EU, is related to public perceptions that the EU, as an organization, is not defending the interests of its member states. In this model, citizens view the EU as an organization detached from reality, not reflecting the needs of its members (Peak, 2023). The origin of the myth about the of the 'Brussels bubble' exacerbates the democratic deficit, persisting since the establishment of the EU. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing sense among the residents of the member states that their opinions regarding the direction of European policies are not adequately reflected. This myth stems from the theory that all important decisions are made

only within one power center, located in Brussels (Hooghe, Marks, 2001). In this context, the supranational level is perceived as disconnected from the intergovernmental one, lacking deeper cooperation.


2 CHALLENGES AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

The existence of a high degree of democratic deficit brings with it several challenges and risks, which subsequently impact the functioning of the EU. The complexity of the decision-making mechanisms and the lack of transparency of the institutional structure contribute to growing sense of mistrust towards the EU and its institutions. The lowest degree of democratic deficit is observed at the municipality level. This is caused by the fact that representatives at the local level are perceived to be closer to inhabitants and often decide on matters related to everyday life. Conversely, the higher the representative level, the greater the democratic deficit is. The increase of the democratic deficit is evident at the level of regions and at the national level, due to larger representative units being involved. This is the reason why there is such a significant sense of democratic deficit at the EU level, as many citizens of the member states consider the EU structures to be too detached (Hooghe, Marks, 2001).

The EU institutional framework is perceived by the citizens of the member states as something beyond their control, which automatically creates a sense of mistrust. Surveys conducted by the Eurobarometer have captured a trend of a significant decrease in trust in EU institutions since 2007, and what is more important, this trend persists. In the current period, the overall trust in EU institutions has been below 50%, which greatly hinders the building of a positive image of the EU among the residents of the member states (Standard Eurobarometer 97..., 2022).

QA6a.11 How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?

The European Union (%)

	Tend to trust		Tend not to trust		Don't know
	Sum.2022	Diff. Sum.2022 - Win.21/22	Sum.2022	Diff. Sum.2022 - Win.21/22	
	EU27 	49	2	43	
EURO AREA	46	7	45	0	9
NON-EURO AREA	57	5	36	-4	7

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 97 - Summer 2022, p. 73

The presence of a high degree of the EU democratic deficit is also closely linked to the rise of the anti-EU tendencies, such as Euroscepticism, populism and right-wing extremism. The Eurosceptic movement questions or opposes the process of European integration and other basic elements of the EU, its policies, basic principles, or institutions. Euroscepticism is mostly driven by concerns about national sovereignty, democratic accountability, cultural identity, and the perceived centralization of power within EU institutions (Torreblanca, 2013).

Currently, we are witnessing a significant rise of political representatives with Eurosceptic tendencies across all member states. In 2008, the preferences of Eurosceptic parties in national parliaments were around 13%. In 2022, preferences of Eurosceptic parties had risen to 22%. It is not just an increase of favor of the soft type of Euroscepticism, characterized by criticism of the EU, but the representatives of this line are in favor of continued membership. The most critical seems to be the rise of hard Euroscepticism, as proponents of this line are actively advocating for withdrawal from the EU and its complete disintegration (The development trap..., 2023). The presence of a high degree of democratic

deficit benefits representatives of the Eurosceptic trend. Through their rhetoric, they often question the legitimacy and credibility of the EU, arguing that the EU does not serve its citizens, lacks democracy, and prioritizes its own interests, without allowing meaningful influence to change this situation. They also emphasize the undemocratic nature of the EU by pointing out the fact that citizens do not have any kind of control, and the supranational level is detached from 'ordinary life' (Brack, Startin, 2015, pp. 239-249).

Alongside the increase in Euroscepticism, we are also witnessing the rise of populism and right-wing extremism. Political parties with anti-EU tendencies often use external threats as a central part of their rhetoric to reinforce their positions and garner public support. These threats often include the topic of migration. By highlighting this kind of issue, such parties blame the EU as being unable or unwilling to adequately protect national interests and sovereignty. This strategy aims to amplify public fears and skepticism about the EU's capacity to ensure stability, cultural identity, and security. In doing so, anti-EU parties often emphasize themes of nationalism, advocating for tighter national control over policy areas that they argue the EU has mismanaged (Hynčica, Maškarinec, Novotny, 2016, p. 216). In cases like that, the democratic deficit is used as a justification for these claims, suggesting that the lack of direct citizen control contributes to poor policy responses and incapacity to deal with these issues.

Politicians with Eurosceptic, populist, and radical tendencies are more frequently gaining executive functions, which often hinders the necessary development of the EU. At the level of the European Council and the Council of the EU, there is growing lack capacity for action, as the adoption of decisions takes a relatively long time. This situation creates tension at the supranational level and limit the ability to act effectively and flexibly (Rohrschneider, Whitefield, 2016). The increasing heterogeneity of attitudes across the spectrum of member states complicates the intergovernmental negotiations, which puts the entire integration process into a 'trap'. This issues mainly affect the areas that require decision-making through unanimity or consensus. The primary reason

for this is that the dissenting opinion of even one member state representative is enough to block the adoption of the most important decisions (Žipaj, 2021, pp. 198-206). On the other hand, decisions made through the QMV are often presented by these representatives as undemocratic. If their member state has not provided an approval, these decisions tend to be presented as undemocratic, forced, and against the interests of their member state (Žipaj, 2023, pp. 55-64).

The internal instability stemming from the existence of a high degree of democratic deficit, is also affecting the external position of the EU, as the chain of democratic legitimacy is weakened. Mistrust towards the EU and its institutions, along with the rise of anti-EU tendencies, such as Euroscepticism, populism, and right-wing extremism, fosters increase of mistrust among integration actors. The perception of processes as undemocratic, imposed, and not reflecting the requirements of the participating actors, leads to an increased sense of mistrust between fundamental elements of European integration. This mistrust not only contributes to the weakening of the integration processes internally, but also to weakening of the EU external influence (Latici, 2021). Consequently, not only is the future continuation of integration processes at risk, but also the EU geopolitical position, as the EU is significantly losing its ground compared to other powerful state actors.

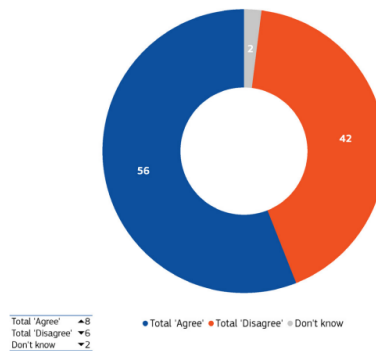
3 POSSIBILITIES OF REDUCING THE EU DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

If we want to discuss the possibilities of reducing the democratic deficit, it is necessary to consider various possibilities for achieving this goal. Of course, this discussion must be grounded in realistic foundations, aligning in line with the intentions of potential changes without disturbing the fundamental principles of the EU functioning. Likewise, our focus should primarily be on options that are already under discussion, with the possibility of achieving 'more democratic' functioning of the EU.

The first, and probably the most favored option for reducing the democratic deficit within the EU, involves potential extension of the powers of the EU

Parliament. This proposition is based on the presented thesis that, despite being the only directly elected supranational institution, the institutional position of the Parliament is weaker compared to other institutional bodies. Notably, the Parliament lacks the power of legislative initiative, also remains highly dependent on the decisions made by the Commission and the Council of the EU. This lack of institutional autonomy results in situations where, although EU citizens can choose the composition of the Parliament, MEPs have very limited over European affairs. Strengthening the Parliament's institutional position would contribute to reducing the democratic deficit, by fostering a greater sense of influence in shaping the direction of the EU (Csernaton, Latici, 2020). Another argument supporting this proposition, is the fact that the EU Parliament has long been regarded as the most reliable EU institution, according to the polls. Higher trust in the Parliament arises from the perception among the EU citizens that Parliament is the only institution over which they might have direct influence. Over time, the Parliament has not emerged as the most trusted institution just within the EU, but the European Parliament constantly enjoyed a higher degree of trust compared to the national parliaments of the member states (EU Post-electoral survey...).

D72.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
 -My voice counts in the EU (EU27) (%)



Source: EU Post-electoral survey 2024, p. 57

In the special edition of the Eurobarometer called 'Post-electoral survey', conducted after the elections to the European Parliament in June 2024, more than half of respondents agree that their voice in the EU counts. This finding could serve as another argument for strengthening the position of the European Parliament, as citizens of member states could gain a stronger sense that their needs could be reflected through a directly shaped international body.

Strengthening the competence framework of the European Parliament was also among the recommendations resulting from 'The Conference of the Future of Europe'. The conference's conclusions stated that enhancing the position of the European Parliament would promote overall democratization as well as the bond between the EU and its citizens (Plottka, Müller, 2020). Reforms aimed at strengthening the institutional position of Parliament could include granting it legislative initiative or expand the areas where MEP's could have full co-decision powers, what may be seen as more realistic option (Parliament 2024..., 2024). Another potential reform could involve strengthening Parliament's role when it comes to procedures dedicated to revision of the fundamental Treaties. There are also calls to give the MEP's greater competences within fiscal policy, as the European Parliament, being a directly elected supranational body, should have direct influence over distribution of Union resources (Gozi, 2021). Naturally, making shifts within the competency framework of EU Parliament requires a change to the EU primary law. Therefore, in any potential revision of the founding Treaties, it will be necessary to consider this possibility and to enhance the position of Parliament.

In the context of increasing direct influence on the direction of the EU, which is also associated with the potential reduction of the democratic deficit, there have been discussions regarding the direct election of the members of the European Commission, or at least its president. These discussions supported the idea that citizens of the member states should have the opportunity to directly elect a commissioner for their member state. This approach would enable the citizens to influence not only the composition of the Parliament but also to shape

the composition of the executive branch, in the form of the Commission (Decker, Sonnicksen, 2011, pp. 168-191). The idea of a direct election of the President of the Commission moved closer to reality with the discussion about the concept of the 'Spitzencandidates'. Specifically on this topic, a survey was conducted in 2022 across eight member states (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Poland, the Netherlands, Italy), regarding whether the President of the Commission should be directly elected. According to the survey, up to 64% of participants expressed support for the possibility of directly electing the 'head' of the European Commission (Gijs, 2022).

As with the European Parliament, potential changes within the Commission that have been suggested cannot be implemented without amending primary EU law. Matters concerning the composition of the Commission are outlined in Article 17 of TEU. Currently, the European Council proposes the candidate for the President of the European Commission. This provision would have to be changed if the head of the Commission possibly will be elected directly by the citizens of the member states. The same article would also have to be amended to allow directly elect the commissioners, as they are currently appointed by the political leadership at the level of the member states (Consolidated version of..., 2016).

Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of subsidiarity presents another opportunity, how to contribute to the reduction of the democratic deficit. The principle of subsidiarity aims to ensure that decisions should be made at the closest possible level to the citizens of member states. Subsidiarity is also intended to ensure better control of measures taken at the EU level, specifically by the national, regional, or local authorities. Subsidiarity should also guarantee the principle of proportionality, which should ensure that the EU undertakes measures only if they are necessary to achieve its objectives (Principle of Subsidiarity...). In this area, more intensive debates began in 2017, when the working group for subsidiarity and proportionality proposed two fundamental measures:

1. to identify specific areas that could be re-delegated to the level of member states;
2. to identify ways for better involvement of regional and local authorities, as a part of the creation and implementation of EU policies.

The transfer of certain areas back to the member states and the greater involvement of regional structures could significantly contribute to the reduction of the democratic deficit (Task force on...). However, since then, there have been no significant shifts in the reconceptualization of competences, nor significant involvement of regions in the creation of EU policies. This lack of progress contributes once again to the current stagnation of the whole integration process.

The long-term quest for a compromise between supporters of institutionalism and proponents of intergovernmentalism is also closely related to the principle of subsidiarity. Institutionalists advocate for a stronger position of the supranational level, while intergovernmentalists demand a stronger position of the nation-state within the integration process. One proposed solution is the more precise realization of 'soft' interactions between both levels. It is the harmonization of needs of both fundamental levels of integration that could lead to the support of interests, satisfying both sides to a similar extent (Žipaj, 2023, p. 128).

The last realistic contribution to the reduction of the democratic deficit appears to be the improvement of education for citizens of the member states. Through education, it is important to clarify the importance of the EU, explain its functioning, also highlight accomplishments that have been achieved as a part of this successful project. Particularly, the attention should be directed towards the member states that joined the EU in the 21st century. It is important to focus on educating the middle and older generations, who may not fully realize the benefits of the EU (Meet us...). As part of efforts to improve the communication between the EU and citizens of the member states, *Europe Direct (ED)* centers are being established across all member states. Currently, there are

approximately 420 of ED contact points in operation. However, a big issue is that they are not distributed proportionally across the member states (Europe Direct Centres...). Additionally, if we divide the number of ED by the number of EU citizens, there is less than one contact point per million citizens. Expanding the network of ED contact points could also contribute to a better understanding of the EU and increase the trust in its functioning and supranational institutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the level of democratic deficit may play a crucial role in shaping the future direction of European integration. The existence of such a significant democratic deficit within the EU is causing problems related to the sense of belonging to the 'European family'. A high degree of democratic deficit is also causing that many citizens don't realize the benefits of this successful project of regional integration. Mistrust and negative attitudes toward the EU also significantly contribute to the rise of anti-EU tendencies, such as Euroscepticism, populism, and right-wing extremism.

Reducing of the EU democratic deficit seem to be very important element for the development of the integration process, as it could contribute to:

- Increasing trust towards supranational level and EU institutions – this can be achieved through better education about decision-making processes and higher engagement of citizens in shaping the integration process.
- Decreasing of anti-EU tendencies – decline of Euroscepticism, populism, right-wing extremism could occur, as EU citizens feel that demands and requirement of member states are being reflected by the supranational level.
- Increasing participation in elections to the European Parliament – by transferring more powers to the EU Parliament, election turnout could be higher, as citizens will have a greater sense of influence over EU matters.

- Strengthening the chain of democratic legitimacy – by increase of trust among all integration actors, tension can be reduced, and the compromises about reaching a common position can be achieved more easily.

Therefore, reducing of the democratic deficit can be considered as one of the essential requirements for further development of European integration processes. Without possible reducing of the EU democratic deficit, it will be very difficult for the EU to overcome the challenges it faces, which will once again lead to significant stagnation in the development of integration process. This unique kind of democratic deficit, which has emerged only in the context of the EU, seems to be responsible for creating barriers that hinder the supranational level from fully developing its potential. Representatives of both main integration levels should take this into consideration and try to reach a common position. The outcomes of these interactions should aim to reduce democratic deficit and promote sense of trust between EU and its citizens across entire integration area.

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THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL CHARACTER IN UNDERSTANDING HUNGARY'S POLITICAL HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

The study of Hungary's complex political history yields valuable lessons for understanding the background of the country's current regime hallmarked by its prime minister Viktor Orbán. This article aims to uncover why some aspects of this previously examined political heritage could not be adequately explained and what tools could be utilised to rectify this shortcoming. The examination of deeply running particularities of a country's political workings is needed, something that is not a new challenge nor a revolutionary approach: The research of national character, a now rather overlooked area of social sciences holds the answers to the more complex questions presented by the historical approach, but this method itself isn't straight forward in drawing conclusions either. This article therefore aims to also understand the ways in which national character studies can be used to a proper scientific standard besides hypothesising how that might help in uncovering deeply rooted peculiarities in Hungarian political behaviour. For this a partial overview and processing of theoretical works on national character is necessary. The results show that there is indeed a raison d'être for the concept of national character and although very difficult to properly grasp, attempts to formulate a coherent picture for a nation's collective mindset are not in vain. This paper therefore not only stands by the concept's existence but also argues for its probable benefit for political science through the example of the continuing research on patterns of Hungarian political history. The main issue found persistent with the concept however is the insurance of proper scientific standards, a problem that needs to be overcome in order to legitimise the usage of national character studies in this day and age.

Keywords: national character, political behaviour, political heritage, collective psychology, theoretical political science

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INTRODUCTION

Hungary's political system is as often discussed in the media as it is examined in political science. Articles that aim to not only understand how it works but also to uncover the reason for this peculiar regime's existence aren't uncommon either, but most of them, be it from the pen of a domestic analyst or a foreign observer, limit their scope to the three and a half decades of the post-socialist era. My research so far has aimed to transcend this limitation and examine Hungary's political history as a whole, from the genesis of popular representation in 1848 to the present, spanning over multiple wars, revolutions, dictatorships, countless system changes and crises that all challenged the way in which Hungary's elite and wider society behave and how its institutions work. And yet, a surprising static nature presented itself along with the questions that come with it: Why is it that Hungary shows certain innate patterns in its political machinations despite turning points in time that amounted to near total catastrophe? In my master's thesis (Kiss, 2023) I have formulated a theory pertaining to this phenomenon, linking several aspects of Hungarian political history together as forming mechanisms that hinder progress, that is to say, that restrain the very opportunity of overcoming themselves.

Not all identified patterns of Hungarian political history could be explained in full, however. Two constants, that of nationalistic politics and that of the need for an authoritarian figure in charge (Kiss, 2023, p. 75) were left unlinked to mechanisms that would logically promote their reoccurrence in all systems where Hungary is free from external occupation and allow enough time for political consolidation. This means, for example, that the dominant party system, where the governing party (in the present case, Fidesz) has more mandates in parliament than the fragmented opposition combined can be interpreted through the ever present anti-innovative mechanisms of Hungarian political history. The fact that this party must conform to the people's need for nationalism and has to produce a strongman leader again and again however is not as self-evident as its emergence to political power.

Evidently, these two attributes need greater attention. Not only would this work fill gaps in the forming of a coherent theory pertaining to Hungarian political development: Uncovering if Hungarian voters truly require a nationalistic approach to politics and an authoritarian leader could for example explain whether the remarkably divergent behaviour of Viktor Orbán in international politics is more the product of his personal ambitions or a true representation of the Hungarian nation's wishes too. The relevance of this research therefore, in my opinion, cannot be denied.

How can we go about finding an explanation for these two traits then? We must first establish the issue in the theoretical plain. Although the background of these characteristics has not yet been properly explained, their mere denotation as recurring patterns in Hungarian political history shows that there must be underlying attributes of the country's elite's and wider society's political behaviour that cannot be results of contemporary circumstances. This means that nationalism and a need for an authoritarian leader are characteristics pertaining to something deeper than the people's immediate responses to certain events or challenges. In order to establish whether this hypothesis could be true, and this recurrence should not be dismissed as a series of mere coincidences, we need to take a stance in the debate around the existence of national character: Do nations indeed have specific attributes that influence the way in which they will behave in a political sense? Could these attributes be in so way innate that we can differentiate certain groups of people (nations) from one another based on whether these specificities are present in them or not? Besides finding out if national character is a viable concept for scientific research, the secondary aim of this writing is to establish how we could apply this concept in regard to the research of Hungarian political development.

The questions we set out to answer are: What is national character? Is national character a concept worthy of scientific attention? Can national character be researched and how? Can this research be applied in the case of Hungary? As outlined above, finding the answers to these questions could guide

us to valuable conclusions for understanding Orbán's regime, but in a broader sense, they also enable political science to diversify its toolbox in the research of political behaviour. This might not seem as crucial to a non-Hungarian observer but considering the country's own scientific sphere's attitudes toward just the application of a historical approach in the discipline, it might be of enormous importance.

First, we shall have to clear up some definitions. So far, I have mentioned elites and society as a whole, but to refer to these both in the context of Hungary's case, we need to clarify the concept of a nation, even if that might seem redundant at a first glance. Afterwards, a review of the literature on national character can follow with qualitative methodology. Finally, we use comparative methods to see whether this concept is adequate for analysing already existing descriptions on Hungarian characteristics. The verification of these descriptions however remains a task for a later article. The scope of this paper is only to establish the legitimacy of the concept at hand.

Regarding the already existing literature, it is quite unfortunate, but Hungarian authors have not delved this far into the research of the theoretical aspects of political science. Save for a small following of Ervin Csizmadia, not even the utilisation of history for the benefit of political science has been accepted in the domestic field. His works have already outlined the vast potential of the approach (Csizmadia, 2017), although, in all fairness, this task set out is still quite new and outside of the domestic scientific mainstream. I personally have taken upon myself to promote this way of thinking and produce such writings in hopes of strengthening this view into a definable subdiscipline in Hungarian political science. Within this *történeti politológia* (lit. historical political science) the research on national character or *néplélek* (lit. spirit of people, no exact translation exists in English) can be viewed as an especially difficult topic to discuss. So far, even Csizmadia has neglected delving into finding out the possibilities of its employment for the research discussed above on the basis that although there does exist rather vast literature on Hungarian political nature or

character, these descriptions are “hardly verifiable scientifically although we feel them containing truth in their core” (Csizmadia, Lakatos, Novák, Paár, Rajnai, 2021, p. 217).

We must remember that although the research of national character is practically non-existent in Hungary, it used to be a rather popular subdiscipline within multiple branches of social sciences worldwide in the 19th and 20th centuries. This paper therefore has evidently more practical benefits for the Hungarian reader but can also highlight deficiencies of neighbouring countries’ scientific spheres, though this for now I shall only presume. This isn’t to say that a Western reader could not find use in this paper’s conclusions at all, only the focus changes: Instead of finding a novel interpretation of national character, we also uncover the potential use of this concept for understanding contemporary Hungarian politics: Something as relevant as ever, especially considering the prominent role Viktor Orbán tries to occupy in the international political sphere.

Before drawing conclusions, we need to approach the problem of national character in understanding Hungary’s political history from quite far: First by clearing up the definition of nation and nationalism, then the concept of national character and finally, finding the connection points between this concept and the two characteristics or patterns of Hungarian political history mentioned above.

1 DEFINING NATIONAL CHARACTER

1.1 The concepts of nation and nationalism

In order to approach the concept of national character we must first firmly establish what we exactly mean by nation. Lowell W. Barrington points out that this key concept along with nationalism is surprisingly often misused (Barrington, 1997). Accepting his reasoning in differentiating the concept of nation from that of an ethnicity or a state, we shall henceforth define it as follows: A nation is a collective of people united by shared cultural features (myths, values, etc.) and the belief in the right to territorial self-determination (Barrington, 1997, p. 713.). Seeing as the closely linked concept of nationalism is

one of the two characteristics that inspired this very research, that should also receive a clear definition here: Nationalism is the pursuit – through argument or other activity – of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty (Barrington, 1997, p. 714.). We must note three key composing aspects in these definitions: The cultural aspect that designates what the nation in its abstract form is, the territorial aspect that designates where the concept is limited to in space, and a social aspect that designates what group the concept applies to on a personal basis.

These concepts do not only need to be cleared up on a purely theoretical basis but also in connection to their use in the case of Hungary, or to be more precise, the Hungarian nation. This needs to be clarified in light of the country's borders not coinciding with the territorial boundaries of the nation as per Barrington's definition.

What does this mean? First, we must look past the concept of the country, since a country is only the territorial component of the state (Barrington, 1997, p. 713.). The Hungarian state is of course normally in the focus of a scientific observer's analysis, since it is the polity itself that participates in the international political system and since its inner political structure is the one definable by a set amount and variety of political institutions through which the people's attitudes can be analysed. Therefore, when we mention Hungarian political behaviour, that must necessarily be reflected within, say, party politics, a phenomenon limited to the Hungarian state.

If we turn our attention towards another political phenomenon pertaining to the state's functioning however, for example parliamentary elections, we find a noticeable complication. Over the last decade and a half, ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary's borders have been granted the opportunity of obtaining Hungarian citizenship without the need of ever having lived within the state's territory and also to cast their votes in its national elections regardless of having a local address of residence. This means that the political institutions of

the state transcend its very borders. The current constitution of Hungary has in this way blurred the boundaries of the concept of the nation somewhat as well since it regards citizens of other (neighbouring) countries as its own potential subjects on the basis of ethnic background, thereby fogging the territorial component of the definition given by Barrington above. Although this political decision was not implemented without controversy,³ we cannot delve too deeply into the topic of Hungarian nationality-politics in this paper. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the political framework of the Orbán regime has somewhat made it difficult to draw a clear distinction between the concept of nation and ethnicity: The aim of the current administration is to include all ethnic Hungarians into the Hungarian nation.

If we take a closer look at the territorial composition of this blurry ethnic-national grouping, we can see that this policy primarily affects the status of Hungarians who live in territories that belonged to the Hungarian state before the first world war. Although this means that the territorial boundaries of the concept are not completely arbitrary, this does bring us to another problem at hand as well: The research of Hungarian political history includes those times when the boundaries of the Hungarian state were much more different than those of today. Before the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, the country's borders included a population consisting of many nations besides the Hungarian one that have since achieved full self-determination. Now the situation is reversed: Many neighbouring countries of Hungary contain members of Hungarian ethnicity as their own citizens, who are regarded as equal members of the Hungarian nation by the state's aforementioned national policy. These two contexts then, the

³ The question of granting ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary the right to vote in Hungary's elections was not only campaigned against by Orbán's predecessor, Ferenc Gyurcsány, but also rejected by the vast majority of voters (Bita, Kovács, 2018). Foreign powers have also voiced concerns about this practice over the years, more recently by the United States, when it excluded all foreign-born Hungarians from its visa exception programme in 2020 and limited all other Hungarian passport holders' ESTA eligibility in 2023 (Lily Bayer, Politico).

present and the past cannot be equated, and a distinction must be made: We need to include into the research those Hungarians who live outside of Hungary now and exclude the members of those nations that were subject to the Hungarian state then but did not belong to the Hungarian nation itself. What can be determined in both cases is that although the boundaries of the country have changed, the fact that the territory of the nation and the country can't be equated, has not.

Referring back to Barrington's concept of nationalism, the feature of defining the territorial boundaries of the nation is not clear in Hungary's case after all. The country's borders are evident, as they can be drawn on all maps, but the nation today oversteps these boundaries while over a century ago it struggled to fill them. Nationalism therefore potentially brings with it an irredentist attitude today and an imperialist one in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This would mean that nationalism as an attribute necessarily has to have changed in its nature after 1920, either in its manifestation or in its motivation.

In order to define however what group of people we consider as part of the Hungarian nation for the purpose of outlining the concept of national character, we must establish parameters that can be applied in the same way throughout the chronological scope of such research. That is to say, this definition must bridge the topographical-political watershed of the change in the country's borders. I propose regarding as the Hungarian nation all those people who identify themselves with the Hungarian cultural features (the cultural aspect of nationality) and are accepted by other Hungarians in their identity as such (the social outline of membership), while also having a political impact on and being politically influenced by the Hungarian state, whether they live within its territorial boundaries or not (the territorial outline of membership).

1.2 The concept of national character

Now that we have outlined the meaning of nation, we can turn our attention to defining national character. As before, we shall start with the general theoretical definition.

James C. Charlesworth defined character as simply as “the sum of qualities or features by which a thing is distinguished from others” or “essential peculiarity” (Charlesworth, 1967, p. 24.) and applied it for the case of nations to create the concept of national character. He went a bit further to distinguish character from characteristics by stating that the latter is merely a set of superficial attributes or properties, while the former is a more profound essence, much closer to a certain kind of nature. Charlesworth however does not explore this difference further and dedicates much more space to the categorisation of national characters than defining what the concept truly means.

Does this mean that Charlesworth regards national character as something more self-evident than a complex concept needing meticulous clarification? Perhaps so, for the literature on national character was quite extensive by then and in fact already past its prime, so to speak, in the mainstream of social sciences. Up until the middle of the 20th century the study of national character was a subject of multiple disciplines, since its scope was rather wide. It aimed mainly at describing the peculiarities of distinct cultures and national behavioural characteristics (Adamson Hoebel, 1967, p. 2.) which made it an adequate field of research for scientists ranging from anthropologists to social psychologists alike. It aimed beyond descriptive motivations to find an answer to the reasons that the political systems around the world differ from nation to nation, assuming that they are shaped by their respective country’s cultural patterns, which can be summed up as a concise national character.⁴ Interest in this field waned over time however as anthropologists for example aimed to

⁴ The works of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead must be emphasised within the anthropological approach to this topic.

examine smaller, more homogenous groups of people rather than entire nations (Adamson Hoebel, 1967, p. 3, 5.) and political scientists decided to pursue the topic of culture from a generalised political behavioural standpoint (Pye, 1991, p. 489.). The main drive behind the scientific interest for national character studies also disappeared at this time because it no longer coincided with national interest in understanding each nation state's motivations and thought processes that through their conflicts and confrontations led the globe into World War Two (Adamson Hoebel, 1967, p. 4.).

For the sake of our discipline, political science, national character studies paved the way for the literature on political culture and cleavage theory hallmarked by Gabriel Almond and Seymour Lipset. The more thorough analysis of national peculiarities therefore steered scientists away from this generalising and simplifying concept, so national character studies became a superficially descriptive field of the past.

This does not mean that hypothesising the existence of an all-encompassing national character and trying to understand it has since completely fallen out of grace. Ter-Minasova for example makes the compelling argument that this instead is becoming more relevant than ever in the 21st century, since globalisation puts mounting pressure on national identities (Ter-Minasova, 2015, p. 20.). And if we refer to Charlesworth's definition, then we understand that the national character must be something as profound as identity in the case of an individual's personality within the community.

Returning our attention to the past, we might better conceptualise the exact definition we seek by understanding where the concept of national character originated from. It is impossible to look past David Hume's theoretical foundation work laid out in his *Essay of National Characters* (Hume, 1994). He envisioned national character as a kind of generalisation which might not apply to everyone equally but instead can be regarded as a rule to which exceptions can be naturally found. As Charlesworth would say a good two centuries after him, Hume talked about a group's (nations') certain peculiarity and went into great

lengths to explain where this peculiarity might come from. He essentially argued that the mindset of a certain nation is shaped by the environmental influences upon an individual's way of thinking. The environment in this case is interpreted as the combination of the people's natural environs (physical causes) and their society's institutions (moral causes).

By interpreting the environment's effects on the individuals mind we seem to touch on the realm of psychology in our endeavour. This is no coincidence, for the earliest studies shedding light upon national character after Hume treated it as such: This was the case for the German school of thought of *Völkerpsychologie*, a topic best summarised by Egbert Klautke (Klautke, 2013) but also briefly analysed by my colleagues and me to initiate the present research on national character (Gyukits, Kiss, Takács 2024). *Völkerpsychologie's* "founding father", so to speak, Wilhelm Wundt aimed to explain the spirit of a nation by interpreting it as the nation's collective psychological makeup which would be the logical extension of individual psychology (Gyukits, Kiss, Takács, 2024, p. 176). This German school was the natural continuation of Hegelian thought, which in turn was doubtless influenced by the theoretical foundations of Montesquieu as well (Gáll, 1978, p. 33).

This psychological plain of course becomes observable and at the same time examinable once personality manifests itself in behaviour. Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania delves much deeper into the concept based on this train of thought. In trying to understand how national character can be examined, she hypothesised what elements of an individual's personality or identity can be categorised as parts of the national character. If we approach the question from the behavioural level, we must recognise that an individual's demeanour might change when the immediate structural, institutional, cultural setting (the aforementioned environment) changes, meaning, those attributes pertaining to the national character might change within the individual or be abandoned altogether. The author brings forward the example of the conduct of prisoners of war or the integration of immigrants (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 11) to ask whether the

concept lying within one's identity level being flexible disproves its very existence.

The other option explored by Jasińska-Kania is if rather those attributes are really part of the national character that remain unchanged, those that are independent from the influence of the social structure, economic institutions, the political system, moral norms, religious beliefs, etc. of the individual. This latter proposition seems more attractive since national character as a concept is not something purely residing within the individual but rather an attribute or set of attributes of the collective.

Expanding on it she designates the possible definition of national character as follows: National character is “a set of unique qualities inexplicable by general laws of interdependence between social and personality variables, but which result simply from unrecurring events in the history of a given nation” (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 12). And although the author remains wary of this definition, keeping her distance because of the haziness of the possible interpretation of it, based on my own research, I can draw similarities between this interpretation of the concept and the empirical findings from the pattern of Hungarian political history. It is hypothesised that to find national character we must strip away all the explicable behavioural patterns and point to the unexplained: That is how I was left with the two attributes whose lack of explanation inspired this very paper. I therefore dare to accept the above definition for national character.

2 RESEARCHING NATIONAL CHARACTER

Jasińska-Kania points out that although the concept was rather popular from the 19th century up until the end of the second world war, its various descriptions equating it to a sort of “common mind” easily led it to a form of mysticism or resulted in committing the error of hypostasis (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 6.). This means that although we might be able to give a definition to national character, resolving its issues voiced in the many critiques that have accompanied this literature cannot be overlooked.

Ter-Minasova presented a few useful points in this regard. Although she did not designate the concept of national character as a potential subject of the political dimension and focuses more on the cultural and linguistic aspect, two very important observations of hers have to be noted: First, that national character is “not an object of the outside world, it exists only in the human mind” (Ter-Minasova, 2015, p. 21.) which predisposes it to doubts about its very existence. In my view, this does not endanger its validity, only designates it as a theoretical construct. The second observation is that one of the potential sources for the study of national character is found in stereotypes, that is, generalisations of a large group of people (Ter-Minasova, 2015, p. 22.). W. J. H. Sprott regards this as a problem, because the researcher risks applying the description of a class or other national subgroup to the entire nation, especially if there exists such a subdivision based on clear geographical and historical distinctions within the nation at hand (Sprott, 1966, p. 211–221). This issue however does not render the analysis of national character impossible but instead advises caution against gross generalisations by suggesting the clear designation of the subject of analysis on one hand and a wider and more thorough collection of empirical data on the other.

Another common methodological issue is that although the numerous studies of national character find in certain behaviours a trait that is part of a greater character, this does in fact not explain them, only gives them another name. They are therefore no more than analytical statements (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 6.). Jasińska-Kania also points out the issue of authors drawing connection between culture and national character. This is especially of interest to us, since as we have discussed in the case of the concept of the nation, culture must be regarded as an integral part of the nation’s member’s mindset. Trying to devolve cultural products into a description of national character however requires adherence to three distinct assumptions: First, that a culture is fully internalised by all members of a given society, in this case, a nation. Second, that cultural products are an expression of the personality of all the members of that

nation. And third, that culture is homogenous and can be corresponded to one set type of personality. These arguments can be referred back to the previous critique on the explanatory nature of these studies: If national character shapes culture, then how can we devolve national character from culture itself? We find ourselves in an explanatory loop, an ouroboros of questions and answers.

Besides this logical paradox, all authors talk about the same thing: The simplification of a large set of individual characters into one national character or rather the reduction of a large group of people into a single one is problematic, to say the least. We must choose therefore if the individualistic approach debunks the existence of the collective or if this latter concept can be interpreted in a way that does not deny nor negate the full complexity of any given individual within the collective.

2.1 A possible solution to the problem: a statistical approach

This issue could be resolved through the lens of statistics. Inkeles and Levinson described national character as referring to “relatively enduring personality features and patterns that are modal among the adult members of a given society” (Inkeles, Levinson, 1969, p. 428.) This means that we do not necessarily negate the diversity of millions of personalities into a single one, but rather identify those individual traits that are most common within them all and group them into one unified concept. This results in a quasi-personality, one that might not cover the entirety of an individual’s full psychological makeup, but it does not need to either: It remains a theoretical construct only. The important conclusion is that a certain level of generalisation can be achieved even without direct observation because national character itself is a concept pertaining to the collective and not the individual (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 10).

Jasińska-Kania points out that for this statistical approach to be empirically utilised, we would need an enormous amount of input data to correctly assess the modal traits of the society researched (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 8). She also underlines the importance of distinguishing in this hypothetical collection of

data those variables that truly constitute national character and those that are independent socio-cultural factors. Both of these sources influence the behaviour of the individual, so it is not enough to deduce the behaviour from personality alone.

This however only becomes relevant if we want to examine the psychological makeup of the individual. Looking at the issue from the standpoint of political science, we can already point toward a certain source of this data necessary for the research of national character with a collective focus instead of an individual one. Jasińska-Kania proposed the usage of public opinion polls or questionnaire surveys (Jasińska-Kania, 1980, p. 10), but in my view, the very institution of voting in elections provides an adequate opportunity full of potential for this analysis. The reasons are clear: Elections already produce data on all adult members of a given society (in this case, a state's citizens) with a particular focus on political behaviour. Although it would be rather difficult to deduce cultural specificities, a lot can be said based on election results in the political dimension. Not only what choice the people have made from the options on the ballot, but also whether they voted at all. The latter question can also be used as a factor in identifying national character. For example, if voter turnout is regularly high, we can deduce that the populace is politically active. Similarly, if turnout is low, it can be deduced that the people are rather indifferent to their country's political processes.

To avoid drawing hasty conclusions however, the researcher must employ comparative methods. Staying with the example of voter turnout, we must always examine the context of the election analysed (to rule out the possibility for example, that turnout was influenced by a prevalent political issue at that time or whether voter is compulsory or not, etc.) and whether the results recur over time, under varying circumstances. In simpler terms, the impulses of the present must be differentiated from behavioural patterns that are constantly present.

This is where we return to the topic that inspired the creation of this very article. The central theme of the historical approach of political science is that it

must discern those phenomena that can be fully explained by their immediate context from those that can only be understood in knowledge of the greater picture, the greater political history of the nation.

3 DISCERNING THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER

As stated in the introduction, despite many descriptions existing of Hungarian national character, these can hardly be regarded as products of scientific research. Endre Arató describes them more akin to fantasy than something pertaining to the field of science (Arató, 1969.), although we of course must be wary of this assessment based on the ideological connotations that permeate it. Arató denounces a popular product of 1930s literature theorising on the concept of nation in the context of the Marxist reality of 1960s Hungary. In other words, disregarding whether this opinion is valid or even genuine, we must remember that the author could not possibly defend an ideological product of the Horthy-era.

Besides that, Ernő Gáll identifies the shortcomings of these works, importantly highlighting Lajos Prohászka's book on Hungarian national character titled "The wanderer and the recluse" (Prohászka, 1936.), stating that not only is this work typical of the writings of national character of the time, but also conforms to the subtype most common in Germany, that employed by such authors as Dilthey, Weber, Troeltsch, Worringer, and Nohl, in which nations are personified in their character and have one basic trait enhanced to produce an ideal type for their intellectual history (Gáll, 1978, p. 25.).

The greatest issue with these works however is that they do not conform to the scientific standards we have outlined here already. The aforementioned critiques neglect to explain exactly why, so applying all previously discussed findings we should clear this up as well. The issue is that although they rely on stereotypes as a source of analysis which is not illegitimate in itself, but none of these works backed their observations up by meticulous studies done on whether the behavioural patterns described do indeed typify the entirety of the nation

either. To be quite fair, how could they? The authors of these works were in no position to conduct nationwide psychological or sociological research, as this task would require enormous resources even today. The necessity of identifying the behavioural patterns' persistence also would have required this research of impossible scale to be repeated with regular intervals.

If we take my earlier proposition on election analysis as a potential solution to this issue, we must be mindful that general suffrage would not be introduced in Hungary until after the second world war, past the prime of national character studies and in an era when writings on these topics were quickly put under ideological scrutiny as noted in the case of Arató. Logically, the adequate conditions for the research of national character in Hungary have dawned only with the fall of the socialist dictatorship, where neither ideological pressure nor restrictions on voting are present. This means that studies on Hungarian national character have only become truly possible in the past three and a half decades. What's more, if we accept the argument made for the case of defining the Hungarian nation above by regarding those Hungarians who live outside of the country but also get to vote in the parliamentary elections as equal members of the nation, then we can only utilise election results as source data after the implementation of the policy past 2014. This leaves us with a window of possibility of a mere decade, thereby further legitimating the neglecting of these kinds of studies in the field of political science.

But even though Hungarian political scientists have steered (in this view, understandably) clear of the topic as already discussed before, other social sciences have not rejected discussing the concept this vehemently. György Hunyadi's work in this regard must be noted, as he has elevated the study of national character into a worthy topic of analysis within the bounds of domestic social psychology (Csepeli, 2018, p. 267–268). He designated the definition of national character as stereotypes that a nation's members assert about their own national group and about members of other national groups which are excellently researchable with the tools of social psychology (Csepeli, 2018, p.

268). The studies following the groundwork laid by Hunyadi have since also produced various descriptions on Hungarian national character which undoubtedly contain more substance than those highlighted by Csizmadia (see Babits, 1999 and Bibó, 1986). And even though the latter were indeed very detailed in their description of said character in their own unique way and all set out to explain the essence of Hungarian political behaviour through a lens of a greater historical scope, drawing connections between the environment of the society in question (be it in the spirit of Hume the moral and physical background of national character) and the nation's mentality and respective behaviour adapted to it, these really do not live up to a scientific standard befitting of today's social sciences.

Instead of regarding them as studies then, we can just take them as they are: Stereotypes, or, referencing Ter-Minasova, sources for the proper study of national character. By demoting them we do allow these writings to serve as valuable bases for coming to the same conclusions as social psychologists, including György Csepeli, have come. He, for example (Csepeli, 2018), but many other authors of the discipline have already conducted research on the topic based on such sources that although does not explicitly indicate its potential use for political science, the interdisciplinary approach utilised by Csizmadia's *történeti politológia* simply cannot ignore.

So it seems then, that Hungarian political science shows a disciplinary deficit not only in its wariness to use historical research to draw conclusions on present political issues, but also in the regard of using other social science's findings to widen its scope for the same purpose. Hungarian political science therefore not only needs to process the existing points made during the decades long debate on national character from abroad but also to open itself in the domestic sphere to an interdisciplinary point of view.

CONCLUSION

We have found that national character, as simple as it may be described is a rather complex concept that requires the viewpoint of several scientific disciplines to be properly understood. Its complexity is also reflected in the necessity for meticulous research to empirically draw conclusions on a certain nation's character. These facts have however surfaced quite slowly, allowing the very topic to be tainted in the eyes of some as a pseudo-science, unworthy of attention or too difficult to apply in the real world in the past decades.

My research has shown that not only can we outline the true meaning of national character, but its study can also be done to modern scientific standards by utilising a statistical approach and potentially taking election results as sources for data as well.

Interestingly, Lucien Pye himself regarded this statistical proposition to be the nail in the coffin for national character studies, since it called for impossibly high scientific standards (Pye, 1991, p. 496). Does this justify the definite abandonment of these types of studies then? As I have argued above, I believe that we need to acknowledge the criticism that has fallen upon the research of national character, but we should not abandon it as a concept altogether. Pye himself also recognised that these writings laid the groundwork for the study of political culture, a topic of our discipline that carried a much more profound impact on its development as a modern social science. He especially praised the works on Russian national character that, in his view, showed truth several decades after their conception in light of contemporary political processes in Russia.

Similar is the case for Hungary. If a Hungarian reader or anyone who is well acquainted with the Hungarian political mindset dedicates time to the many books written on the Hungarian national character a hundred or even two hundred years ago, they will notice, as Csizmadia has put it, some kind of truth to them in their core.

This truth that has already been written down now needs verification. That is the task set forward by the incomplete toolbox of Hungarian political science. My research in this regard has clearly shown that domestic political science would greatly benefit from an interdisciplinary approach, for example borrowing the findings of social psychology in the case of studying national character but also for utilising history in general.

In order to draw clear conclusions then on the starting proposition, the proper identification of two previously unexplained attributes of Hungarian political behaviour (nationalistic politics and the need for an authoritarian leader) will have to take into consideration the mindful usage of stereotypes as a source but not completely reject the usage of unscientific writings on national character. The verification of the presence of these attributes within the Hungarian nation can be conducted through examining election results and using all available public opinion polls or questionnaire surveys conducted that produced data on these attributes over the last three and a half decades. Future research therefore has the path clearly laid out to produce an analysis on Hungarian national character befitting modern scientific standards.

Once this task is done, we become capable of drawing conclusions on the political attitudes of the Hungarian nation that not only keep Viktor Orbán in power but also explain his conduct in international affairs. This future topic will undoubtedly be of interest to domestic and international researchers of the Orbán-regime alike.

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