

Hungary's "anti-capitalist" far-right: Jobbik and the Hungarian Guard

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This article discusses the political success of the far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik). Jobbik is usually depicted as owing its success to anti-Roma and anti-establishment sentiment, mobilized with the help of a paramilitary organization, the Hungarian Guard. With the examples of the party programs, the speeches of Jobbik leaders during marches of the Hungarian Guard, and the press releases of the party between 2008 and 2010, this article shows how Jobbik not only attempts to mobilize anti-Roma sentiment, but also tries to present itself as a party taking considerable interest in the economic issues of poverty and inequality triggered by capitalism. It also suggests that the party's success might in fact also be due to this focus on the economy, as well as due to increasing efforts on behalf of the party leadership to differentiate their positions from those of the main center-right party, Fidesz. This could explain how even though authorities banned the Hungarian Guard in July 2009, Jobbik nevertheless doubled its number of voters in the parliamentary elections of April 2010 (and achieved a further increase in absolute vote numbers in 2014) as compared to its electoral outcome in the European Parliament elections of June 2009.

Keywords: far-right; Hungary; post-communism; Eastern Europe

Introduction

The 2000s brought, in post-communist Europe, the rise and establishment of political forces that most observers perceived as a threat to the survival of liberal democracy in the region. Usually labeled as populist, right-wing populist, or far-right, these forces have become a regular and even dominant presence in these countries' parliaments, not to mention their streets, where they proved capable of mobilizing an allegedly apathetic post-communist public. While Poland's Party of Law and Justice has most evidently epitomized this phenomenon (under the label of right-wing populism), the organization most talked about around the end of the 2000s became the Movement for a Better Hungary, Jobbik. The article makes the following argument about the development of Jobbik: while many studies present Jobbik's political success as a result of fueling anti-Roma sentiments, this article shows how Jobbik also constructs issues of poverty and welfare retrenchment caused by capitalism and globalization as central to its message. To cite party leader Gábor Vona, Jobbik sees itself as a party trying to turn "the Hungarian nation into the nation that most courageously opposes global capitalism."¹ The rise of Jobbik might be important also for reasons relevant to the wider post-communist region, as radical nationalist organizations elsewhere look to Jobbik for inspiration.²

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The article proceeds as follows: It continues with a short discussion of what it understands as far-right and radical nationalism, and presents the state of the literature on the far-right in Eastern Europe and in particular in Hungary. Existing comparative scholarship on post-communist Europe generally expected the retrenchment of social protection to trigger support for the far-right, but did not expect this to happen in the countries that joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. The article proceeds with a discussion of the Hungarian Guard, the paramilitary organization credited with allowing Jobbik to mobilize anti-Roma sentiment and have its first electoral success (the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2009). It argues that by creating the Hungarian Guard, Jobbik tried not only to capture anti-Roma sentiment, but also to respond to the political context of 2006: a radical nationalist camp in search of new political figures and organizations to lead it. The Hungarian Guard was a formidable instrument in bringing about a successful outcome in the June 2009 EP elections, but since the Guard was banned the next month, it is important to understand how Jobbik could almost double its number of votes in the 10 months after the ban without relying anymore on the Guard. The explanation presented in this paper is that Jobbik developed its programmatic ideas and attempted to gain attention after 2009 not so much as an anti-Roma formation, but as one taking interest in alleviating the country's economic problems. Thus the paper continues with a presentation of Jobbik's political programs, and argues that the three political programs present Jobbik as a political force seeing the economy as the main battleground on which the future of the ethnic nation is fought; in two of the three programmatic documents, the Roma issue is marginal, although revealing Jobbik's threatening stance toward the Roma. The last part relies on an analysis of some 500 press releases issued by Jobbik in 2008–2010 to show, among other things, the extent to which the economic focus detailed in the political programs is also present in the messages communicated by Jobbik to the public.

Explaining the rise of the post-communist far-right

This article approaches far-right or radical nationalist formations as informal or formal groups practicing ethnic reductionism, a subordination of all political issues to the issue of the relationship between ethnic groups. They filter all characteristics of the polity through ethnic lenses and are ready to give up most principles of a liberal democratic polity (for instance minority rights, parliamentarism) in order to enact their vision of relationships between ethnic groups. They use ethnicity as a marker dividing society between members of their group and potentially threatening other groups, and reduce individuals to such ethnic markers. Usually these political formations seek the thorough reform of the legal framework organizing the polity (Constitution and related laws),³ claim to represent one particular ethnos, and vary greatly in what they ask for in the name of that ethnos. The most extreme ones ask for the physical extermination, exclusion or forced subordination of other ethnic groups; the less extreme ones (although not necessarily less violent) pursue the goal of reorganizing relationships between ethnic groups, making sure that their ethnic group receives representation in various organizations. They also vary greatly in what they see as the basis for ethnicity, but most often they conceive ethnicity as something that one is born into (and it can be a "culture," language, confession, religion, "race," or a certain ancestry). What this article describes as "radical nationalist" or "far-right" resonates with discussions of the "radical right party family" (Rydgren 2007), so it uses the terms radical nationalist and radical right or far-right interchangeably.

There is little focus on what triggers the rise of such more extreme nationalist formations at certain moments rather than at others in post-communist Europe (see Bustikova

and Kitschelt 2009, for a discussion of the distinct context of the far-right in post-communist Europe as opposed to its context in the West). Even though the expectations of scholars were that the fall of communism would strengthen nationalist and extreme nationalist positions (Jowitt 1993), the fluctuating success of corresponding political forces (Mudde 2005) shows that there is more to say about the development of extreme nationalism than that it was the fall of communism that triggered it. The little comparative literature there is focuses on explaining the electoral results of radical political parties through public opinion research; one recent publication (the only one to attempt a causal investigation of far-right development throughout most post-communist societies) emphasizes that support for the far-right in Central Eastern Europe correlates with retrenchment of social protection. It also argues that far-right forces have limited appeal in Central Eastern Europe because mainstream parties pro-actively court the far-right electorate (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009). It thus hardly expected the far-right to rise in importance in Central Eastern Europe, and expected it instead to strengthen in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. But by the mid-2000s and intensifying around the end of the decade radical nationalist formations started having increasing mobilization strength also in Central Eastern Europe, at least in terms of a more substantial street presence. Hungary was a rather extreme case, as the far-right showed not only a higher street presence, but also strong capacities of directly threatening state institutions (most evidently in September 2006, when far-right extremists defeated police forces and devastated the headquarters of the national television). The electoral success of the Hungarian far-right in the 2009 EP elections and in the 2010 and 2014 national elections serve as further evidence for far-right strength also in Central Eastern Europe (CEE). The comparative literature has yet to come to terms with this development (as well as with the rise of the Party of Law and Justice and most recently the *Ruch Narodowy* in Poland).

Against this background, a growing number of articles try to answer the question about what led to the emergence and rise of Jobbik in Hungary. Most claim that the rise of the far-right is mainly the outcome of growing anti-Roma sentiments in the country (Barlai and Hartleb 2011; Karácsony and Róna 2011; Bartlett et al. 2012; Paksa 2012). They also agree that the creation of the Hungarian Guard was crucial for the success of Jobbik; it sparked more media attention to criminal acts committed by Roma ethnics, and helped Jobbik exploit existing anti-Roma sentiments (Karácsony and Róna 2011; Bartlett et al. 2012). These and other studies also argue that what is changing is the way in which political formations mobilize their supporters; new technologies, particularly those that are Internet-based allow political parties to better reach the public (Barlai and Hartleb 2011; Barlai 2012; Bartlett et al. 2012).

Yet the data in the article by Karácsony and Róna (2011) show that attention to what Jobbik calls “gipsy crime” preceded the creation of the Guard, and that events not connected to Jobbik or the Guard sparked more references to “gipsy crime” in the media than the corresponding statements of Jobbik and its sympathizers in the Guard.⁴ And it is also not clear whether anti-Roma sentiment is a cause of support for the far-right or a consequence of far-right mobilization⁵; in the second case, the question of why people participate or pay attention to initial mobilization is still open. Furthermore, their analysis focuses on Jobbik’s electoral success of 2009. In the parliamentary elections of 2010 Jobbik more than doubled its number of voters, from 427,773 in 2009 to 855,436 in 2010 (and to 1,020,476 in April 2014). In the case of such an important change in voter numbers (as well as the differences between EP and national parliamentary elections), one cannot automatically presume that the motives that mobilized voters in 2009 are the same as those in 2010.

The fact is that by the elections of 2010, Jobbik no longer had at its disposal the instrument that helped it mobilize anti-Roma sentiment until 2009: in July 2009 (some two weeks after the EP elections) authorities banned the Hungarian Guard, the close-to-Jobbik paramilitary organization that helped boost media attention to “Roma crime” in cases such as Tatárszentgyörgy and Kerepes in December 2007. Although there were many successor organizations to the original guard, it took Jobbik almost two years to grow as close to these organizations as it was with the original one, and launch an action as media-effective as the marches against “Gypsy crime” held during 2007–2009 (presented further below in this article). Furthermore, on going through the speeches made by Jobbik leaders during key events in the establishment of the Hungarian Guard (as done further below), it is also not clear why Jobbik leaders largely avoided the Roma issue during these speeches. The argument of this article is that Jobbik is about more than just enmity toward Roma. The programmatic documents of Jobbik present it as a party attempting to gain support by relying mostly on channeling economic discontent; it claims to speak not on behalf of certain aggrieved groups (for instance the unemployed) but of those unhappy with the state and the direction of economic development of the country, of which there are many.⁶ The article thus builds on the work of several scholars who long before the rise of Jobbik expected that in the absence of strong and vocal trade unions the frustration and anger over economic transformation in post-communist Europe can eventually play into the hands of the far-right.⁷

This account of Jobbik, of course, does not refute the fact that an important reason why Jobbik rose to success in 2009 is the party’s enmity toward the Roma. But the story of Jobbik as a party of economic discontent adds to that explanation an account of how Jobbik could double in comparison to 2009 the number of voters, from 427,773 (2009) to 855,436 (2010). An important question is to what extent economic discontent actually mattered for the success of Jobbik in 2010. This paper argues that while they played a minor role in the 2009 elections, afterwards they played an increasingly important role, and shows this through an analysis of press releases between 2009 and 2010. But before discussing the place of economic issues among the ideas of Jobbik, the next part focuses on the Hungarian Guard. Most commentators agree that what caused Jobbik’s initial surge in popularity (in the context of the 2009 EP elections) was not its programmatic ideas outlined in the 2006 program, but the establishment and activities of the Hungarian Guard, which helped Jobbik basically appropriate the Roma issue: the marches of the Hungarian Guard in response to “gypsy crime” caused growing media interest (and therefore also public interest) in Jobbik. However, scholars who have looked at the context in which the media reported the activities of the Guard and Jobbik also argue that the context of media reporting was largely negative for Jobbik; thus, it is not very likely that the marches of the Hungarian Guard caused growing Jobbik support outside those parts of the public that were already sympathetic toward ethnonationalist views. And yet, for the 2009 elections this was probably all what Jobbik needed: to unite behind its ranks the public potentially open to far-right ideas, a task to which the Hungarian Guard proved an excellent instrument. The next part details this story and also adds to it that the Hungarian Guard was not only a response to “Gypsy crime” (and probably worked in bringing votes because of its anti-Roma stance). It might have worked in bringing votes also because it was a response to the political context of 2006, one that has revealed a massive radical nationalist sector in search for leadership.

The Hungarian Guard: uniting the nationalist camp around Jobbik

Jobbik’s first four years of existence (2002–2006), depicted by its current leadership as “the dark years,” saw the establishment of a political party with insignificant support among the

population. Although the party developed its present-day slogans and ideas into a program as early as 2006, in the elections that took place that year it failed to enter parliament. According to Jobbik activists, it was only in late 2006 that the times began to change for Jobbik.⁸ That year unknown sources released a recording documenting how Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány complained to his fellow socialist party members that he had to lie about the country's finances "day and night:" the country's economic situation was not as rosy as depicted by the socialists before the elections; and the only way out was to initiate budget cuts and austerity measures.

The recording sparked violent protests and skirmishes with the police in September and October 2006; on 18 September far-right demonstrators defeated police forces and briefly seized and devastated the headquarters of the national television station (less violent protests went on for at least a week); barricades were set ablaze in Budapest on 23 October. Tens of thousands of supporters of center-right and far-right political formations took part in the demonstrations. Already on the first day of the demonstrations they rejected the representative of Hungary's old far-right party, The Hungarian Life and Truth Party (MIÉP): party president István Csurka was met with hostility and cries of "No more Csurka" when he attempted to address the crowds (Paksa 2012, 221). Instead, the demonstrations provided an excellent arena for newer organizations of the far-right, showing that these can help coordinate and organize protests. In the words of Tamás Molnár, the Jobbik member playing a central role in the protests: "A new right wing emerged right there on Kossuth-square, setting itself goals such as solidarity, integration [among far-right groups], a new transformation, a fourth republic" (Hírszerző információ 2006). The protests represented a turning point for Jobbik, whose activists took part in the skirmishes with the riot police, and later on also in coordinating the protests taking place in Budapest. The protests became a central event for Jobbik, because they allowed it to directly connect with the wider radical nationalist movement and speak in its name. And it interpreted the actions of the Socialist government as a betrayal of the people, deeming the government illegitimate, with one Jobbik activist openly arguing that the Socialists were driving the country toward civil war.⁹

In response to the government's refusal to quit after the publication of the transcripts, Jobbik established the *Magyar Gárda*, an organization claiming to be mobilizing the public around ideas of law and order, self-help in case of natural disasters, and humanitarian interventions. Since members of the Gárda showed up in black uniforms and waved flags seen for the last time in Hungarian politics in the hands of interwar fascists, most observers saw the establishment of the Gárda as a great danger for democracy in Hungary, and as a step telling of Jobbik's fascism.¹⁰ Indeed, the messages publicly communicated by Jobbik leaders to the Gárda recruits and their supporters during the rallies establishing the new organization show a threatening stance toward the established political elite. Such statements should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric: they represent narratives through which leaders communicate to the rank-and-file and to potential supporters the goals and values of their organization, as well as the actions for which it seeks to mobilize them. In the following paragraphs, the article focuses on the speeches made by Gárda and Jobbik party leader Gábor Vona, a person central in the Hungarian Guard since he was the one who registered it, who takes credit for establishing it, and the person allowed to give the longest speeches during the marches held by the Guard.

What the analysis of these statements shows is that Jobbik leaders are preoccupied with systemic change in the country, alleging that there are strong continuities between the current political elite in charge of Hungary and the pre-1989 period; like most far-right parties in Europe, Jobbik too has a very strong anti-establishment stance (with the

establishment understood loosely as to include all other political parties). During the first rally, in fact establishing the *Gárda* and swearing in its first recruits (held on 25 August 2007), *Gárda* and Jobbik leader Gábor Vona declared that the “aim of the *Gárda* is the finalization of the transformation and the salvation of the Hungarians,” and, without even mentioning the Roma, vented most anger at Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, a person that “left the elderly without peace, the adults without security, the young without future, the children without childhood. The nation without Hungarians” (speech held on 25 August 2007). Vona avoided references to the Roma also in the next national-level *Gárda* rallies in 2007 and 2008. Instead, there were again many accusations leveled at the ruling elite (portrayed as being the continuator of the pre-1989 Communists who suppressed the 1956 revolt and sacked the country), and objectives outlined for the future (“more children, more jobs, a prouder and stronger nation,” speech held on 21 October 2007). Most importantly, there were many mentions of what the initiator of the *Gárda* portrayed as the disastrous state of the country in words such as these:

The Hungarian people’s last 70 years – the 40 years of communism and 20 years of post-communism – turned it [the people] into Europe’s last nation. In economic, moral, social, and political ways. [...] Whoever comes here in a bad mood can shamelessly kick us around. (speech held on 21 October 2007)

What is wrong with the country is mainly due to Hungary not being given the chance to have its “own” way, and Jobbik leaders depict the *Gárda* as an effort to ensure that “our own country really is our own” (speech held on 25 August 2007).

The statements above are taken from what Jobbik portrayed as the “national-level” events in the life of the Hungarian Guard: these were five “marches” held in Budapest in August 2007 (celebrating the Guard’s establishment and first 56 members), October 2007, March 2008, October 2008, and March 2009. In contrast, the Hungarian Guard actions receiving most media attention were the marches organized in response to “Gipsy crime,” which were marches and events organized outside of Budapest, such as most importantly the marches held in Tatárszentgyörgy and Kerepes in December 2007; in April 2008 in Nyírkáta and in Vásárosnamény (both in the country’s poorest region in the north-east); in June 2008 in Pátka; and in March 2009 in Sarkad. It was in such marches that Guard and local Jobbik leaders most clearly articulated their enmity toward the Roma. Karácsony and Róna (2011) show that the Hungarian Guard involvement in such marches and the ensuing media attention (statistically documented in the case of Kerepes) represent the key to understanding how Jobbik became, in the eyes of part of the electorate, the party most closely associated with the Roma issue. Of course, as Karácsony and Róna also point out, media attention was largely negative toward Jobbik. It can be argued that probably it not only attracted certain voters but also scared away potential supporters. Yet given that the Hungarian Guard emerged following the 2006 protests, it could very well be that it worked as an instrument of bringing votes because it addressed far-right voters in the first place.

What is relevant here is not only the topic, but the actual strategy pursued by Jobbik: half-political party and half-social movement organization, it managed to secure the far-right vote in the EP elections not by relying solely on electoral campaigning, but by setting up a parallel paramilitary organization, signaling to the wider radical nationalist movement how serious Jobbik is about solving the country’s problems; it appealed to the sense of urgency of this movement by showing that small steps toward achieving the agenda of the movement can be done “right here, right now;” and by introducing uniforms it allowed radical nationalists to openly celebrate that they belong to the corresponding

movement, while at the same time reaching a wider public and communicating it that it does not wait for the elections to solve the country's problems. Thus in a national rally celebrating the Gárda's first year, Vona details some of the small steps undertaken by Guard members:

They are prosecuting a movement that organized more than 100 events in full respect of the law [...] that on St. Nicholas day and Christmas distributed gifts to more than 100 needy children and to more than 100 needy families. [...] a movement maintaining countless and by everybody forgotten war monuments and graves [...] A movement that organized the most commemorations of victims of Communism and of the Don River disaster [a World War Two defeat of the Hungarian army by the Red Army]. A movement that has helped the homeless victims of natural disasters [...]. (speech made on 29 March 2008)

In brief, a major reason for the significance of the Gárda is the following: Jobbik found in it a way of achieving very concrete political goals, at times bringing it immediate public support and attention without having to wait for elections. But the authorities banned the Gárda in July 2009: if the paramilitary organization was so central to Jobbik's success, authorities left Jobbik without it only 10 months before the national elections. Jobbik tried to relaunch it under a different name ("The New Hungarian Guard"), but in the first years after the ban it could no longer organize events in central Budapest (on Hero's Square, one of the city's major squares). Instead, Guard members met on fields outside of towns (near Kerepes, in September 2009, a meeting also attended by Jobbik leaders)¹¹ or on the private properties of members (in Szentendre, August 2009), under heavy police surveillance. Furthermore, if the Guard was important in uniting the far-right scene, the Guard itself had started to fall apart. Before the ban there was a first split in September 2008, and after the ban the membership of the New Hungarian Guard fell below 100 (Athena Institute 2013), making it extremely difficult to organize events at the pace reached in 2009. It is in this context that Jobbik reformulated its programmatic ideas and developed them in the form of the Radical Change program.

Jobbik's programmatic ideas

Jobbik leaders and activists present their organization as a "radical nationalist" political formation, vocally disputing being part of the "far-right," the "extreme right," or being associated with Fascism (or National-Socialism). Nevertheless, Jobbik can be conceptualized as an ethnonationalist or far-right formation (as defined above), focusing the thrust of its actions on defending the ethnic Hungarian nation from a list of perceived threatening others. Its political programs reveal a strong preoccupation with the economy, showing how the biggest threats to the ethnic nation stem from impoverishment, lack of jobs and social protection; these are seen as partly the result of actions of foreign forces and their allies within the Hungarian polity. Its focus on economic issues is rather new in comparison to the far-right political force that had dominated the radical nationalist camp before the rise of Jobbik: In its latest programmatic document (2005), MIÉP blamed all wrongs of post-1989 developments on a Hungarian state incapable of enforcing its laws (Ma.hu 2005). In the case of Jobbik's programmatic documents, this focus is reversed: it is not lawlessness that is the starting point in the analysis of existing problems, but poverty. It is the economy rather than the state that is the locus of the most dramatic and threatening events for the ethnic nation, a change in focus that allows Jobbik to concentrate on topics such as poverty, unemployment, and loss of welfare benefits. It also allows it to problematize the relationship between Hungarian and Roma ethnics, by arguing that the growing Hungarian

and Roma impoverishment fuels ethnic tensions, as in the context of impoverishment, “gipsy crime” becomes ever more rampant.

Thus, Jobbik’s first political program (the 13-pages-long Bethlen Gábor Program of 2006) starts by emphasizing the centrality of the economy in two pages of critique against globalization and neoliberalism:

What is needed instead of the neoliberal pseudo-democracy – that under the guise of free competition divides society between a thin, very rich part, and a thick, very poor part – is a principled democracy, in which the state stands up in defense of basic values.

Jobbik’s solutions envisage a stronger role of the state in the economy (for instance by nationalizing every economic sector of “national interest,” “the subordination of monetary policy to national interests,” page 2), nationalization and expansion of welfare (most importantly by nationalizing private pension funds, page 3, and withdrawing support to multinational companies (MNCs) and extending it to “Hungarian small and medium enterprises,” and, among other ideas, the imposition of unionization in multinational companies, page 3). In total, 5 of 11 points deal with what Jobbik intends to do about economic issues (next to what was presented above are plans for agriculture, environmental problems, and better labor market protection for child-rearing parents). Only the second part of the document features the more typical issues of the twentieth century Hungarian far-right, namely settling through educational measures the issue of the Hungarian nation’s origins, and the legacy of the Trianon Peace Treaty (for instance extending support to Hungarians living abroad due to the 1920 territorial losses, or naming and shaming those Hungarians allegedly responsible for Trianon). In this second half of the document there is also a passage about law and order (titled “Order is the spirit of everything”), requiring the introduction of the death penalty for the “most severe” crimes; here there is also a mention of the Roma (page 10), in the context of proposing the creation of a special police unit to tackle “Gipsy crime” (Jobbik 2006).

The far longer (almost 90 pages), 2010 “Radical Change” electoral program (Jobbik 2010a) is more complex, but the ideas contained remain the same: the main focus is on the economy and on fighting poverty, and the solution is the increase of the state’s role in the economy. The “strong, active and entrepreneurial state” is to renegotiate the country’s external debt, support Hungarian business, create jobs, commit banks to support Hungarian enterprises, investigate privatizations and the activities of multinational and offshore companies, etc. The program starts with proclaiming that “global capitalism based on the free movement of multinational capital has failed,” and dedicates the program’s first and largest part to detailing how an active state can re-launch the economy (pages 1–17).

It is important to note that the 2010 program remains the defining one for Jobbik; it is the “Radical Change” program that the party presents as its main programmatic document and at the time of writing (late 2013) it is still the only one openly accessible on its website. Given the centrality of this document, it is worth going into more details about the rest of the document, also heavily dominated by economic issues. Thus pages 18–23 detail an economic plan for the support of rural areas. It includes the idea of setting up a rural bank for farmers, as well as supporting local food producers (under the slogan “You are what you eat”), and in particular producers of ecologically grown and processed food. The chapter is followed by parts dedicated to environmental protection (23–25), energy markets (26–27), and infrastructure development (28–30). Pages 33–48 discuss policies of supporting families, healthcare and pension issues, as well as ideas of replacing welfare with workfare (under the slogan “Who does not want to work also should not eat!”); this part also consists of the only two pages in the document dedicated to the Roma, shortly

mentioned below). The next part of the document continues the focus on the economy and welfare: entitled “Proud nation” (pages 48–62), it argues that the “economic reunification” of Hungarians (meaning of Hungarian-speakers living in Hungary and the neighboring countries) is an “economic imperative” with positive consequences for Hungary – what is meant is financial help for Hungarians living abroad and wanting to stay in their countries rather than emigrate to Hungary. This part also discusses educational reforms, again from the perspective of fighting “neoliberal educational policy” (49); what is proposed is a set of measures aimed at strengthening discipline in schools. It also promises a stronger influence of the country’s “historical” churches (i.e. ruling out neo-protestant denominations) over educational policy. Finally, law and order issues are combined with issues of foreign policy into one chapter (63–75), while the last part (77–83) details ideas of constitutional and administrative reforms. Interestingly, the law and order chapter is dominated by the issue of “crimes of politicians,” a notion which Jobbik would like to have enshrined in the country’s Penal Code. The program also gives two concrete examples of crimes for which politicians who have been in office should face trial: again the two “crimes” relate to the economy – the public debt and the privatization of “national property” (64).

Jobbik’s newest programmatic document (four-pages long, entitled *Béla IV*, and published in late 2010, Jobbik 2010b) summarizes what it considers to be Hungary’s three biggest problems, shows how the government fails to tackle them, and offers its own alternative solutions. Its launching coincides with the growing adversity toward the ruling Fidesz. Again, the economy has the central stage, with the document starting by declaring that: “The history of the last twenty years of Hungarian economy policy [represents] a terrible tragedy,” with three present-day problems (“pitfalls”) further deepening poverty and weakening the economy. First, there is “being at the mercy” of “international” and EU powers, because “our international commitments” “go against the strengthening of the economy.” The second “trap” is foreign debt, turning Hungary into the “easy prey” of “international business and the European Union.” The third problem is the most serious one, and the first two are important mainly because they tie the polity’s hands in terms of what to do about this third one: it is the “demographical trap,” caused by dropping total fertility rates combined with the “growth of gipsy fertility;” “threatening the country with the specter of a decaying, criminalizing society.” This “trap” and the subordination of the first two problems to it represent an example of ethnonationalist framing: loss of sovereignty and increasing debt are problematic not because they can lead to impoverishment, but because poverty promises to favor the rise of a threatening ethnic other. As to why this other is so threatening, it is still the 2010 “Radical Change” program that offers most insights into Jobbik thinking. The document dedicates two pages out of 88 to the Roma, arguing that the growth of the Roma population is associated with higher crime rates. That said, the document vehemently denied being racist. In defining what it means by “gipsy crime,” it argued the following:

The term gipsy crime does not mean that every gipsy is a criminal. It therefore does not mean the collective labeling of gipsies, and also does not involve racism, because the phenomenon is not genetically-conditioned, but instead is to be understood in the context of the specific socio-cultural background [of the Roma]. This is a criminological term, according to which there are forms of crime specific to this ethnic group (for instance usury, knife-fighting, mass involvement in fights, theft of scrap metal). (Jobbik 2010a, 40)¹²

And yet the use of terms such as “gipsy crime” does exactly what the drafters of the Jobbik program claim not to be doing: it indiscriminately labels an entire ethnicity in negative terms (“gipsy” being a term that Jobbik uses in referring to all Roma); and it is arbitrary, as the examples mentioned in the text cannot be characteristic of only one ethnic group.¹³

Jobbik's stance toward the Roma (and Jews) is different from that of groups officially following fascism in Hungary, as it does not see these groups as different "races" with which coexistence is impossible.¹⁴ But it is as arbitrary as the standpoint of fascist groups: while the latter groups use racist theories and skin color as ethnic markers, Jobbik argues that it is Roma culture ("socio-cultural background") that fosters crime, reducing individuals to arbitrarily delimited national identities.

How important were the programmatic ideas of Jobbik for bringing about the success of April 2010, when it entered parliament as the third biggest political force? In comparison to the EP elections of 2009, it almost doubled its number of voters in 2010. This doubling of votes requires an explanation of how Jobbik could achieve it without relying further on the Hungarian Guard (the main mechanism connecting Jobbik to the Roma issue in the eyes of 2009 voters, according to the study done by Karácsony and Róna 2011). Even more, polls (Figure 1) showed that after the success achieved in June 2009, the percentage of Jobbik supporters went in the following six months through an important decline. It seemed that in the absence of the Guard, Jobbik cannot even keep the numbers of voters it had in June 2009. Yet starting in January 2010, support for Jobbik began again to grow. One can only speculate about what led to the rise in the numbers of Jobbik supporters in early 2010, but one explanation could be that the rise coincided with the launching of the party's electoral campaign along the ideas outlined in the "Radical Change" document (also the party's electoral slogan), in January 2010. Of course, one cannot expect voters to read a 90-page program, but the Jobbik leader Vona stated on numerous occasions the gist of the Radical Change program in a summarized form, as being about "telling the truth about multinational capital, the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Israeli land buyouts and about Gipsy crime" (Jobbik 2010c). This quote shows the place of the Roma issue is more important than one can infer from the actual Radical Change document, but it is also telling about the party's focus on the economy.

Figure 1 relies on survey data and shows how support for Jobbik changed in the short period from 2009 to 2013. The polling institute basically collected no data on Jobbik prior to January 2009, as it deemed the party marginal (it did not exceed 2%), but support for Jobbik increases shortly before the mid-2009 EP elections, and again grew between January and March 2010.

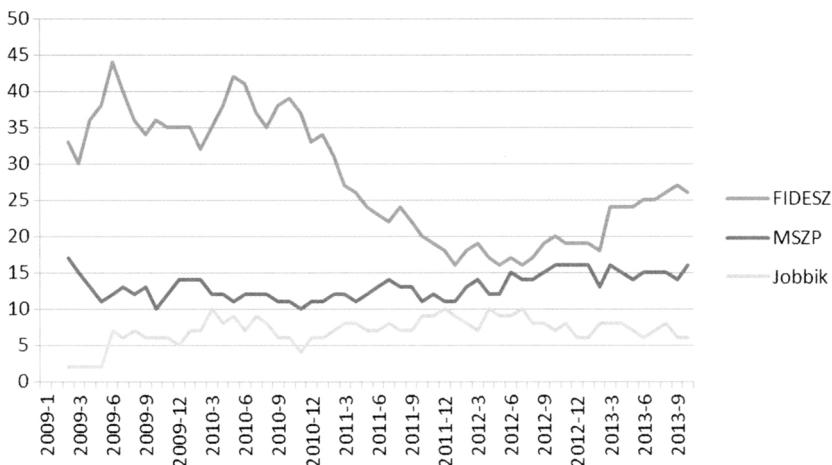


Figure 1. Support for Jobbik, 2009–2013. Source: www.ipsos.hu.

Interestingly enough, support for Jobbik peaked before the actual elections in April 2010; during the last campaign month, Jobbik lost some of its support, something bitterly decried by Jobbik leaders and presented as the result of a smear-campaign by its political competitors. The decrease that started in March–April 2010 continued throughout the entire year and by November 2010 it halved the number of Jobbik supporters reached before the elections. Yet after that date support started growing again, a trend that continued through 2011 and led to a recovery of early-2010 support levels. The next part focuses on these two periods of growing support for Jobbik, in early 2010 and again in late 2010. It uses data from some 800 Jobbik official press releases posted between 2008 and 2010 on the website www.jobbik.hu. Regarding the months before the 2010 elections, the press releases roughly approximate the ideas laid out in the programmatic documents, and specifically a strengthening emphasis on economic issues, and a rather marginal place for the Roma issue. As of mid-2010, opposition to, and criticism of, Fidesz plays a dominant role in the press releases, at times reaching levels of 1 out of 4. Other documents also show how central opposition to Fidesz policies became for Jobbik after the 2010 elections, in practice also meaning that even the strong stance on Roma issues are part of the same efforts to oppose and challenge the ruling Fidesz.

Jobbik's press releases, 2008–2010

Although the present-day leader of Jobbik started his political career as a member of Fidesz, the relations between the two parties right of the center soured considerably in the context of the 2010 electoral campaign. Figure 2 shows this development. It is based on some 800 press releases posted on the www.jobbik.hu website. These posts increase in numbers after 2008 (there were only roughly about 100 in 2008, growing to some 200 the next year, and reaching several hundred in 2010). The coding of the data relied on categories identified in Jobbik's political programs, as well as on the categories developed in scholarly articles studying Jobbik's political message: enmity toward Roma, toward Jews, economy and welfare, law and order, and Trianon-related issues and actions (commemorations, actions honoring particular figures, in support of Hungarians in neighboring countries, or in protest against authorities in those countries). Additionally, I also included categories

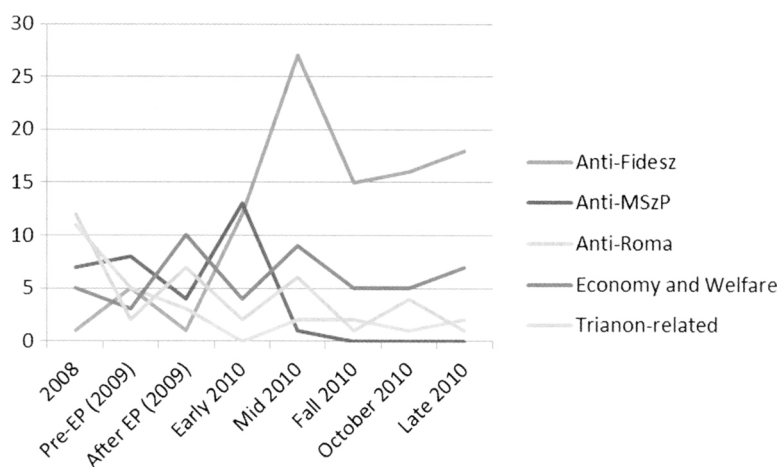


Figure 2. Key topics in Jobbik press releases (per 100 articles), 2008–2010.

covering Jobbik's main political competitors, in order to identify which political forces Jobbik targets most often in negative terms. (For the sake of clarity, I left out several categories from the figure below, also because their incidence was far below that of the categories I kept in Figure 1.) Thus, in the months prior to the EP elections of June 2009, most articles clearly identifying a political party as a target for criticism were dedicated to the ruling Socialist Party (MSZP), followed by the Liberals (SzDSz, not included in Figure 2). Throughout 2010, however, these parties were replaced by Fidesz, both before and after the 2010 elections, won by Fidesz with an overwhelming majority. The former rivals virtually disappeared from the press releases, to be remembered only in the context of a trial against former Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány (I discuss further below the context in which Jobbik intensified its anti-Fidesz stance).

Interestingly, the issue of the Roma was more present than the others (welfare and law and order) in the press releases only in the period prior to the EP elections in 2009. By the start of 2010 the economy and welfare issue, even though marginal throughout 2008 and early 2009, had overtaken in terms of numbers of press releases dedicated to it the number of press releases focusing the groups that Jobbik portrays as ethnic others (Roma and Jews).¹⁵

It can very well be that official Jobbik press releases are not the place for voicing and mobilizing anti-Roma sentiment: other studies have shown that there are other close-to-Jobbik media outlets – such as most importantly the *kuruc.info* website – that predominantly focus on the Roma issue (Vidra and Fox 2012). Although it has never been proven whether, or the extent to which, Jobbik actually controls the website, it is clear that the website constantly reminds its visitors to support Jobbik. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Jobbik leaders are in any way afraid to use their official website for popularizing their ideas toward Roma: in the few press releases that do take up the Roma issue, the language is as offensive toward Roma (and Jews) as in the case of the *kuruc.info* website.¹⁶

Out of the content-based categories used in coding (anti-Roma or anti-Jewish messages, ideas pertaining to MNCs and austerity measures, law and order, Trianon), economic and welfare issues were after 2008 the most present ones; specifically, the articles dedicated to these issues focused on criticizing the presence of MNCs in Hungary and austerity measures. The press releases demanded the protection of various groups – workers, public sector employees, retirees – from the Fidesz-backed tax reforms but mostly from actions of MNCs, in particular banks, energy suppliers, and large retail chains (the latter criticized for artificially raising prices and lowering the quality of their food products). They also demanded the protection of Hungarians from actions of the IMF and in particular of the EU, one release (from 3 June 2010) claiming for instance that “The 2010 elections did not give power to the new government to copy the old tune of the European Commission’s president about structural reforms and fiscal consolidation.”

Closely connected to the emphasis on the economy is another development throughout 2010 that deserves attention, namely the rise in anti-Fidesz messages. Already in early 2010 Jobbik leader Vona equated Fidesz with the Socialists: “We still wait for an answer to the question why Viktor Orbán considers Jobbik to be extremist and violent. Maybe because we do not want to prosecute only the red [Socialist], but also the orange [Fidesz] evil-doers?” (Jobbik 2010c) This development is particularly important, as scholars studying the strengthening of the far-right in post-communist countries consider the relationship between large center-right parties and the far-right crucial for understanding the situation of the latter (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009). The biggest rise in anti-Fidesz messages came in summer 2010 (when the increase was spread over several months) and October 2010. The reason why Jobbik anti-Fidesz messages intensified in October 2010, the

month after which polls registered the reversal of the trend of falling support for Jobbik, was that Jobbik targeted the ruling Fidesz over the ecological disaster that took place on 4 October 2010, when a caustic waste reservoir broke and flooded nearby settlements (killing 9 and injuring at least 120). Although the Fidesz government was quite quick to react (rebuilding the dam in one week, arresting management, nationalizing the plant), Jobbik depicted the events in terms such as “Hungarian Chernobyl” and criticized the government for not doing enough. For instance, Jobbik demanded the confiscation of the entire property of the plant’s 13 owners, and protection of the victims (the people whose houses were affected) from banks, who – according to Jobbik – were pressuring the people who took mortgages for their houses to pay for the damage, as the houses’ value no longer corresponded to the initial mortgage contractual terms (Jobbik 2012).

Of course, in the absence of more in-depth data it is difficult to know what exactly caused support for Jobbik to intensify again in 2010. It is important to note that the relationship between Jobbik and Fidesz deteriorated even further around that time also for other reasons. Specifically, while Jobbik was the only party in parliament to initially support Fidesz’ drive to change the country’s Constitution, in November 2010 it abandoned this position, probably as leaders were aware of falling public support (reaching pre-July 2009 levels). Again it criticized Fidesz for not doing enough to counter the mounting influence of “multinational capital,” as in the context of the constitutional revisions Fidesz did not support Jobbik’s ideas of a ban on foreign acquisitions of Hungarian land and natural resources.

In general, a considerable part of Jobbik’s critique of Fidesz centers on economic issues, and in particular on the topics of multinational capital, austerity measures, and welfare. This focus on the economy in criticisms of Fidesz should not come as a surprise: This is obviously the area over which Jobbik can challenge Fidesz, since on national issues Jobbik leaders can only observe how Fidesz actually enacted many measures that they themselves had advocated. In a speech to party members held during the 2012 Jobbik Congress, party leader Vona listed a long series of actions that Fidesz enacted thanks to Jobbik-pressures, all related to the party’s agenda of national issues.¹⁷ In contrast, it is clearly easier for Jobbik politicians to differentiate themselves from Fidesz on economic grounds, since Fidesz – although rejecting privatization and deregulation is a “staunch advocate of austerity and welfare cuts” (Korkut 2012; Egyedy 2013, 39), something opposed by Jobbik ever since the days when Ferenc Gyurcsány led the government.

2011: The return of the “paramilitary” strategy

By late 2010, Jobbik had regained some of its lost capacity to rely on paramilitary organizations, as courts had declared that the new organizations it had set up after the 2009 Hungarian Guard ban cannot be regarded as successors of the initial organization. As a result, the New Hungarian Guard organized throughout the following years a long series of actions in the countryside, among which was also the most dramatic and best-known anti-Roma mobilization, in Gyöngyöspata in 2011 (according the Athena Institute, the New Hungarian Guard organized many of these actions, including those in Gyöngyöspata, under a different name, the Better Future Civil Militia; Athena Institute 2013). As a result of the mobilization, the Roma were forced to flee from the town, the mayor resigned, and in the ensuing local elections Jobbik won the mayoral seat (for a detailed report of these events, see Feischmidt and Szombati 2012).

Internally Jobbik regarded the episode as a huge success; surprisingly enough and enlightening on Jobbik’s take on the Roma issue, party officials saw Gyöngyöspata not

as a triumph over the Roma, but over Fidesz. In its 2012 internal congress, Jobbik leader Vona presented Gyöngyöspata to party activists in the following terms:

And what is the victory, what is the lesson? [...] If people hear about us at first hand, not from press agencies, not from newspapers, not from the TV, but at first hand, than despite all media lies [...] the people will choose our side. This is the message of Gyöngyöspata: That we are capable of winning, and that we can even beat the Fidesz [the party in power].¹⁸

Furthermore, a transcript of a talk between Jobbik activists in Gyöngyöspata that was leaked to the press revealed how the activists prepared for police intervention and talked about the state, the police, and a Fidesz government they depicted as dominated by Jews.¹⁹

A key component of the escalation was that several paramilitary organizations moved into town, settling there for weeks until the hundreds of frightened villagers fled from Gyöngyöspata, and the ensuing street fighting finally prompted police intervention. Furthermore, the mayor's resignation provided Jobbik with the opportunity of openly campaigning in town for its candidate in the ensuing elections (O. Juhasz, the Jobbik candidate, eventually won the elections). These two conditions – prolonged militia presence in a town and the resignation of the local mayor – might be very difficult to replicate elsewhere. Yet even if at least at the level of rhetoric centered on Roma actions, Jobbik's involvement in town showed that its actions are part of a broader trend of consolidating enmity toward the party in power.

Conclusions

This article argued that Jobbik's self-image (as projected in party programs, press releases, and speeches of top leaders) emphasizes the economy as the locus of the most dramatic and threatening developments for the ethnic nation. Problematic about the economy are mostly the poverty and welfare retrenchment due to "neoliberal globalization." Having said this, this does not mean that Jobbik is more left-wing than it is a far-right party: it focuses on the economy from an ethnonationalist perspective, in which the economy deserves attention because it is the locus of the biggest threats to the ethnic nation. This focus on the economy allowed Jobbik to move on from its preoccupation with the Roma issue before the 2009 EP elections (although never abandoning it). After the Hungarian authorities' ban against the Hungarian Guard in mid-2009 Jobbik leaders needed a changed emphasis in their political message, and their concern with economic issues allowed them do so by paying increasing attention to the actions of MNCs, the IMF and the EU, as well as to the austerity measures enacted by the government. Most importantly for the period after the 2009 elections, the economic focus allowed Jobbik to express heavy criticism of Fidesz and the solutions it offered for the country's economic problems.

The increase in anti-Fidesz messages throughout 2010 represents evidence for the argument that the relationship between large center-right parties and the far-right is crucial for understanding the situation of the latter in post-communist Europe (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009). Specifically, the argument was that across post-communist Europe, the retrenching welfare state represents a formidable opportunity for far-right forces; these forces however could not strengthen in Central Eastern Europe (including Hungary) for two reasons. First, in Central Eastern Europe the retrenchment was not as radical as in the rest of post-communist Europe, at least until these countries joined the EU. Second, even after joining the EU – something that limited these countries' capacity to spend on welfare – center-right parties "embrace some of the appeal of the radical right," so that "radical right parties have few electoral opportunities;" this happens in particular if center-right parties attempt to take over the issue of nationalism, and present themselves as the only

ones speaking in the name of the nation (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009, 466–467). The rise of Jobbik in Hungary from a marginal extra-parliamentary organization to the parliament's third largest party shows that important changes are under way in Central Eastern Europe; most importantly, it seems that center-right parties cannot limit anymore the electoral opportunities of the far-right by simply taking over some of its issues. The case of Hungary after 2009 suggests that if the far-right manages to establish in its discourse a strong presence of economic issues such as welfare retrenchment, it can reach considerable levels of voter support and challenge established parties.

Notes

1. The quote is from the 2013 congress of Jobbik. A recording is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgKQsG7czQE> (accessed 13 November 2013).
2. Poland could be, next to Hungary, another example, as it experienced important successes in mobilization on behalf of the radical nationalist *Ruch Narodowy*. An observer called Jobbik the model for the strategies and discourse pursued by the *Ruch Narodowy* (Varga 2012).
3. In other words, they oppose the idea of equating boundaries of the state with those of the nation (Brubaker 1999).
4. For instance, the 2009 statement of Hungary's parliamentary commissioner for human rights and social scientist Maté Szábo, declaring that "gypsy crime" indeed exists: <http://www.errc.org/article/hungarian-rights-groups-denounce-anti-romani-statements-by-hungarys-parliamentary-commissioner-for-civil-rights/3025>
5. Kovács (2012) shows for instance the latter to be happening in the context of Jobbik mobilization and Antisemitic prejudice.
6. See a recent study showing that Hungary has – among post-communist countries – after Bulgaria the highest share of people believing their country to be heading in the wrong direction (Juhász, Krekó, and Molnár 2012, 20).
7. Several authors expressed concerns about the successful drive of governments in the 1990s to pursue economic reforms without much consultation and by sidestepping trade unions and a protesting public but with dramatic increases in social spending; ever since EU accession, agreeing to the EU's Maastricht criteria in the 2000s has greatly limited the CEE governments' capacity to spend on welfare, something that has often increased the already existing dissatisfaction with the results of the economic reforms of the 1990s (Greskovits 2007; Ágh 2010). In a Polanyian vein, it has been argued that the key question arising from these developments is who, with what discourse, and to what result captures the "anger" and "frustration" unleashed by market reform in post-communist publics (Ost 2006; Vanhuysse 2007); at the case of Poland, Ost (2006) further explored how it is radical nationalist discourse that seems to gain most from such anger and frustration.
8. See for instance the statements of Jobbik veterans Gábor Szábo and Gábor Zázrivecz (the latter changed his surname from Zázrivecz to Vona) made in the Jobbik-sympathetic documentary *A Jobbik Nemzedék* (The Jobbik Generation), a 2010 documentary film available here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R30fmLzFslY> (accessed 2 June 2014).
9. According to the same Molnár (2007), who was one of the leader of what became the coordinating body for the protests in late October 2006, the "Hungarian National Committee."
10. This seems by now to be the dominant explanation among Hungarian social scientists. Although they do not deny the importance of the 2006 mobilization for Jobbik, they argue that the creation of the Gárda should be seen in the context of a series of crimes committed by Roma ethnics starting in Autumn 2006 in Olaszkalizska, and Jobbik's search for a way to politically exploit those crimes (Karácsony and Róna 2011; Paksa 2012).
11. A video of the meeting is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNU5PuKQNYE> (accessed 20 October 2013).
12. There is also a 25-page English version of the 2010 program, available on the Jobbik website, <http://jobbik.com/sites/default/files/Jobbik-RADICALCHANGE2010.pdf>. It also includes Jobbik's discussion of "gypsy crime," but in a shortened version, not including the examples given in the original Hungarian-language text.

13. One can think, for instance in the case of “mass involvement in fights,” how widespread such fights are among groups proudly claiming Hungarian ancestry, such as Ferencváros and Újpest football team supporters (for background see <http://www.hungarianfootball.com/2012/05/ujpest-vs-ferencvaros-a-background/>, accessed 14 June 2013).
14. Meant here are mainly the “Pax Hungarica Movement,” an organization openly propagating “Hungarian National-Socialism,” and various other organizations close to it; for a description see Paksa (2012, 197–208).
15. The analysis actually uncovered a very small number of articles dedicated to both issues: in the pre-EP campaign, only four articles out of 100 addressed Roma issues, and that was the highest number in the 2009–2010 period, while the economy and welfare issue covered a maximum of 9 articles out of 100, in mid-2010. It is nevertheless interesting that Jobbik gives so little space on its website to an issue (the Roma) credited to have brought it its first electoral success.
16. For instance, one of the few press releases focusing on Roma issues demanded that since “the Hungarian educational system cannot socialize Gipsy children anymore,” and since “within Gipsy society there is downward trend,” with “Gipsy families giving each other abnormal examples,” Roma children should be taken away from their families and put into special schools, with the right to see their families “once or twice every week or month, pending on the tutor’s approval” (Jobbik 2010d).
17. In Vona’s words during 19 May 2012 Jobbik Congress:

In Parliament, the Fidesz-KDNP government tried taking the wind out of our sails[...] I am sure that without Jobbik’s presence in Parliament, there would not have been any official Trianon-commemoration, there would not be double citizenship [granted by the Fidesz-government to ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries], and there would be no class trips abroad [for Hungarian children to neighboring countries with large Hungarian communities]

The full talk of Jobbik leader Vona during 19 May 2012 Congress can be found here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRMNpcY8D3s> (accessed 12 November 2013).

18. See the same recording as in note 15.
19. The transcript and recording are available here in Hungarian, http://atv.hu/belfold/20120419_juhasz_oszkar_felkeszulten_haboruzna_a_zsidesz_rendorei_ellen, with a weblog also offering a more complete transcript and discussion in English here: <http://thecontrarianhungarian.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/scandalous-jobbik-civil-war-tapes-with-transcript-of-gyongyospata-mayors-remarks/> (accessed 20 June 2013).

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