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HOW TO MAKE A GOOD POLITICAL STORY

edited by
Milosz Hodun

If you consider all the places where content is published every day, it is hard to imagine the amount of images and texts that bombard us from every side. How to get through in this information noise with one's message? Companies are outdoing each other in creating stories that will leave a mark in the memory of the recipients, that will win their hearts. The same is true of politicians. They tell voters a vision of the world, an image of reality.

Anna Maria Trawińska

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HANDBOOK OF STORYTELLING

edited by Milosz Hodun

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INTRODUCTION

● **Milosz Hodun**

Central and Eastern Europe have captured the headlines in recent years. Reports from the "new Union" reverberated in the entire Community and far beyond it. Unfortunately, most reports were regretful and even appalling. Chipping away at the foundations of democracy in Hungary. Attacks on the independent judiciary system and media freedom in Poland. Corruption scandals in Romania, the Czech Republic, and Latvia. Mafia networks in high-power positions discovered after the murder of a journalist in Slovakia... European leaders thought of the Visegrad Group as a Trojan horse that wishes to blow up the Union from within. More and more scathing comments appeared in the press calling the last enlargement a mistake. Many analyses rightfully concluded that the social and political transformation of Central and Eastern Europe had not ended and that it was a mistake to think of it as a closed chapter in the newest history of the continent.

On top of all that, the global wave of populism and nationalism symbolized by Donald Trump and Brexit, and the unceasing interest of Putin's Russia in this part of the world caused worries about the results of the elections to the European Parliament. The 2019 campaign has been the most ferocious and brutal in history; its result – a radical strengthening of the eurosceptic and openly anti-EU forces

in the European Parliament, and its wager were the future of the integration process (or the disintegration). There was a substantial worry that radical groups will expand their holdings and win as much as 1/3 of the mandates. Forecasts suggested that a considerable part of these MEPs would be from Central and Eastern Europe. After all, this nationalistic and populist wave rose in the region during the 2014 elections, which was reflected in the composition of the last European Parliament. Since then, the parties and movements that surfaced thanks to the wave have achieved spectacular success – as seen in the one-party government of PiS in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary. It should be added that support for extremist, xenophobic and outright racist, and facist-like parties has risen, such as in the case of the The People's Party – Our Slovakia or Kotleba (Ľsns) and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) in the Czech Republic.

What is very important, is that populist parties did a great job at playing on social emotions; that should be seen as a significant source of their success. Provoking a fear of the "Other" and the "Stranger", this crass game on people's worst emotions was used by smaller extremist parties for a long time. However, PiS and Fidesz managed to turn this into a fantastically planned electoral strategy. Straight out of the offices of political marketing strategists, this strategy is based on thorough social research and is packaged in professional PR advice. It follows the rules of modern election campaigns and utilizes the experiences of populists and conservatives from Western Europe and the USA.

It's worth noting that what to American campaign leaders is a self-evident fact, remains an act on the edge of blasphemy in Europe – emotions are a breeding ground for every election campaign. Not data, dry facts, numbers, and rational arguments, but emotions.

Election results depend on creating an emotional connection between a candidate and the voters. A mass connection which is made possible by the media: traditional press and social media. That seems clear since the airing of Lyndon Johnson's "Daisy Girl" campaign ad, where images of a girl picking petals are followed by images of a nuclear explosion, an explosion conjuring up voters' emotions. Broadcast once, the ad achieved its goal and until this day there was no turning back from the emotional path in campaigns. The elections of Barack Obama and Donald Trump were the best proof that. Rather than presenting detailed programs that would address the struggles of the Americans, both presidents sold their personal stories as instruments to provoke emotional reactions in voters and to mobilize them. We remember the two slogans that made crowds go wild – "Hope" and "Make America Great Again", rather than tax plans. Four elementary campaign emotions form these two slogans: fear, anger, hope, and pride. It happened only once when the emotional goal was set that the path towards it was paved with the content of a coherent program.

For many European liberals, the mere act of thinking about leading a campaign based on emotions, rather than programs and calculations, is unthinkable because it would mean betraying the ideals of rationalism and resorting to stunts unworthy of a responsible leader, a moral ideal, a statesman. Yet, on the dynamically changing political scene, where stable multiple party systems known for decades are breaking down and are being replaced with a patchwork of new parties and ephemeral movements, where the war for votes is becoming more and more innovative and brutal at the same time, liberals too are starting to understand that emotions play a leading role in electoral campaigns. Central and Eastern Europe is a great example of that. Here, liberal start-ups challenged populists and nationalists

in the election campaign by using the weapons of the other side: emotions and storytelling.

Elections to the European Parliament in Central and Eastern Europe proved that emotions play an important role in campaigns. The primary axis of the campaign's narrative was built around stories that captivate the imagination and concern issues that are most understandable to people, not around charts and meticulously thought-out arguments concerning treaties, programs, and directives. This is not to say that these elections were not about European issues, because in many places they were. This is to say that these were the elections whose results were influenced by touching upon topics that move voters in a way that is close to them.

This new strategy was taken up by both sides of the conflict, which, in simple terms, we can call as a conflict between nationalist-populist parties and liberals. As much as resorting to a play on emotions is not surprising to populists, when it comes to liberals, we observed a new, one could say, an un-typical, electoral campaign.

Plays on emotions are written into the DNA of populists. By definition, populism means: using feelings and emotions to obtain the goal of evoking the feeling of community of the people and characterizing the enemy of these people. Populism feeds off emotions, conflict, and a polarised society. As mentioned, contemporary central European populism fails to do this spontaneously or out of principle, instead, it is based on studies, data, and planned-out strategies. This is particularly visible where populists are in power and where they use all the information on citizens that is available to the government, from demographic data provided by statistical institutes to detailed data on groups of inhabitants and even individual voters which can be extracted from ministries and agencies and completed by governmental

centers for studies and analyses. This detailed knowledge is paired with custom-made demands meant to guarantee support from the voters.

Due to the fact that the Central European populism, or any populism for that matter, is not interested in the good of all (instead investing in select social groups), nor a long term development (what matters is the support "here and now"), its leaders are not afraid to formulate slogans that divide and are destructive for the country, societies, the economy, and international relations that would guarantee peace and security. In the campaign to the European Parliament, Central European populists presented themselves first and foremost as the defenders of the interests of the European Union's nation-states. They promised a return to the full and true sovereignty at the cost of deepened and effective integration. What does that mean? Sometimes it might mean an attack on the common currency through the use of fake news, at others requests to leave the European Union, sometimes fuelled by a xenophobic sauce. It always means choosing an enemy as the one who is responsible for all of the failures of a country. This external enemy could be the Brussels elites, it could be Berlin or Paris, Merkel or Macron. There is also always an internal enemy. For the Central European populists there is an entire array of internal enemies: national and ethnic minorities, post-communist special services, the economic elites, sexual minorities, even vegetarians and cyclists... The more visible the internal enemy is, the more demonized he becomes and this allows to build the entire public debate on oblique statements or conspiracy theories that make important use of rhetoric based on phrases such as "network".

In order to succeed, Central European populists learn from their Western friends and forge international alliances that are also used in

campaigns. These can be divided into two categories: alliances from the main current and self-formed extremist groups. The first solution is the case for Hungarian Fidesz, which is a member of the EPP, and the Romanian Social Democratic Party, which belongs to the S&D. During the campaign, due to their diverging programs and for the negative PR they generated, both parties were suspended in their European families. Polish PiS and Czech ODS are a part of the eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists, at which the Latvian New Conservatives look upon with admiration. Naturally, there are even more right-wing and extremist groups that come together in the Alliance for Peace and Freedom and Identity and Democracy. The new Slovakian group Sme Rodina (We Are Family) is a part of the latter. In the last week of the campaign, they organized a manifestation in Bratislava with Marine Le Pen and the leaders of other fascist-like parties, such as Austria's Freedom Party and Greece's New Right Party. These alliances lean towards weakening the Union and fracturing its fragile unity. Often to the satisfaction of Putin, who sometimes sponsors and sometimes just roots for some of these political projects.

On the other hand, we have liberal forces in Central Europe that were the driving force behind positive, pro-European, election campaigns. These are the parties parties linked to ALDE and Renew Europe, that was formed after the elections. They were in the post-communist fight against populism and have achieved electoral success. Progressive Slovakia, Hungarian Momentum, the Romanian alliance USR/PLUS, the Latvian coalition Attīstībai/Par! are liberal start-ups and symbols of progressive change and are also symbols of modern election campaigns. The Polish start-up Nowoczesna (Modern party) deserves a mention of its own. After its success in the 2015 parliamentary elections and the 2018 Polish local elections, the party

was a part of a wider European Coalition that was created for the EP elections. Even though it did not win any MEP mandates, it influenced the program and the electoral narration in Poland. When it comes to the Czech Republic's ANO, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's (who is another member of ALDE) movement, it is hard to compare it to the above mentioned liberal start-ups because it's a well rounded and rooted in power party, with all the problems that it entails, with a different, non-progressive program.

In the chapters that follow, authors from different countries show how storytelling and the use of play on emotions during campaigns influenced the elections. They will present the most interesting case studies embedded in each country's national context. They will point out the main topics that have mobilized citizens of different member states to vote. The mobilization was significant. An increased voter turnout was noted in every country described in this publication. Only in Latvia was this increase less significant. In the remaining countries it was substantial. Although it still remains as the country in which the European Parliament attracts the least attention, Slovakia improved its disastrous results from five years back and saw an increase from 13% to 23%. In this competition, Poland and Romania achieved something that several so-called "old democracies" from Western and Northern EU countries could be jealous of – an increase of 22 and 18 percentage points respectively. This mobilization could be explained by a shift in the weight of the election campaign towards a play on emotions.

Liberal start-ups used emotions and storytelling in election campaigns as a tool to describe their own beliefs, reach voters and influence their choices. In other words, liberals did not take over the populists' programs and rhetoric to stoop down to their level.

Instead, they took over their technology to use the same weapons. Liberals did not stop talking about their fundamental values: human rights, an open society, economic liberty, and the development of entrepreneurship. However, they did start to speak the language of emotions, thus being able to reach a wider group of voters. Contrary to populists, they made use of the language of feelings to promote constructive actions, to describe a positive and inclusive vision of the future.

The liberals understood the role of emotions in the planning of election campaigns, at the same time accepting the nature of modern media and the way that it transmits reality. They have stopped being afraid and embarrassed of speaking in an emotional way. What's more, they began doing this everywhere their voters were and in the same way their voters did that. These parties have found their place in times where there is increasing pressure on *infotainment* – a mix of information and entertainment. A good example of that was the promotion of the program and the candidates in tabloids by the Latvian Attīstībai/Par! Or the creation of GIFs with the top female candidates of the Hungarian Momentum party.

Different parties struck different emotional chords. In Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland where liberal parties are a part of the opposition to the ruling populist governments, the leading theme was a *normal, European country* and the restitution of hope to citizens, a healthy democracy, a corruption-free administration, and high-quality public services. In addition, in Poland, the ruling party added subjects concerning world-views to the public debate. This ignited the imagination of the society. Fuelled by the propaganda of government-controlled press and the calls of church representatives, this dominated all other discussions and disputes.

In the context of the last election, Poland's example seems very interesting because two big blocks stood up against each other in the race – the government block concentrated around PiS and the opposition, which managed to unite different opposition groups: the conservative PSL, the centrist Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska), the progressive Modern party (Nowoczesna), and the Greens. This setup allowed PiS to impose topics that were uncomfortable to different opposition groups, most of all concerning the rights of LGBTI people, and portray it as an affront to the Polish family, Polish children, and traditional Christian values. On the other hand, the opposition tried to interfere with the success of the conservative populists bringing up the subject of the Church's excessive role in Poland and the Catholic Church's sexual child abuse cases. Political emotions on both sides skyrocketed, thus mobilizing a couple of thousands of new voters.

Thanks to the modern campaigns, it was possible to introduce progressive politicians of a new kind from Central and Eastern Europe to the European Parliament. At last, Latvian liberals will be represented in the Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg. The Hungarians dug mines under the wall built by Viktor Orbán, and Momentum became the natural leader of the Budapest's opposition. Slovakia confirmed its lucky streak; liberals won the mayorship of Bratislava, the Presidency of Slovakia, and got first place in the European elections, thus giving hopes for a change in government in 2020. Finally, the fantastic result of the liberal coalition in Romania raises hopes for the removal of the corrupt socialists from power.

The chapters that follow trace how liberal parties built stories about their candidates. Especially in the countries that have a single constituency, where a smaller number of MEPs are chosen. Thrilling

stories about the list leaders, the foundations of the campaigns, and the keys to their successes. Katalin Csech and Anna Donáth in Hungary, Michal Šimečka in Hungary, and Ivars Ijabs in Latvia are all examples of the storytelling about the new heroes of the public opinion are described below. The Latvian campaign of the Attīstībai/Par! Coalition exemplifies how you can build your own story by juxtaposing it with an anti-hero. Against this backdrop, we will analyze the fall of Paweł Kukiz, the leader of a Polish anti-establishment startup who burst onto the Polish political scene with a smash hit in 2015 and, finally, hit rock bottom in the elections to the European Parliament.

Analysis of the campaigns of each country is preceded by a theoretical introduction by dr. Anna Maria Trawińska which allows us to understand where storytelling in contemporary politics originated from and how social, cultural, and informational changes in the area of communications lead to the situation where only a good story can be noticed in the chaos of information. What do myths have in common with the campaigns to the European Parliament? The following pages will give you an answer.

Enjoy the reading! ●

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE.
THE WORLD IS THE SUM OF MEANINGS

● **Anna Maria Trawińska**

Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that the world is not the sum of things, but the sum of facts.[1] Nowadays, in the era of postmodernism, one could say that it is the sum not so much of facts as of meanings – meanings produced and created at a dizzying pace. The French sociologist and philosopher of culture, theoretician of postmodernism and critic of globalisation, Jean Baudrillard, points in his works to three cultural phenomena which, in his opinion, most accurately describe contemporary reality.

The first is the emancipatory **crisis of representation**. Baudrillard introduces the notion of hyper-reality to describe this state, which is created by the activities of media, understood as sign-creating machines replacing reality with its simulation. According to Baudrillard, simulation is a process of creating and generating a reality that is not based on reality. He stipulates that the process of creating an image replaces recording, imitation or copying of real objects of reality.[2] Equalization of the copy and the original could by exemplified by the Lascaux paintings.

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1 See: Wittgeinstein, Ludwig. 2007. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Book Jungle, as well as: Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009. *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell.
2 Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

"In the same way, with the pretext of saving the original, one forbade visitors to enter the Lascaux caves, but an exact replica was constructed five hundred meters from it, so that everyone could see them (one glances through a peephole at the authentic cave, and then one visits the reconstituted whole). It is possible that the memory of the original grottoes is itself stamped in the minds of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication suffices to render both artificial".[3] The difference between the original and the copy turns out to be insignificant for the average user (the difference between the original cave and its copy is important only for archaeologists, and not for tourists who construct an idea of the past), so the means of simulating reality appear also outside the film set. Social media (especially Instagram) are the centre for the production of images creating hyper-reality, yet hyper-reality can be seen on many levels of everyday life, including the branding of places. Promotional spots, folders filled with retouched photographs, websites with a dissected vision of the country which is not always equal to reality. Watching spots of tourist destinations on BBC, it is difficult to tell the name of which country will be given at the end of the commercial. Confusingly similar shots of beaches, meadows, sometimes mountains, practically identical hotels, swimming pools and restaurants. Often very similar slogans to encourage people to come. Albania, Georgia, Poland, Lithuania, Macedonia, Slovakia... It is impossible to notice any significant difference. As tourist destinations, these places merge into one, despite the fact that the intention behind broadcasting

[3] Ibid.
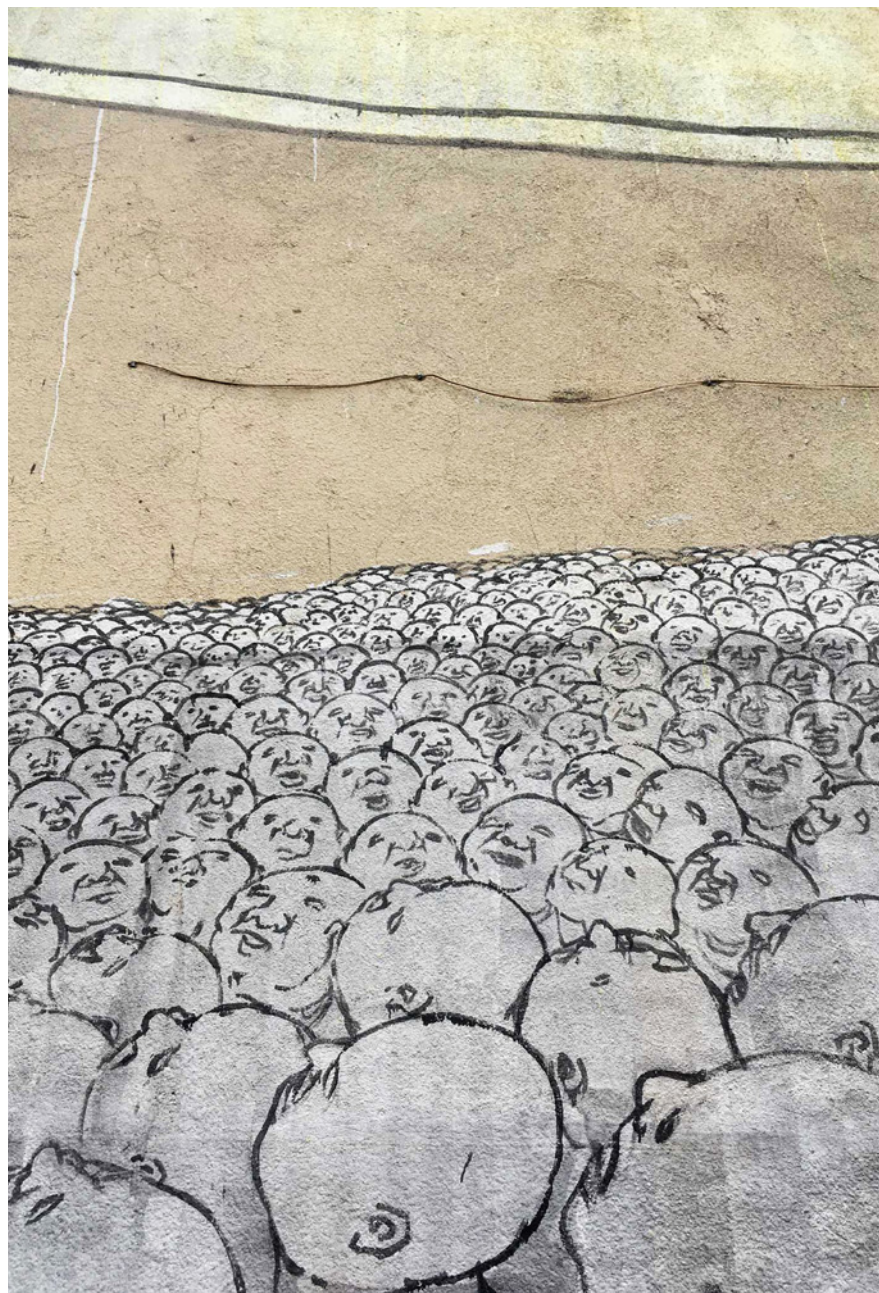
the spots was to distinguish countries, to emphasize their values. Similar mechanics of blurring the boundaries between the original and the copy take place in political marketing. The distinction between a campaign and a political programme is not important for the average voter. For the average voter, the moment of the campaign is in fact one of the most politically engaging moments which culminates in voting. Until the next campaign, the voter is on political holidays.

In addition, what Baudrillard calls the "obsession" with transforming everything into information and **mediatisation of reality** by imposing television structures on the social world must be taken into account. People get inspired by the patterns they watch on TV, they for instance dress like their favourite actors, plan their interior design copying the home décor of their favourite singer, plan their holidays at a spot where the person they admire goes. This also entails perceiving certain sets of features as "beautiful" – and this in turn explains the similarity of advertisements, including promotional spots of tourist destinations or political spots/posters. If you did an experiment, removed logos and party names from the leaflets and asked the voters to connect the candidates to parties, the result of such an experiment could be very surprising.

We understand the mediatisation of the world as the shaping of certain perception habits in the audience. For example, the production of an incredible amount of "news" has led to a reversal of the hierarchy of importance: the public sphere with political and historical themes has been replaced by the private sphere and banal matters of everyday life. Sex, intrigue, parties and guest lists – trivial issues – are elevated to the rank of an

event. The media transform life into experience. The huge image and information production industry contributed to the triumph of simulation. The modernist principle of production has been replaced by the principle of consumption, not so much the consumption of things as the consumption of signs, symbols and information. The change of the paradigm of production to the paradigm of consumption is a sign of our times, a feature that distinguishes modernism from postmodernism. First of all, signs are consumed, not objects. This corresponds to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, who introduces the concept of symbolic capital and confirms that we consume signs associated with prestige.[4] More important than the usefulness of a given product (e.g. a car) is its cultural role (a car as a sign is more important than a car as a utility object). In this way, consumption becomes an end in itself and not the satisfaction of material needs.

Globalization and the accompanying processes – including, first of all, consumerism and the development of media and the Internet – have created social conditions in which the process of branding could be transferred from the area of product marketing to areas once foreign to marketing. One of them is the area of place branding, another is personal branding and a new face of political marketing. The consequences of this process are clearly felt since the consumption of symbols has led to a situation in which identity is constructed from symbols. Identity, the vision of which is sold to us by politicians in their election speeches.

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[4] See: Bourdieu, Pierre. 2010. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Taylor & Francis Ltd
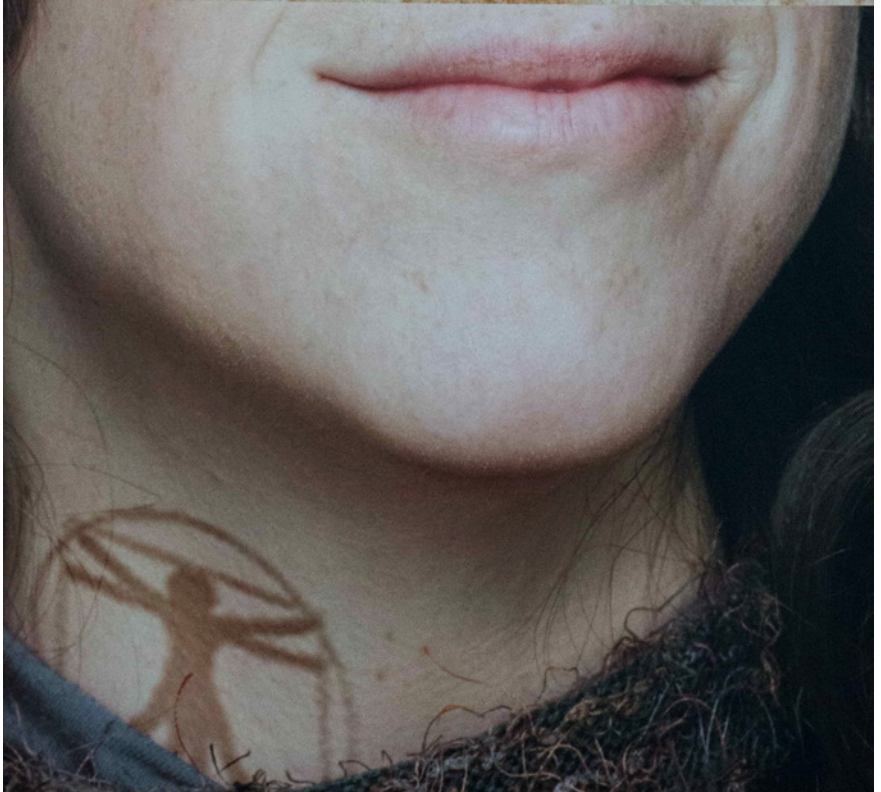
A myth and a story. Dream society and storytelling

Rolf Jansen's[5] concept of *dream society* is based on the assumption that consumers increasingly seek experience and adventure, paying attention to things that attract their hearts and not their minds. Nowadays, we buy products with a story. Jansen even postulates an inverted order: we buy a story with a product. He illustrates this with an example of his own watch. The first one was given to him by his parents. It was a watch with a decent mechanism wound once a day. It was in the 1950s, at the time of the decline of industrial society. The author of the concept of *dream society* bought his next watch in the 1980s. It was an electronic quartz watch – unlike its predecessor, it showed the time more accurately, it was also cheaper. The purchase was made in the era of the information society. Today, in the *dream society* era, the purchase of a watch has nothing to do with its functions or the accuracy of time measurement. In *dream society*, functions are taken for granted, nobody pays any attention to them. The decisive factor is the story behind the object, the emotions it brings, the lifestyle it represents, adventure. Whether you choose a Rolex, Omega or Pattek watch is not determined by the technical parameters of these watches, because they are very similar, if not identical. Buying a watch – in this case a watch – one buys the story that it tells to the world. Without emotion, there is no sale – this one sentence best summarises and sums up at the same time a new market trend in the post information society, called by Jensen the *dream society*. In today's information society, we reward those who skilfully (that is in a manner unnoticeable to us) provide us with manipulated

5   Jensen, Rolf. 1999. *The Dream Society: How the Coming Shift from Information to Imagination Will Transform Your Business*, McGraw-Hill.

data. In the future society – *dream society* – we will reward those who tell the best stories. *Storytelling* is omnipresent because it is the keyword to reflect on the brand.

Storytelling known from the beginnings of mankind, has for the last several years been gaining more and more supporters in the world of marketing and advertising. According to Monika Górska, the most often repeated word during the conference of content marketing experts from all over the world in Arizona, in October 2015 was the word: *storytelling*. The second was the word: authenticity. These two words describe modern marketing, according to Rolf Jensen: the reality of *dream society*.

The end of the 20th century brought many social, cultural and informational changes in the area of communication, including marketing communication. The advent of the Internet and increasingly easy access to it created technical conditions for two-way communication, which in turn intensified information noise. The contemporary recipient is not only a listener, but also a co-creator of the message, who passes it on – thanks to social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.). In a world in which we assimilate 100,000 words a day (that is, as if someone were talking to us 12 hours a day without any break) only a good story has a chance to be noticed. Only an excellent one has a chance to be retold. A story that will break through the information flooding us from all sides.

According to the "Digital 2019" report published by Hootsuite and We Are Social, 4,388 billion people, or 57% of the world's population, use the Internet. The amount of information they produce is hard to imagine, even if researchers in the field create visual comparisons for us. An anecdote was told some time ago

that at the end of 2010 the world's information resources were estimated – according to IDC data – at one thousand exabytes (exabyte – one trillion bytes, one with eighteen zeros). If this were printed in the form of books, more than 70 stacks of height equal to the distance between the Earth and the sun would be created. How much information exists less than 10 years later? Every minute more than 500 hours of video content is added on YouTube and half a million posts appear on Twitter! At the same time – every minute – about 70.000 photos appear on Instagram. These are just three channels for posting content. If you consider all the places where content is published every day, it is hard to imagine the amount of images and texts that bombard us from every side. How to get through in this information noise with one's message? Companies are outdoing each other in creating stories that will leave a mark in the memory of the recipients, that will win their hearts. The same is true of politicians. They tell voters a vision of the world, an image of reality. By constructing these stories, they reach for archetypes functioning in the society, created for thousands of years according to similar patterns.

In the world of marketing and advertising, the use and referencing archetypes functioning in the society in brand strategy began with the work of Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson "The Hero and The Outlaw".[6] which is based on Joseph Campbell's and Carl Jung's academic output. The archetypes of a brand, such as sage, wizard, clown, patriarch, guard, warrior, companion, lover, discoverer, Mother Earth or temptress, refer to the collective subconscious, the power of myths and epics of culture. Inspiration

6 Mark, Margaret, Carol S. Pearson. 2001. *The Hero and The Outlaw. Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes*, Mc Graw-Hill.

can be sought in Greek and Roman mythology, in Arthurian epics, in Scandinavian and Icelandic myths, in Chinese mythology, in Slavic fairy tales...

Myth is regarded as a story with certain functions (cognitive, integrative, etc.) and is identified with a universal category of culture, a structure "that can embody the most basic features of human thinking and social behaviour"[7] and can be analysed in terms of Durheim's collective effervescence, Jung's archetypes or Levi-Strauss' permanent structures of thought. On the one hand, branding strategies try to create a coherent, contemporary story about a particular country and its inhabitants (*storytelling*), on the other hand, all coordinated actions are intended to create permanent structures of perception of a given nation, a given party, a given political program.

In my doctoral dissertation, I put forward a thesis that a skilful indication of national myths, unveiling of this "DNA of culture" would allow to build the DNA of a national brand. If we consider the statement that myth is the foundation of national identity to be true, national branding can be considered a process of creating a contemporary myth of identity. Such an interpretation of place branding draws attention to the role of the story and the content transmitted, which build images and thus construct reality. Why do I ever write about national branding in the context of electoral narratives for the European Parliament? I am convinced that political campaigns are a kind of inward national branding. A story created for voters about who we are as a nation and how we imagine our country.

7 Domański, Henryk (ed.). 1999. *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 2, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Oficyna Naukowa, entry: Mit [Myth], p. 251 [own translation].
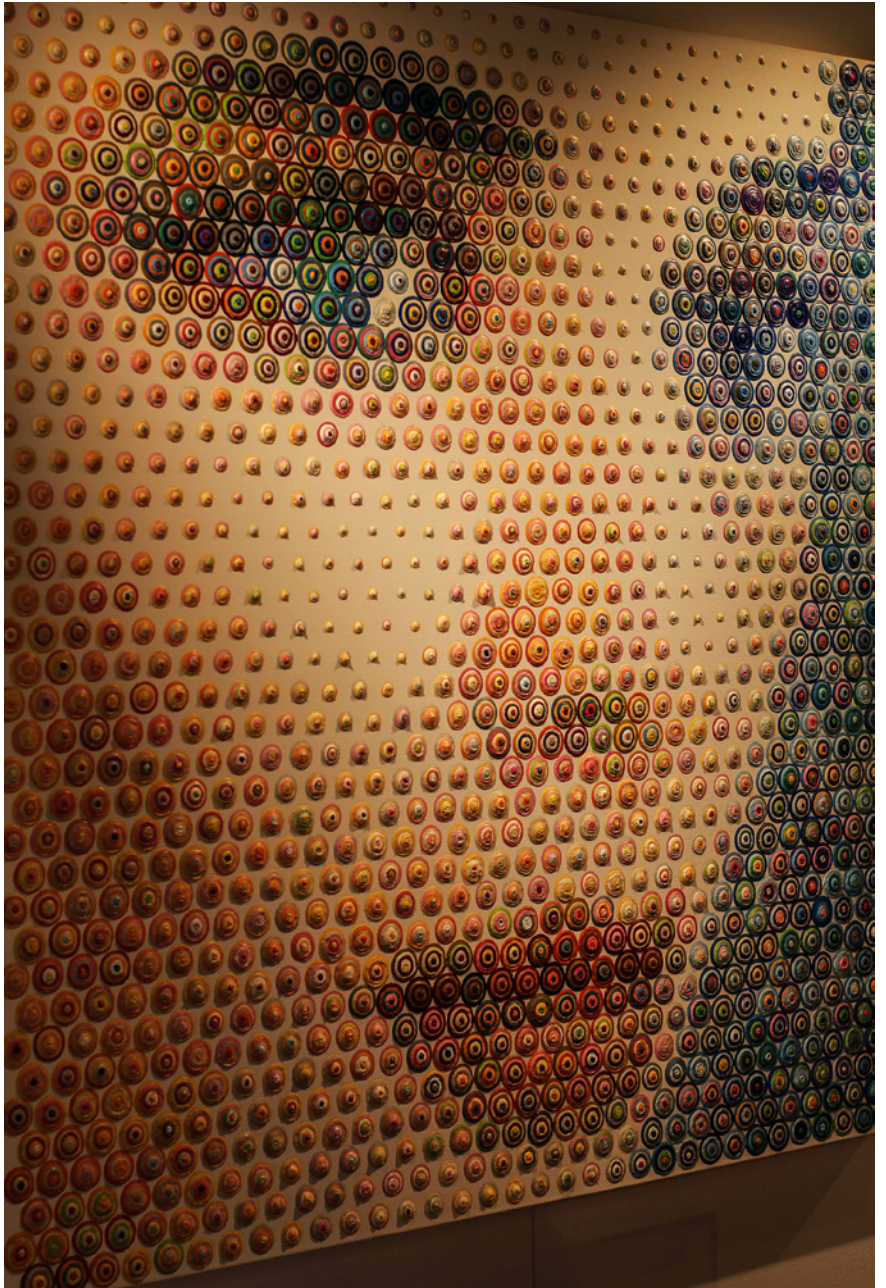
Universal model of a story

The study of text structure was initiated by a Russian literary scholar and precursor of narratology – Vladimir Propp, who undertook the analysis of structures of folk fairy tales (also known as magic fairy tales). Propp analysed Russian fairy tales. In 1928, he wrote "Morphology of the Folktale"[8], and almost 40 years later (in 1966) the thoughts formulated in this book were developed by a French sociologist, Algirdas Greimas. Propp's work was then discovered by French structuralists, led by Lévi-Strauss, who was delighted with Propp's analysis and decided to continue the analysis of narrative structures.

Propp's first conclusion is that the narrative form of fairy tales is universal in telling stories as such. Fairy tale is structured not by the nature of the characters that appear in it, but by the functions that they perform in the plot. In his analysis, Propp comes to the conclusion that despite numerous details and many characters of fairy tales, the number of functions is extremely small. This conclusion led the Russian scholar to distinguish between representation (large number of details and complexity) and reality (simple structure underlying the story, repeated in many different ways).

In The Morphology of the Folktale, Propp states that fairy tales – regardless of the culture in which they are rooted – have similar themes, for example, "a dragon kidnaps the king's daughter". Each of these themes can be divided into four elements, each of which can be replaced without affecting the basic structure of the story, since each element has a function as below:

8 Propp, Vladimir Yakovlevich. 2012. *The Russian Folktale by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp*, Wayne State University Press Detroit.

- element: DRAGON – function: FORCE OF EVIL – replacement: WITCH
- element: KING – function: RULER – replacement: CHIEF
- element: DAUGHTER – function: BELOVED PERSON – replacement: WIFE
- element: KIDNAPPING – function: SAFETY – replacement: DISAPPEARANCE.

Considering this example, we can replace "a dragon kidnapping the king's daughter" with "a witch causing the chief's wife to disappear", referring to the same function of each element. Therefore, a given function can be performed by many people with different roles, because the function of a given role arises from its significance for the structure of the story as a whole. In examining a group of 100 stories, Propp distinguished 31 functions (actions such as "prohibition", "violation", or "disappearance" as mentioned above). These functions are performed within seven action circles: the antagonist, the donor (provider), the helper, the princess (wanted character) and her father, the person sending the hero on a journey, the hero, the usurper. The selected types of characters make specific moves in their narration that make a given character credible and result in a specific type of action (Propp distinguished 7 of them).

Nearly 40 years later, Greimas[9] undertook research into narrative structures and in his conclusions agreed with Propp that it was necessary for narrative forms to be placed within a specific, finite number of elements and ways. However, the structure of these elements, proposed by Propp, was modified considerably.

[9] See: Schleifer, Ronald. *A.J.Greimas and the Nature of Meaning: Linguistics, Semiotics and Discourse Theory*, Routledge Library Editions: Literary Theory.
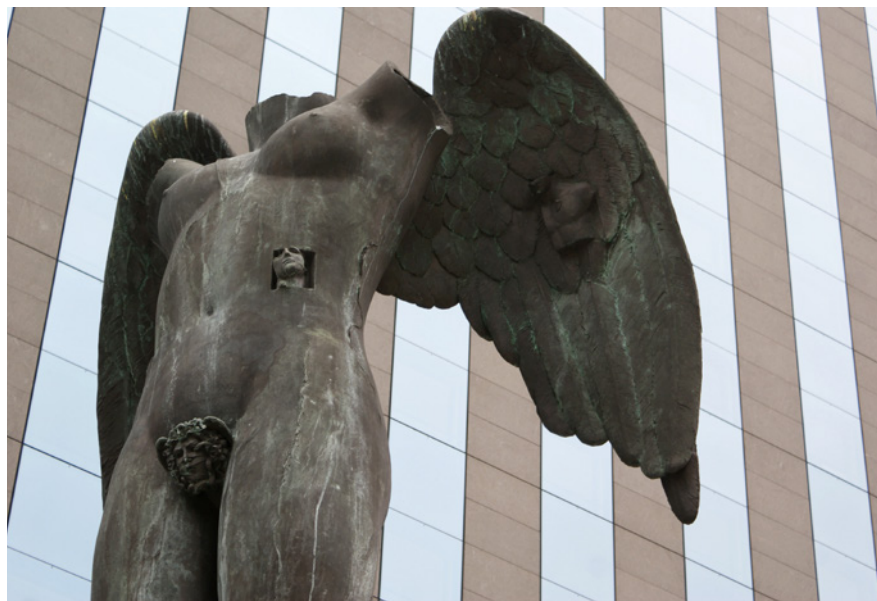
He reduced the list of seven circles of action to a set of three structural relations:

- SUBJECT versus OBJECT (a hero and a princess or a wanted character),
- SENDER versus RECEIVER (i.e. the father and the person who sends the hero),
- HELPER versus OPPONENT (donor, helper and antagonist).

Secondly, Greimas came to the conclusion that the 31 functions distinguished by Propp can be grouped together because they are very interlinked, and thus also reduce their number. For example, the "prohibition" and "violation" functions – as distinguished by Propp – are, according to Greimas, linked to each other. A "violation of rules" can only take place if there is some kind of "prohibition". Following this line of reasoning, Greimas distinguishes three basic structures of folk narratives. These are:

- contractual structures (relating to the conclusion and termination of contracts),
- execution structures (including testing, struggle),
- disconnection structures (relating to movement, departures, arrivals).

The reference to Propp and Greimas's work in the context of the political narrative serves to direct attention to two aspects of the social reality in which these phenomena operate. First, according to the theoretical perspective of structuralism, "meaning never resides in a single term"[10] and, as a consequence of this assumption, it is fundamental to seek to understand the ways of articulating individual elements. Secondly, the methodology

[10] See: Silverman, David. 1993. *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*, SAGE Publishing.

of structuralism makes it possible to illustrate the existence and functioning of the narrative structure. When we realize how much of the analysed qualitative data (interviews, documents, articles, research reports, analyses) is actually a narrative form, we can find the structure around which the narratives are constructed.

It should not be forgotten that structuralism itself appeared as an attempt to create a strict, objective, coherent and logical science about literature. It is a line of thoughts without a uniform programme. The main assumption of structural thought is based on the statement that social structure is more important than action. Beyond the fluid and changing manifestations of social reality, there are structures that we can say exist but which the members of the community who function in these structures are unaware of. Structure has the character of an ordered system in which modification of one of the elements affects the functioning of others. In philosophy, structuralism is first of all a methodological stance based on the assumption that in order to understand certain phenomena it is necessary to grasp the structure. In the literature studies initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure, from Switzerland, at the beginning of the 20th century, structuralism manifests itself in the understanding of language as a system of intertwined relations, rather than a loose set of elements. In the 1960s, when structuralism was the most successful, criticism of the methodology that tried to describe individual artistic creations in a systematic way started. The thought that was critical towards structuralism was called poststructuralism, and its origin is considered to be the paper "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Humanities" delivered by Jacques Derrida in 1966 during the conference "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man"
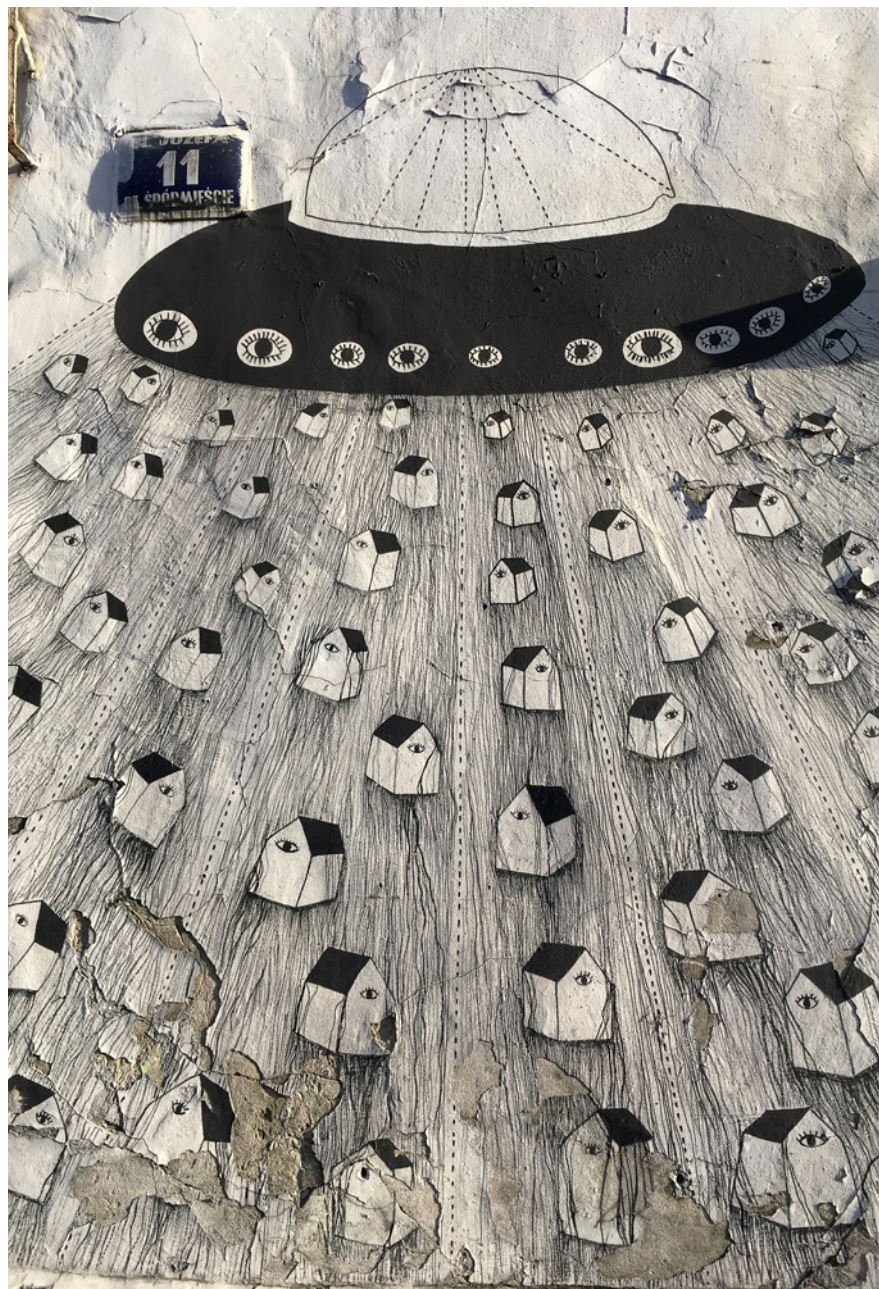
at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. Derrida postulated that text is not a natural reflection of reality. After Ludwig Wittgenstein, he believed that language determined interpretation. In his works, Pierre Bourdieu presents language as a socially unrecognized tool of power. I do not analyse the truthfulness or lack of truth of ontological statements. In fact, the two approaches – structuralist and poststructuralist – somehow complement each other regarding branding, storytelling and political discourse. Creating the image of a place is not about reflecting reality. The creation of a party's image is not aimed at presenting its programmatic assumptions. In each of these cases there is an awareness that by building a story we create this reality in a certain way.

Professionals who create stories – not literary works, but stories told to sell a certain product – draw on the work of structuralists, including Propp, because they assume that there is a universal storytelling pattern that will evoke certain emotions regardless of the culture in which the story is told. Nowadays, Propp's analysis is used for a variety of studies on different systems of culture, especially mass culture. It forms the basis for many analyses of film and television narratives, such as crime series, as well as the basis or starting point for other narratological theories. Most of the greatest film stories are based on this scheme. "Star Wars", "The Lord of the Rings", "Matrix", films about James Bond, as well as Disney fairy tales for children, including "Shrek", "Cars" and "Airplanes". The model of a story also works well in the case of the history of the biggest brands. Storytelling tools are also used by politicians. In 2008, Barack Obama, who appeared out of nowhere and who was initially given no chance to win, created a story summarized by the call "YES WE CAN" and seduced voters who felt

treated as subjects rather than as consumers of the "presidential elections" olympics. A similar strategy was applied in 2015 by Andrzej Duda, who was not known to Polish voters, sometimes confused with Piotr Duda, the chairman of "Solidarity", who did not have the best ratings. Yet he sold a story that the Poles liked and was elected president. The scheme proposed by Vladimir Propp is the basis on which modern marketers base their campaigns. It is a frame around which trainings for salespeople and businessmen are created.

Giving examples from the world of film, politics or specific product brands, I wanted to illustrate the omnipresence of a story. In the light of the above considerations, one may assume that understanding of the mythogenic process may translate into success of the branding strategy. In the case of a country, we do not only create an attractive and eye-catching campaign, we do not create a coherent business plan of coordinated actions, but in a sense we also design thought structures that allow us to interpret phenomena in the surrounding reality, that determine our judgments and choices.

Based on sociological considerations to date, we can conclude that building brand identity – including of a national brand – is done by creating narrative structures which will create a memorable story that can become the foundation of a positive stereotype. Image building is hence conditioned by discourse, which in turn is a form of power. As Michel Foucault wrote: "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized".[11]

11 Foucault, Michel. from *The Order of Discourse* R.Young, ed.*Untying the Text* (1971), Routledge & Kegan Paul.
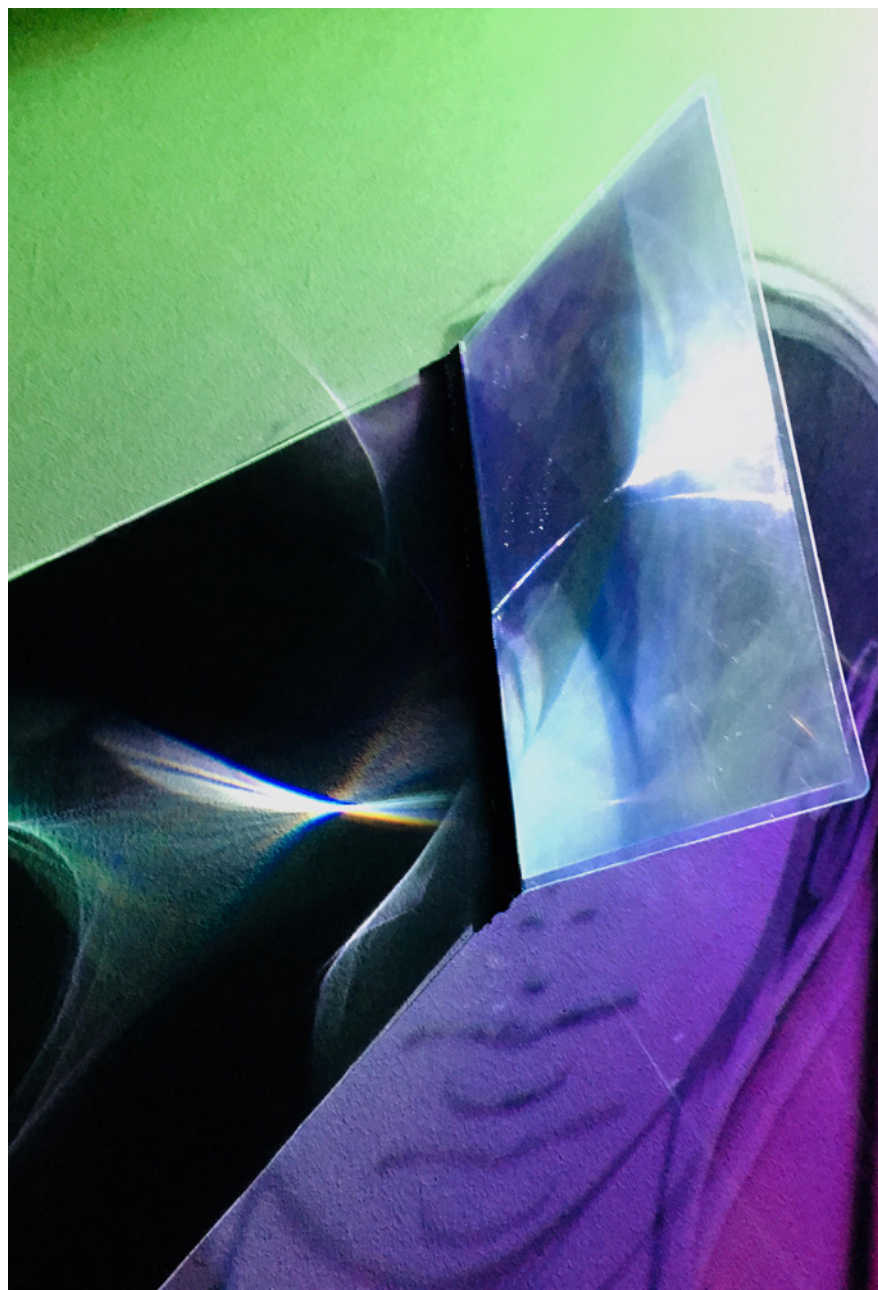
**The Himalayas of History,
or a few words instead of an ending**

Which story broke through in the information noise before the elections? Which story was understood, interpreted in the way the storyteller wanted it to be? Which story was engaging? Which vision of the future won?

Narratives – it is from them that human reality is woven. Such an approach, based on the conviction that reality is perceived through the prism of its culture and experience, is in sociology defined as constructivism, in political sciences it is defined as *agenda setting* – that is, establishing a media agenda, constructing the perception of current political and social events through the selection of presented contents, their order of presentation, building contexts for them.

The world of the beginning of the 21st century is a world in which an unimaginable amount of new content is produced per minute – not only by media corporations, but by all of us. It is a world in which new techniques of manipulation and social engineering are applied in an increasingly subtle way. Can we find any interpretation frames on the map of this world?

I believe that one of the most exploited interpretation frameworks in the last elections to the European Parliament was that which referred to European identity vs. national identity.

The election results show that the EU's great weakness is the fact that it has not been able to build a brand which the inhabitants of the Old Continent would identify with. It failed to build a coherent story about European identity. The EU has become a label instead of a brand. Made in the EU. And an "imaginary community".
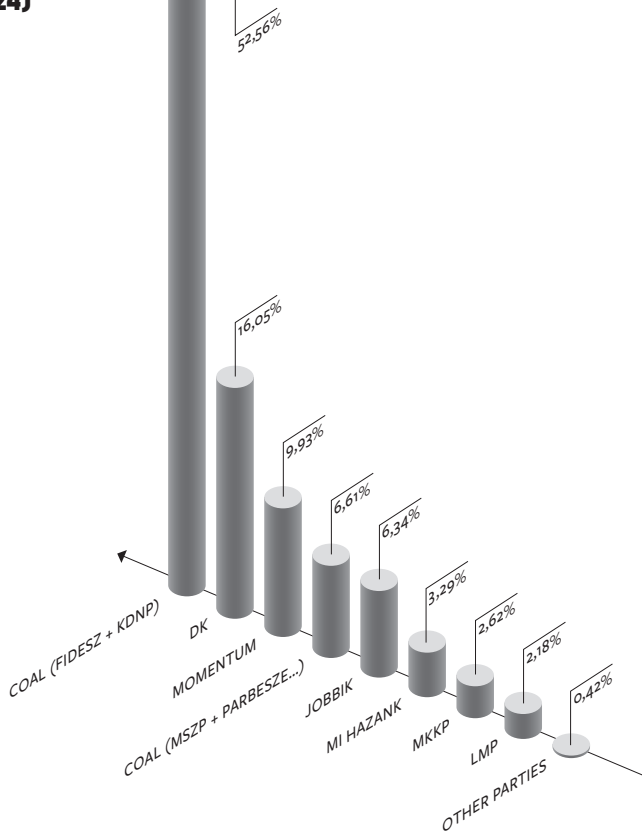
Oriana Fallaci's "Interview with Power" starts with a quotation from Guglielmo Ferrero: "for the Western mind, the problem of power is like a huge steep mountain full of cracks, glaciers, descending avalanches, which stands in the way of all mankind. You have to conquer the Himalayas of History to one day come out to the fertile plains of the future"[12]. I agree that it is necessary to conquer the Himalayas of History. Mainly in order to be able to tell a story that will allow the rebuilding of Europe.

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[12] Fallaci, Oriana. 2016. *Wywiad z władzą* [*Il Potere*], translated into Polish by: Hanna Borkowska, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Świat Książki [own translation].

▶ All pictures in the chapter were taken by the author.

RESULTS BY THE
NATIONAL PARTY
(2019–2024)

52,56%

16,05%

9,93%

6,61%

6,34%

3,29%

2,62%

2,18%

0,42%

COAL (FIDESZ + KDNP)

DK

MOMENTUM

COAL (MSZP + PARBESZE...)

JOBBIK

MI HAZANK

MKKP

LMP

OTHER PARTIES

joy

fear

EMOTIONS

LIBERAL MESSENGERS AS MESSAGES

● **Gergő Papp**

An illiberal state – The current situation in Hungary

Hungary has been governed by Viktor Orbán and his party, Fidesz, since 2010. After winning a two-thirds majority in 2010, which is enough to amend the country's constitution, Viktor Orbán immediately started to build up the system which seems almost impossible to beat for many.

The system is called the "System of National Cooperation"[1] (NER), but this is an empty phrase. What is much more descriptive is the term "illiberal state", which was used by Orbán in his 2014 annual political speech in Bálványos. Even though Orbán partly used the term to label his politics as non-liberal, it actually describes a state where the rule of law and the system of checks and balances are constantly getting weaker, while a Russian-style propaganda machine is getting more and more influential. Another good term to describe this phenomenon is the "hybrid

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[1] According to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a new social contract was signed at the 2010 parliamentary elections. Two months after the election, the Parliament adopted the Programme of National Cooperation: https://www.parlament. hu/irom39/00047/00047_e.pdf. The text of the declaration had to be hanged in all public administration buildings. Analysts say that 'NER' is the alias for all coming economic and political reforms, and an attempt to achieve profound changes in government, economy, and society.

system": half democracy, half autocracy[2]. One thing is certain: the purpose of Orbán's system is to keep power at all costs.

Fidesz has won two-thirds majorities three times: in 2010, in 2014, and 2018. In 2010, it was due to the failure of the previous government and the economic crisis, but Fidesz succeeded in the 2014 and 2018 elections partly because the party wrote a new electoral law, that increased the proportion of seats won in individual constituencies and made the individual constituency elections single-round elections. The rise of the far-right Jobbik also helped Fidesz to divide its opposition while staying in the "center" compared to Jobbik and the leftist opposition parties.

Currently, there are 8 parties in the Hungarian party system. Fidesz, the far-right governing party, which has been in power since 2010, is led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The post-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (mszp), was found in 1989 as one of the legal successors of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (mszmp). Since 2018, mszp is in cooperation with the green Dialogue party, which polls between 0–1%, but has a popular politician, Gergely Karácsony, who is currently the opposition's candidate for the position of Mayor of Budapest. Democratic Coalition is a leftist-liberal party of Ferenc Gyurcsány, who was the prime minister of the Socialist government from 2004 to 2009, before his resignation due to extreme unpopularity. In 2011, he left the Socialist party and created his own party. Jobbik was founded in the early 2000s as a far-right party, but became popular around 2006, partly due to its resistance to the leftist government, and partly due to growing hatred towards Roma people in

2 An article by Hungarian political scientist Gábor Filippov, in July 2018: https://24.hu/belfold/2018/07/31/filippov-gabor-a-hibrid-ellenforradalom-kora/

Hungary. After 2014, Jobbik started to move to the center and in 2019, they are cooperating with all the other opposition parties to help beat Fidesz. The Our Homeland Movement, founded in 2018, consists of far-right politicians who left Jobbik due to its cooperation with leftist parties. Momentum was founded in 2017 as a centrist, progressive party by mostly young people in their 20s and 30s. They received 3% in the general elections in 2018, but continued to attract attention and new members. Politics can be Different (LMP) is a green party founded in 2008. In the 2018 election, they received more than 7% of the votes, but due to internal fights, their most popular politicians left the party and now they are polling around 2%. The Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) is a joke-party, currently polling between 1–3%.

In 2015, when the migration crisis reached the European Union, Fidesz changed its politics and moved further to the right, using its anti-immigration stance to take votes from Jobbik. The government built a fence at the end of 2015 around its Southern border. Its politicians and the government's propaganda depicted migrants as terrorists, stirring up xenophobia and racism everywhere in the country. In a very short period of time, the migrant issue became the number one issue in Hungary, even though no migrant wanted to remain in the country. Fidesz successfully used its propaganda in the past 4 years to depict all opposition parties as pro-immigration and branded itself as the only anti-immigrant party that defends Christian Hungary. Opposition parties were unable to react successfully; all of the parties stated that they would not tear down the fence, yet also added that the government is only using migrants as a propaganda tool to stay in power. In these years, Jobbik started to move closer to

the center, as it realized that Fidesz is winning over the far-right voters with its new narrative.

In the 2018 general election, Jobbik became the strongest opposition party (20%) but refused to cooperate with the opposition. MSZP-Dialogue received 11%, the green LMP received 7%, Democratic Coalition, the party of the former Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, received 5%, while Momentum, which appeared in politics only a year before, received 3%. While Fidesz received only 49% of the popular vote, the lack of cooperation among the opposition parties in individual constituencies resulted in another two-thirds majority for Fidesz.

The 2018 election had a serious psychological impact on the opposition parties and voters: after some internal battles, all the opposition parties came to the conclusion that the system of Fidesz can only be beaten through cooperation. Due to this recognition, at the end of 2018, all of the opposition parties demonstrated together against an overtime law[3] (dubbed 'slave law') and started their campaigns for the European Parliament elections with this new political attitude.

Thus, the opposition understood that they needed to cooperate in demonstrations, and also in the 2019 municipal elections, and in the 2022 general elections in order to beat the hegemonic governing party, as these two elections have individual constituencies with first-past-the-post electoral systems. For the 2019 European Parliament election, the idea of a common electoral list came up, but unlike in Poland, opposition parties decided to run on separate lists to show their independent political profile, and

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3 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/18/hungary-opposition-plans-more-protests-after-slave-law-passes-viktor-orban

to try to strengthen their position within the opposition. It was logical, as there was no real need to cooperate in the 2019 European Parliament elections, which has a proportional election system.

A side effect of the symbolic cooperation in demonstrations against the 'slave law' at the end of 2018, was that the differences between opposition parties started to disappear, which makes it difficult to mobilize the parties' core bases in the EP campaign.

Thus, after the joint demonstrations in December 2018 against the 'slave law', the parties faced the problem that they have to campaign with their independent party lists, while their only real opponent is Fidesz.

A 2-year old party preparing for the European elections – The short story of the Momentum Movement

The story of the Momentum Movement started in 2015, when its current president, András Fekete-Győr gathered 9 people with the purpose of creating a new political party. Mr. Fekete-Győr was studying abroad, in France, during the 2014 general elections and he saw that while Viktor Orbán has been transforming Hungary into an illiberal state, the parties and politicians in the opposition are still the same ones whose failure led to Fidesz's success in 2010. It was clear for him and for many in his generation that with the same opposition parties, Fidesz will not lose elections in the near future. They started to build a community mostly of university students and career-starters in their twenties, which became a 140-member movement by the end of 2016. Momentum Movement burst into the political scene of Hungary at the beginning of 2017, when the group initiated a referendum on Hungary's 2024 Olympic bid. Momentum Movement campaigned against

Hungary's Olympic bid, with the campaign title 'Nolimpia'. There were two main messages: One is that it just costs too much money, while hospitals and schools are in terrible shape, so the money should be invested in areas like education and health care. The other message was that hosting the Olympic Games would be just an opportunity for corrupt businessmen close to Fidesz to increase their wealth.

In order to hold a referendum, Momentum had to collect 138.000 signatures, which seemed impossible in 30 days. For this reason, the government tried to stay silent about the issue at first. However, when it became clear that Momentum has a chance to collect the necessary amount of signatures, the government started calling Momentum 'unpatriotic' and attacked the leaders of the movement with various lies, using its propaganda machine, including the country's public television. One propagandist close to the government even said that whoever gives their signature to Momentum is a 'traitor'.

During the campaign, Momentum appeared with its organization in the streets of Budapest, and their leaders were in the media's focus for a whole month.

The very first campaign of Momentum was a huge success: the movement gathered 266.151 signatures in a month, almost double the necessary to hold a referendum. Seeing the numbers, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán withdrew Hungary's bid from hosting the Olympics, as it was obvious that there is no clear popular support behind it (public polls showed that the support was rapidly deteriorating during the signature collection).

After the success, Momentum began to build up its network all around Hungary, transforming itself from a 140-member Buda-

pest organization into a party with around 100 local chapters in the country. Momentum was the first new party since 2010 that was able to build up a country-organization, eliciting interest in all parts of the country, mostly among young people. The media often portrayed Momentum as a generational party due to the young age of its leaders and members, while Momentum emphasized the need to exceed the left-right political cleavage.

Despite its early successes, Momentum received only 3% in the 2018 parliamentary election, which could have meant the end of the party. Instead, more than 2.000 people applied to join Momentum in the following days. This was unexpected for the party, but it was probably due to the fact that opposition voters were disappointed with the other opposition parties. These parties were promising that they will end Fidesz's rule since 2010, but they were not even able to prevent the two-thirds majority of Fidesz in 2018, let alone bringing new energies into the opposition. This allowed the one-year-old Momentum party to be seen as something that's very different than these older parties and its extraparliamentary status contributed to this image. With the party's re-elected leader, András Fekete-Győr, they started to prepare for the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Fidesz

Momentum participated in the 2018 protests against the 'slave law', where the party's Vice-President (now MEP) Anna Donáth was detained and kept at a police station for the night because of a harmless smoking flare. Later, Momentum led the demonstrators to the building of the state television, which became a symbolic site for the protests.

Momentum's Vice-President Anna Donath holds up a smoking flare in a December protest against the 'slave law' in Budapest, Hungary. SOURCE: Péter Kőhalmi/AFP

Instead of falling apart, Momentum became stronger and focused on the upcoming European elections, while its rivals (e.g. Jobbik, LMP) were occupied with internal conflicts. While Momentum was founded on the idea of creating a new political cleavage between itself and all the other parties, it gave up its strict independent politics and started to cooperate with other opposition parties. With this decision, Momentum gave up an important part of its identity.

The party gave up its independent politics and started to cooperate with other political parties, giving up an important part of its identity. Public polls started to show Momentum at above 5%, so reaching the threshold seemed more and more probable.

However, another failure to reach the threshold could have meant the end of the party.

This was the mood in which Momentum was preparing for the European Parliament elections.

Creating new political cleavages in Hungary with emotional campaigning

While the opposition was bound together in the previous one-year period only by its anti-Orbanism, Momentum tried a new message. After trying out similar messages during 2017, the party put its emphasis on a new political cleavage which can be experienced all around Europe, namely that in the coming years, instead of a competition between the center-right and the center-left, the actual political battle will happen between pro-EU, centrist, parties and anti-EU, Russian-friendly, far-right parties. This was most prominently demonstrated by the French presidential elections in 2017, the success of which has also convinced Momentum that this new political cleavage is real.

Momentum's European Parliament campaign had two equally powerful elements that worked together surprisingly well: an emotional and a rational, materialistic, element.

For Momentum, emphasizing the pro-EU/anti-EU political cleavage and putting Momentum on the pro-EU side was easy: many of its founders, politicians, and members studied or worked abroad and spoke several languages, and the party even called itself the party of the "Erasmus generation". This was very different from other parties and politicians.

It was also clear what Fidesz's campaign message would be: since the migration crisis began in 2015, the governing party used

Momentum President András-Fekete Győr in the party's pro-Europe protest

this issue in every election campaign, branding itself as the only true "anti-immigration" party, and stirring xenophobia and racism to receive more votes. Fidesz also added George Soros to the campaign as the "puppet master" behind migration, who wants to execute the "Soros plan" with the help of 'Brussels' and opposition parties to "flood Hungary with migrants". The governing party even had George Soros placed along with Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker on a billboard, with the caption 'You have the right to know what Brussels is planning to do!'.

Momentum started to build up its European alliances very early, meeting with En Marche, NEOS, and many other ALDE parties

in 2017. Momentum was a real European party from the beginning, evolving alongside similar parties in Europe, along the new pro-EU/anti-EU political cleavage.

The illiberal system and anti-EU stance of Viktor Orbán pushed all parties that opposed it to the pro-EU side; that even happened to the formerly Eurosceptic Jobbik, to an extent. However, when this happened, Momentum had the advantage, as it had built its story around the new pro-EU/anti-EU political cleavage since it appeared on the political stage in January 2017. For this reason, Momentum was more authentic on the pro-EU side than the other opposition parties.

Of course, it was easy for Momentum to use the new political cleavage for its advantage because the illiberal system and anti-EU stance of Viktor Orbán had pushed all parties that oppose it to the pro-EU side. This new political cleavage became even more clear in the last two months of the campaign, when Viktor Orbán got into a conflict with the European People's Party (EPP) and hosted then-Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache and then-Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in Hungary, while someone close to the government even spoke about possibly forming a far-right alliance with them.

Facing an anti-EU government that is so far from them on the political landscape, Momentum was able to offer itself as a pro-EU, youthful alternative, without the compromises of decades-old center-right and center-left parties. A party that is moving fast, has several international allies, pays close attention to the newest campaign techniques in Europe and in the USA, does campaign on a professional level and with discipline, understands the need for a clear party hierarchy, creates inner cohesion.

So after the failure of the opposition in the 2018 general election, opposition voters found a new alternative that can bring fresh energy to the opposition.

Besides its logo and bright purple color, Momentum used the European Union flag as a symbol wherever it could. This was clear at the main campaign event, the 'Europe March' on 1st May 2019, for which Momentum invited some of its international allies: Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, Senator Emma Bonino, and ALDE Vice-President Luis Garicano. Their invitation also strengthened Momentum's uncompromising stance: even after being called "traitors" and a party that "serves foreign interests" in the pro-government media, Momentum continued being proud of its European allies.

While presenting its program in March, Momentum used the slogans "We Are Europe" and "Momentum + Europe = Future" to show its European identity and commitment to Europe. Even the titles of the program's main chapters were a message of pro-Europeanism: 'Europe that looks into the future', 'Strong Europe' and 'Cohesive Europe'. Momentum even started to coin the term 'European Patriotism' in Hungary, which was summed up in a strong phrase referring to a common European army: "European fighter jets to the European skies!".

Momentum also used the young age of its politicians and its popularity among young people to its advantage: when a study came out that Momentum is the most popular party among university students, the communications team created Facebook advertisements and leaflets to promote this message.

Other 'media stunts' also contributed to Momentum's image as a youthful party that is constantly looking for new ways to

Momentum and ALDE politicians at the party's 'Europe March' in 2019 May
SOURCE: Momentum

reach voters. One of these was when the party's politician, Miklós Hajnal was invited to the government-controlled public media television channel M1 for a 5-minute speech. That was the second time Momentum was ever invited to M1, which is mainly a propaganda tool for the government. In the 5 minutes, Momentum's politician read "real news", the news that did not appear in the public media, such as some corruption cases of Viktor Orbán's relatives, and the fact that more and more young people want to leave Hungary. The video[4] was uploaded to Youtube and Facebook and went viral.

4 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2449200765119798
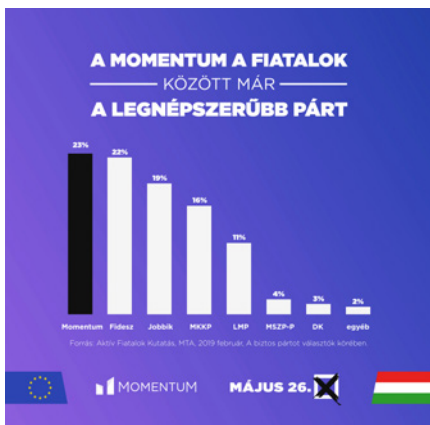
↑ Momentum advertisements with the text: "Momentum is the most popular party among young people". SOURCE: Momentum

→ Momentum's offline campaign advertisements with the text "EU funds only for hospitals, schools, and jobs!". SOURCE: Momentum

EU funds only for hospitals, schools, and jobs

"EU funds only for hospitals, schools, and jobs!" – this is the slogan Momentum used to complement its emotional campaigning with a materialistic message. It was simple and very clear: Momentum proposed that EU funds should only be used for these purposes, instead of other things that proved to be useless, or even harmful to Hungarian democracy.

Behind the slogan, there was a more detailed story, and during the campaign, Momentum told this story in its entirety. The five elements of the story were:

1 **The Hungarian government is spending EU funds on use-less projects.** During the campaign, Momentum talked about and showed several EU-funded projects that seemed useless,

like fountains and very low, 40-centimeter lookouts. With this, Momentum sent the message that the government cannot be trusted with EU funds, thus it should be limited to fund only hospitals, schools, and jobs.

2 **The Hungarian government is stealing EU funds.** As it had appeared in the press several times, people close to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, such as his son-in-law István Tiborcz, won several EU-funded projects with high margins. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) investigated some of these projects, but only had the authority to write a public report. Considering this, Momentum's slogan was just as much about the government's corruption as about schools, hospitals, and jobs.

3 **The distribution mechanism of EU funds should be reconsidered.** Behind the slogan was the idea that the payment of EU funds should be linked to the situation of the rule of law in the country. Another proposal was to link EU funds to the country's membership in the European Public Prosecutor's Office, which the Hungarian government refused to join.

4 **The condition of Hungarian hospitals and schools is catastrophic while pro-government businessmen are getting richer.** Contrasting the state of health care and education with the wealth of businessmen close to the prime minister is a recurring element of opposition politics. With its campaign focusing on EU funds, Momentum was able to "recycle" this topic and received many positive reactions.

→ ALDE's campaign truck of Viktor Orbán, which Momentum used in the Hungarian campaign. SOURCE: Momentum

5 EU **funds are used by the Hungarian government to build an illiberal state.** EU funds are not only used to make pro-government businessmen and the family of Viktor Orbán rich but also to fund an ever-growing propaganda machine that helps Fidesz to stay in power. This is the opposite of what EU funds are for.

The story behind the slogan connected with Momentum's emotional messages, creating a campaign that was exciting and realistic at the same time.

Messengers as messages: Katalin Cseh and Anna Donáth

The actual message of Momentum was only one part of its story. As a new party with very low financial resources, Momentum needed to be creative and extremely effective to convince the necessary number of voters, to reach the 5% threshold. The tools used to get the message through were not just the new ways of communication and resource management, but became an integral part of Momentum's story and brand.

Besides professional online targeting and constant updates on Momentum's politicians' Instagram, Momentum also created its own politicians' reaction GIFs, which were used in Instagram stories and Facebook chats thousands of times.

Momentum considers itself as a movement rather than a party, which primarily means that hundreds of its members are eager to spend their free time working for Momentum's success. This is most prominent during campaigns when hundreds of members get out to the streets and talk to voters all around the country. The constant presence of Momentum's members and activists in all corners of the country brought the party's message (and its

Screencaps of gifs of Momentum politicians, which can be found through Facebook's and Instagram's GIF search

bright purple color) to those who were not following elections closely via the media. The young age of the party's activists also sent a message: The new generation is here.

As it happened all around Europe, politics became much more personalized in Hungary as well. That is why the most important messengers of Momentum's messages were Katalin Cseh and Anna Donáth, the two women at the top of the party's election list. When Momentum announced its election list, the main point to communicate was that Momentum's list is led by two women, thus emphasizing the symbolism of women politicians in a very masculine political environment.

The two leading candidates of Momentum communicated the party's campaign narrative perfectly, sticking to the slogan and going into details when time allowed it. Every day they told the story of why EU funds must only be spent on hospitals, schools, and jobs, and talked about the government's corruption regarding EU funds.

As young women in their early thirties, Katalin Cseh and Anna Donáth were not just messengers of Momentum's campaign message; they were also 'messages'. With them, Momentum showed its core image clearer than ever before: young people who are
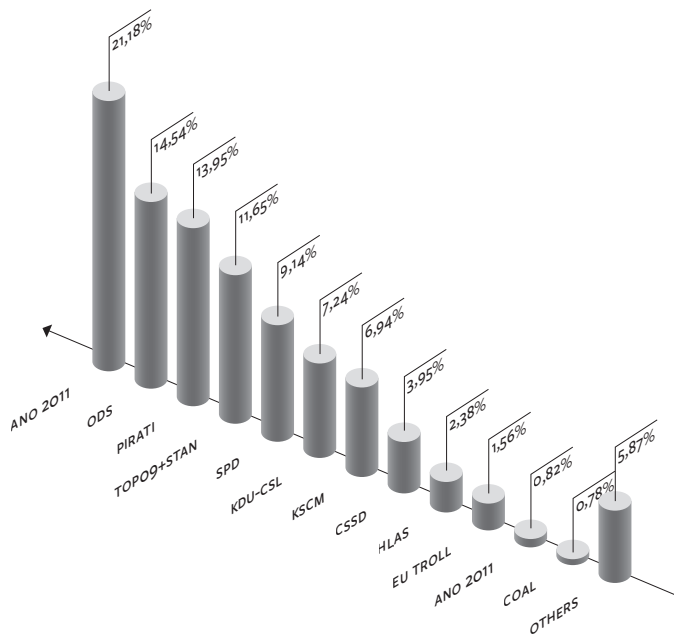
↑ "Vote for the future, vote for Momentum! Female leading candidates are
the most popular! More women to the European Parliament!". SOURCE: Momentum
→ Mostly young Momentum activists collecting signatures around the country
SOURCE: Momentum

part of a new political generation, who speak several languages,
who studied and worked abroad but returned home to get into
politics in Hungary, and to overthrow its illiberal government. ●

GOOD STORY

offers a better, positive alternative to the current state of affairs. It gives hope to those who are looking for change and can be mobilized.

RESULTS BY THE
NATIONAL PARTY
(2019–2024)

21,18%
14,54%
13,95%
11,65%
9,14%
7,24%
6,94%
3,95%
2,38%
1,56%
0,82%
0,78%
5,87%

ANO 2011
ODS
PIRATI
TOP09+STAN
SPD
KDU-CSL
KSCM
CSSD
HLAS
EU TROLL
ANO 2011
COAL
OTHERS

rage

EMOTIONS

THE FEAR OF BEING MARGINALIZED IN THE CENTER OF EUROPE

● **Veronika Špalková**

In the Czech Republic, during recent years, the number of anchored voters who regularly vote for the same party has been decreasing. On the contrary, the number of voters who decide just before elections, many of who do so directly at the polling station, is increasing. Political campaigns are, therefore, becoming more important and it is not enough to run them just for a few weeks before elections. According to Czech political scientist Jakub Charvát, we are at the time of "media-intensive" campaigns. This entails several phenomena: permanent campaigns, personalization and professionalization of campaigns, use of social networks, and above all – emotionalization.[1]

In general, the campaign before the EP elections in the Czech Republic mainly touched upon the European Union, as such, and the migration issues. Commentator of the major Czech media Aktualne.cz, Petr Janyška, described the situation as follows: "No great enthusiasm. Fragmentation. No common strategy. Greatly unknown which fraction of the Czech parties will become a part

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[1] Charvát, Jakub. 2018. „Nové prvky českých volebních kampaní: personalizace, emocionalizace, sociální sítě." *Top-az.eu* online (pdf). Available from: <http://www.top-az.eu/files/downloads/nove-prvky-ceskych-volebnich-kampani-personalizace-emocionalizace-socialni-site.pdf>.

of the European Parliament. 'Czech-Czech' domestic campaign lacking international topics which Europe lives with today: climate, plastics, droughts. As if it was an election to the Czech parliament. Zero participation of European politicians. Nationalists of all kinds driving against Europeans; fear of the world or of the openness to it."[2]

The discussion on European integration is confined to domestic problems; it is vague and is characterized by a lack of understanding of the basic principles of the EU and the role of the Czech Republic in the EU and its institutions. Over the past five years, we have seen a significant shift in the debate on the European Union: from considering the advantages and disadvantages of future eurozone membership to the requirement to hold a referendum on withdrawal from the EU.[3]

A total of 40 Czech parties and movements participated in the EP elections. Several different Europhobic and Eurosceptic groups were formed, such as the Czech Independence Party (gaining 0.40% of votes) or the Czech Sovereignty Party (gaining 0.11% of votes), but none that would, albeit naively, promote the benefits of the EU.

Euroscepticism dominated the pre-election debate from its beginning to its end. A great example of this is a party that won the European elections – ANO 2011 (YES 2011). This party is the current ruling party in the Czech Republic and it reigns in a coalition with the Czech Social Democratic Party. The ANO 2011

2 https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/evropske-volby-provincni-klidek-ceske-kampane/r~5a4a45e47bac11e9b6a9ac1f6b220ee8/.
3 http://www.top-az.eu/files/downloads/topaz-pravicova-reseni-politickych-vyzev-pro-rok-2019.pdf.

Andrej Babiš.
SOURCE: Facebook archive
of Andrej Babiš

is a project of one of the richest Czechs, Andrej Babiš, who is currently also the Prime Minister. It is a party that offers voter with its election programs a quick and simple solution to exactly the problems that currently plague them. Such a political party cannot be identified on the right-left spectrum because it is constantly moving across its center. The election slogan of this party in the election campaign to the EP became: "We will protect the Czech Republic. Hard and uncompromisingly.", without clarifying what ANO 2011 is trying to protect the country from. Andrej Babiš and his promoters were also inspired by Donald Trump – the Prime Minister set out among the public in a red cap with the inscription: "Strong Czech Republic".

Almost immediately, after the publication of this pre-election strategy, another photo of the cap appeared. It shows that Babiš's cap is "made in China", which only proves a somewhat ironic and

bittersweet reality in which Babiš "effortfully and uncompromisingly protects the Czech Republic".

The debate on national sovereignty gained momentum at the time of crisis in the eurozone, in sight of the demand for 'repayment of the Greek debt' by all euro area countries, pointing to the situation of Slovakia, as a new member of the eurozone, and even more powerfully charged up with the development of the migration crisis. As the migration crisis was directly related to the EU, and even though it affected the Czech reality only marginally, it influenced significantly the current discourse on the future of the Czech Republic in the EU and, reinforced by Brexit, even raised the issue of leaving the EU.[4]

The process of emotionalization of campaigns goes hand-in-hand with the process of trivialization, as voters make political decisions far less based on logical arguments and much more on the emotions and overall image of the party and its leader. In recent years, this phenomenon has become so significant in the Czech Republic, that it even has been addressed by analyst Milan Petrák, who proposed a unique analysis[5] of the so-called 'group irrationality'. It is based on the theory that irrational groups, no matter what their members believe in or fight against, have a greater tendency to demagogy. They can, therefore, be recognized through the way they communicate. The more irrationality they hold, the more aggressively they communicate. Mr. Petrák created a list of words the use of which, in this sense, indicates

[4] http://www.top-az.eu/files/downloads/topaz-pravicova-reseni-politickych-vyzev-pro-rok-2019.pdf
[5] More information available in: Petrák, Milan. 2011. *Skrytá autorita: Iracionalita a dav v člověku*. Dybbuk.

irrationality and applied his research to the European Parliament elections of 2019.[6]

Mr. Petrák used texts found on websites of the political parties and blogs of the main officials from the period of December 1st, 2018 to April 17th, 2019. In the Czech Republic, a total of 40 parties and movements took part in the EP elections. Most of them gained only a marginal number of votes and did not get into the EP. Among the relevant political parties, the Green Party, the Czech Pirate Party, and STAN (Mayors and Independents) performed best in Mr. Petrák's linguistic analysis. They communicated most objectively and least emotionally. The Greens did not get into the EP, having only 0,60% of the votes. The Czech Pirate Party won 14% of the votes and took 3 seats in the EP. This is a great success, comparing to the 2014 elections when they remained just below the 5% threshold required for a mandate. STAN participated in the election in a two-party coalition with the TOP 09 party and together they managed to get 11,65% of the votes and to take 3 seats in the EP.

The following parties have repeatedly found themselves on the other side of the spectrum: The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), and Tomio Okamura's Direct Democracy Party (SPD). These parties communicated most aggressively and most emotionally. The KSČM managed to exceed the 5% limit by 2 percent and thus gained 1 mandate in the EP. The ODS was the second most successful Czech party in the European elections and now holds 4 seats in the EP with 14,5% of votes. The SPD had phenomenal

[6] http://iracionalita.net/index.php

success and, with 9,14% of the votes, has two MEPs. The success of the SPD is considered phenomenal mainly because the party was formed only 4 years ago and thus did not participate in the 2014 EP elections.[7]

It was the SPD that built its success on a strongly negative campaign against everything that is not Czech. SPD is probably the most radical movement of the current Czech political scene. It is a far-right party, one of the most Eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties in the political spectrum on the European level. With its programs and rhetoric, the SPD movement appeals to two of the strongest fears that have resonated across the whole Czech society in recent years: the fear of losing freedom due to European integration and the fear of losing identity and nationality due to migration. Milan Petrák's linguistic analysis showed that out of over a thousand of emotional words indicating rhetorical aggression, these are the most commonly used in regards to SPD's program, comments, and politicians: brutal, dictation, lie, mad, sovereignty, freedom, globalists, multiculturalism, struggle, death.[8]

In mainstream politics, the relatively new call to leave the EU is related to trying to use the voices of the dissatisfied, to give them a story and a simple answer. It strengthens the perception of Czech activity in the EU as of a second-order membership, which is influenced by the feeling that the Czech Republic has a secondary role in the EU. The Czech Republic feeds on its story of a small country that others try to control and that has minimal

7 https://www.bisnode.cz/o-bisnode/o-nas/novinky/pred-volbami-do-evropskeho-parlamentu-nejvecneji-komunikuji-zeleni-pirati-a-stan/
8 https://www.bisnode.cz/o-bisnode/o-nas/novinky/pred-volbami-do-evropskeho-parlamentu-nejvecneji-komunikuji-zeleni-pirati-a-stan/
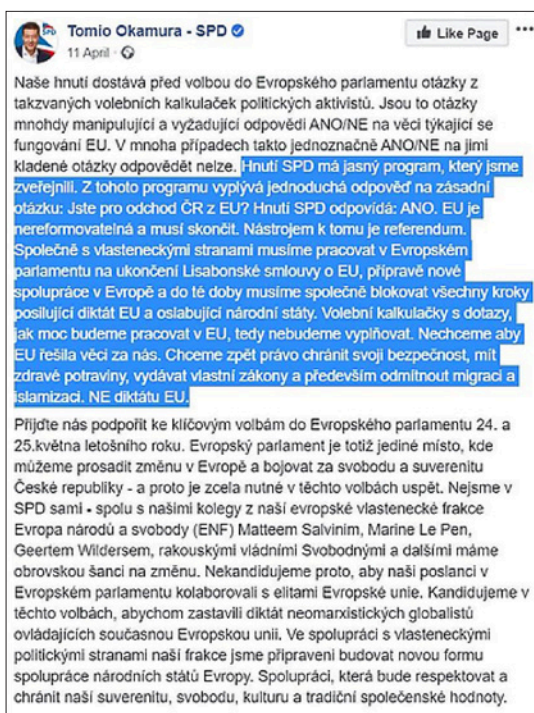
possibilities to influence the behavior of the superpowers. This very frequently used approach is summed up by the sentence of the former Czech President Václav Klaus (2017): "Our peculiarity is that for thousands of years we have been dealing with the problem of the survival of a small country neighboring Germany's continental hegemon."[9]

This "trend" appears very often in the rhetoric of the SPD: the "Munich dictate" of 1938, which broke the integrity of the Czech land and deprived it of sovereignty just before World War II, is often compared with the new "Brussels dictate" which is slowly, but surely, depriving us of sovereignty the same way. Regarding the migration crisis, SPD speaks of a "German dictate" that has caused a rush of refugees to Europe and is now forcing us to integrate migrants who are supposed to damage the traditional Christian values of the Czech nation.

In addition to the total abuse of emotions (extreme emotionalization of the campaign), SPD also fulfills other phenomena described in the first paragraph: it is characterized by strong personalization, since all of the actions of this party depend on its founder and chairman Tomio Okamura (the patriotic, nationalist, and anti-immigrant party in the Czech Republic is indeed successfully led by half-Czech and half-Japanese, who does business in the niche of Japanese cuisine and Sushi). All communication of the SPD Party is through Tomio Okamura. His strongest weapons are social networks (another phenomenon of the modern political campaign) and disinformation sites which are willing to publish his opinions.

[9] http://institutvk.cz/clanky/980.html

He posts on Facebook several times a day. The posts are usually very long, with almost no information, and full of hate focused on the EU, Germany, migrants, Czech politicians, political parties, etc. The following screenshot shows one of his pre-European-election posts; the highlighted part is translated into English below:

Tomi Okamura
SOURCE: Facebook
of Tomio Okamura

Translation: "The SPD has a clear agenda which we have published. This program gives a simple answer to the fundamental question: Are you in favor of the Czech Republic leaving the EU? The SPD movement responds: YES. The EU is unreformable and
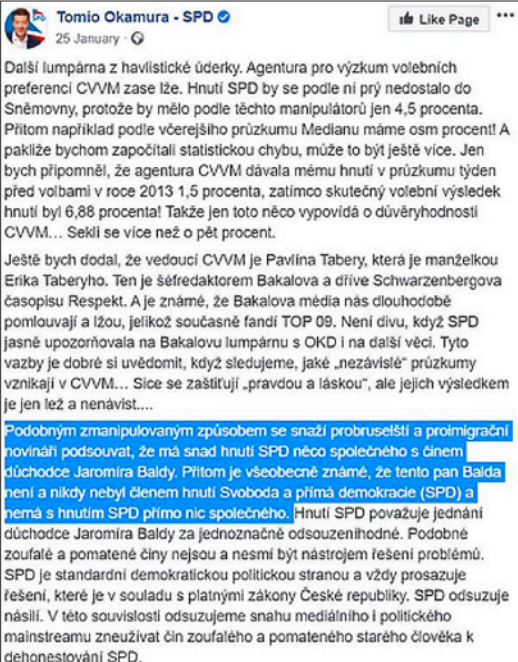
must end. The instrument to do this is a referendum. Together, with the patriotic parties, we must work in the European Parliament to end the Lisbon Treaty on the EU, to prepare a new cooperation in Europe, and together we must block all steps that strengthen the dictation of the EU and weaken nation-states. So, we will not fill out electoral calculators asking how much we will work in the EU. We do not want the EU to deal with things for us. We want the right to protect our security, have healthy food, make our own laws and, above all, reject migration and Islamization. NO to the EU dictation."

This aggressive rhetoric, which attacks basic human emotions, provokes in some of the more vulnerable people the effort to defend themselves by all possible means, not just by voting in elections. So, while there are practically no migrants from the last migration wave in the Czech Republic and there has never been a terrorist attack caused by a foreigner, we already have our own Czech terrorist.

The 71-year-old SPD sympathizer Jaromír Balda caused two train accidents in 2017 by deliberately laying down felled trees on the tracks. Around the felled trees, he left leaflets with the words "Allah Akbar!" (In Arabic – "God is great!"). Then, he sent out similar printouts to different mailboxes and posted them in public places. He wanted to set the blame for his deeds onto Muslim migrants, thus creating a fear of a migration wave in the society. During the interrogation and trial, Mr. Bald made it clear of how terrified he was due to the anti-immigrant propaganda when he said: "I had dreams about how they [Muslim immigrants] were here – how they cut our heads, shouted their religious slogans." In April 2019, he was sentenced to 4 years in prison for a terrorist act.

The SPD distanced itself from Mr. Balda via Tomia Okamura's Facebook profile, as shown in the next screenshot (the high-lighted section is translated below).

Tomi Okamura
SOURCE: Facebook
of Tomio Okamura

Translation: "In a similar manipulated manner, the Pro-Brussels and pro-immigration journalists try to testify that perhaps the SPD movement has something to do with the act of pensioner Jaromír Balda. It is a common knowledge that Mr. Balda is not, and has never been, a member of the SPD movement and has nothing to do with the SPD movement."

Roman Máca. SOURCE: Twitter of Roman Máca

Okamura issued this statement, even though there was some visual evidence that he had much to do with the SPD. In the following photo, you can see Mr. Balda (front right) engaged in a live discussion with Tomio Okamura himself (front left). The next picture shows Mr. Balda playing accordion at the SPD petition stand.

This very unfortunate example is just the tip of the iceberg. The SPD has gained over 9% in the EP elections, and many of these people are as scared as Mr. Balda but have not yet gone from long-term anxiety to acute fear that carries aggression. Even though this case was closed in mid-April of 2019, immediately before the European elections, it did not hurt the party in any way.

The genesis of the campaigns to the European Parliament in the Czech Republic was based to a large degree on the national themes and policies, with a distant awareness of something

Roman Máca. SOURCE: Twitter of Roman Máca

transnational or European. A strong European theme was missing; the Czech Republic was perceived as a peripheral country to European events. In the discussion on the direction of the EU, the contradictions between European and national policy came to the forefront and the number of voices of Eurosceptics in the EU membership increased. ●

GOOD STORY

is build on emotions, not rational arguments and numbers. It is not about copying populists' negative narrations but about appealing to emotions just like they do.

RESULTS BY THE NATIONAL PARTY (2019–2024)

Bar chart showing results by national party (2019–2024):

- COAL (PS + SPOLU) — 20,11%
- SMER-SD — 15,72%
- ĽSNS — 12,07%
- KDH — 9,69%
- SAS — 9,62%
- COAL (OĽANO + NOVA) — 5,25%
- SMK-MPK — 4,96
- SNS — 4,09%
- KU — 3,85%
- SME RODINA — 3,23%
- MOST-HID — 2,59%
- KDŹP — 2,06%
- OTHER PARTIES — 6,76%
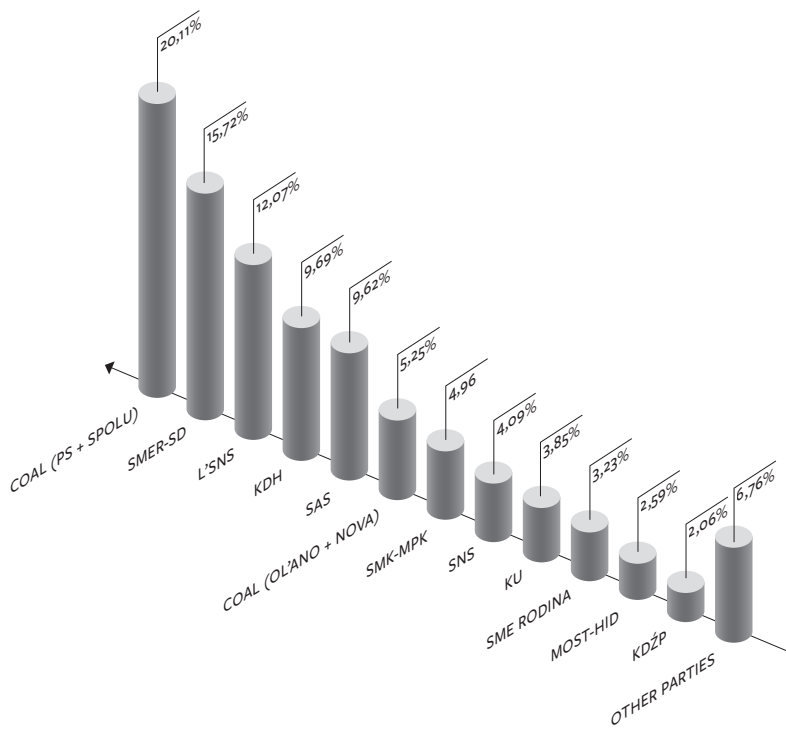
optimism   anger

EMOTIONS

RUN ACROSS SLOVAKIA

● **Ondrej Gažovič**
with support of **Matúš Mikšík**

The presented chapter introduces the campaign of Michal Šimečka – the leader of the coalition of *Progresívne Slovensko* (PS – Progressive Slovakia)[1] and *Spolu*[2] in the 2019 EU Elections in Slovakia. It focuses on the emotions and stories included in the campaign and captures the nine-month period (09/18–05/19).

Introduction

We were sitting on a terrace overlooking a calm sea. It was a warm August evening, and we were finishing a sweet watermelon in the setting sun. Two young families: four adults and two children

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[1] Progresívne Slovensko (PS) is a liberal political movement, that was formed first as a civic movement in 2016 and transformed into a political party in 2017. It is based on the values of progressivism, freedom, equality, and justice. As of today, it has more than 600 members and has successfully supported the campaigns of Matúš Vallo for the office of the Mayor of Slovakia's capital Bratislava, as well as former Vice-Chairman of PS Zuzana Čaputová for the office of the President of Slovak Republic. Current chairman of PS is Michal Truban, successful entrepreneur in the IT sector.

[2] Spolu is a center-right political party that was formed in 2017. It puts emphasis on the strong and modern economy along with better social and healthcare policies. Current chairman of Spolu is Miroslav Beblavý, experienced MP and former Deputy Minister of Social and Family Affairs of Slovak Republic. Spolu and PS created a pre-election coalition in 2019, before the elections to the European Parliament. After winning the elections, PS and Spolu decided to continue their cooperation and run as a pre-election coalition also for the 2020 national elections.

of the pre-school age. We were saying goodbye to our summer vacation.

I remember that all these ten days in Croatia, Michal and I spent discussing whether to go to the European Election campaign and, if so, how to handle it at best. The EU Elections were scheduled to take place in nine months, in May 2019. At the time, Michal was already Vice-Chairman of Progresívne Slovensko (PS) – a new liberal movement that was gaining just about 3–5% of voters' preferences in the polls. He had returned to Slovakia after many years abroad and almost nobody knew him at home.

During the final evening, we came up with a plank challenge on the terrace. Maybe you know it: a static exercise in which you position yourself horizontally just above the ground, with only your forearms and toes on the ground. It looks simple, but even after several tens of seconds, you get extreme pain in your entire body. Michal and I are athletes, but our manful strength quickly proved to be insufficient.

Then, my five-year-old son Karol took the plank position. He had no idea what he was doing; he just innocently smiled at us and held. Gradually, he broke all of our records. He went on, keeping the same smile until he has beaten the best time almost twofold. We all applauded him, and he went on smiling, unsure of what was going on.

Nine months later, in May 2019, we won the European Elections in Slovakia. Michal was the leader of the coalition PS/Spolu which scored incredible 20,11% of the votes. After 15 years, someone in Slovakia succeeded in defeating the populist SMER-SD party of the former Prime Minister Robert Fico in a party vote. Besides,

Michal scored over 81 000 preferential votes – the second-highest number out of all the candidates in Slovakia.

When I was looking at Michal's incredulous smile, I had to remember the little Karol and our summer plank challenge. Probably, they were both equally unaware of what is ahead of them and they were both just as underrated. Despite that, they both did great and won. I am not precisely sure what is behind Karol's success. This chapter tries to present at least one part of the story and emotions which helped Michal to win.

The Story and Sentiments
of Michal Šimečka's Personal Campaign

We gradually started with Michal Šimečka's EU Elections campaign in September 2018. In that month, PS scored about 4% in the poll of voting preferences by the renowned FOCUS agency; it would not be enough even to gain one mandate. Moreover, although Michal was Vice-Chairman of PS and an expert on European and foreign politics in the movement, his ticket in the ballot was not certain at all. We knew that to succeed, a consensus of societal factors would be necessary. We had no other way of influencing them, but only through the most efficient work of our team.

At first, we had to define Michal's political agenda precisely. That would require extracting several key authentic elements from the story of his life and attitudes around which we would build a story of his candidacy. We have had many discussions about that; consulted friends and experts, checked first ideas with focus groups, and used the analysis of our social media posts' success.

The result was the following list of characteristics, which we then communicated to the public throughout the campaign: 1) a top expert returning home from abroad, 2) a continuator in the family story, which commits him to fight for freedom and democracy, 3) a sympathetic and active young person who makes you want to do sports with him or have a beer.

Top Expert

The great advantage of Michal's campaign was that he had mastered the field of European politics better than few in Slovakia. His education and practical experience are excellent for a 35-year--old person.

He completed his Master's and Doctoral degree in Political Science at the University of Oxford. He has published in prestigious academic journals, worked in leading think-tanks in Prague and Brussels, in the European Parliament, as well as an advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

His expertise made it easier for us to prepare for discussions not only with the broader public but also with political opponents in media. At the same time, we purposefully communicated to the public with journalism, professional blogs, social networks, and promotional materials.

This part of the narrative was a clear value orientation: On every possible occasion, we communicated pro-European attitudes and supported Slovakia's association with the European integration project. While most politicians in Slovakia either openly berate the EU or respond to the topic by, "The EU is fine, BUT...", our authentic attitude was, figuratively speaking, to hold the European flag proud and high.

We regularly analyzed and commented on the events in the international and European politics (D. Trump's activity, Brexit issue, politicians' stances on the migration crisis, the annexation of Crimea and sanctions against Russia, Skripal's case, international populism, etc.).

We also used expertise in behind-the-scenes insight into politics which Michal was regularly bringing. An example of such was his business trip to Russia, where he took a part in negotiations with leading representatives of Russian diplomacy, foreign and security policy. The most successful Facebook status from this trip had over 800 shares and about 130,000 people read it.

At the end of the campaign, an attempt to discredit Michal appeared: He was accused of being inexperienced and unprepared. We responded with a short FB status listing his professional experience; it resonated positively and again, around 130,000 people read it.

Family Tradition

An integral part of Michal's campaign was his personal story of the successor of the family's mission. Michal's grandfather, the philosopher Milan Šimečka, was a distinguished Czechoslovak dissident and a political prisoner. His personal friends included Václav Havel; his books, translated to English, belonged among the most valuable sources of information for the West about the nature of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Michal's grandmother, Eva Šimečková, was fired from work by communists due to her opinions on politics during the times of normalization; his father, Martin M. Šimečka, could not study. In 1989 M.M. Šimečka was one of the leaders of the Velvet Revolution. Later, after the rise of

the authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, he was labeled as an "enemy of the state" for his democratic attitudes. Gradually, he became one of the most respected journalists in the region and long-time editor-in-chief of the *Domino Fórum*, *SME*, and *Respekt*. Michal's mother Marta Šimečková is the main organizer of the Central European Forum, which every year attracts leading intellectuals from all over the world to Bratislava.

This line created an added value to Michal's story and clearly differentiated him from all other candidates. His main viewpoint was that of the generation-approved brand of fighting for freedom and democracy, personal responsibility which does not allow him to disappoint the legacy of his parents and grandparents.

An important narrative on the return of a successful young expert to Slovakia also supported the family story. In Slovakia, from which tens of thousands of young people left for studies or work, this aspect is clearly understood and appreciated. Instead of "cashing in" on his education gained abroad in multi-national corporations in London or New York, Michal decided to try to win the political support of Slovak citizens enabling him to serve them as a competent, democracy and pro-European values advocating politician.

This part of the story was illustrated by Michal's personal texts, memories, and visual materials devoted to mother, father, and grandparents, as well as the commemoration of the values of November 1989 and the fight for freedom.

Sympathetic and Active Young Person

The third line of Michal's political identity was the youthful energy of a sympathetic man ready to work hard. In many circles,

the European Parliament still kept its reputation of being an unimportant institution to which exhausted politicians, who are past their prime, are put for "retirement". Why should any voter take part in such elections? An essential part of the campaign was to eradicate this judgment and introduce Michal as an active person with a drive and motivation to change things.

A part of this communication was in creating a personal emotional relationship with the candidate who is a nice "common person", into whom you can bump on the street, go running with, or chat while having a beer.

The "lifestyle" line was also communicated through the insight into Michal's private life: his relationship with his girlfriend, a successful professional dancer Soňa Ferienčíková; their time together with the Bublina dog. It was also communicated by showing people from behind the scenes – the campaign team and the lives of the individuals in it.

Beh za skutočne európske Slovensko (The Run For Truly European Slovakia) provided the main communication line. Within this project, Michal symbolically ran across the whole country – from the eastern border of Slovakia with Ukraine to the western border with Czechia. The series of shorter runs, in which Michal's supporters, sympathizers, and colleagues from the PS/Spolu ballot joined him, was complemented with public discussions and an intensive campaign in streets of towns and villages. Presentation videos were filmed from each stage and the project culminated with Michal's finish at the team-building barbecue of volunteers and political leaders of PS/Spolu in Bratislava. The reactions to the "running" component of the campaign were exceptionally positive.

Pre-Election Videos – Interconnection of Stories

The central communication in the final phase of the campaign were two professional election video shoots aimed at effectively linking the previously communicated stories into one impressive unit.

The first shoot was a "running video". In it, Michal runs where the Iron Curtain laid in the past. The visual and content contrast of the past (barbed borders, border guards firing at people, political prisoners) with the present (free movement within the EU, security and open opportunities for everyone) impressively linked the sentiment of expertise (pro-European political profile), family story (personal memories), and the youthful energy of a runner who is ready to work actively. The running video reached about 220,000 people on Facebook alone; it was also actively promoted on Instagram and YouTube.

The second shoot was a "house meeting". In it, Michal introduces the European Union using the analogy of an apartment house. The owners of individual flats (national states) have their interests and sufficient freedom in their flats. However, they share a common infrastructure (external walls, elevator, corridors, riser pipes, et al.); they have to take care of it together. They cannot do anything they want; they must consider each other – reach a consensus democratically and protect the interests of the weaker. Michal, as a sympathetic young expert, explains the analogy to voters. He is pictured as a contrast to an aggressive tenant oppressing his co-tenants, disrespecting other tenants, and wanting to demolish or build walls one-sidedly (authoritarian, populist, and extremist political parties/governments). The house meeting video reached over 330.000 people on Facebook; it was also intensively promoted on other social networks. It sparked a considerable reaction

and as a consequence, the most-watched national media reported about it (TV, web, print).

The Story and Sentiments of the PS/Spolu Central Campaign

Telling the story of Michal Šimečka's successful campaign without mentioning the story and sentiments of the overall drive of PS/Spolu would be analytically dishonest. The candidate's personal campaign might have been useful in any way, but in an adverse social context or mismanaged campaign of the coalition, it would be anyhow insufficient for success.

Therefore, the following chapter briefly points to the main story and sentiments of the PS/Spolu overall campaign in the 2019 EU Elections. Anyhow, it cannot be viewed as its "official" or "authoritative" interpretation. We are unauthorized to do such interpretation; we did not take part in setting it up, running, or executing the overall campaign. Here, we only present an indicative view limited in scope and depth by the people who were interconnected with the central campaign and jointly coordinated candidate and coalitions' activities.

Truly European Slovakia

The campaign's central emphasis was on the emotion of struggling for a "truly European Slovakia". This narrative is based on the argument that although Slovakia has been a member state of the EU for 15 years, it has not yet reached the European level of salaries, roads, schools, hospitals, or justice for its citizens.

The reason for falling behind are old politicians who have wasted their opportunities – by corrupting themselves and making

populist decisions instead of responsibly running the country in the best interests of its citizens.

This spirit was used in communicating; e.g., different unauthorized ingredients in the Western EU member states and Slovakia or a different quality of hospital beds and meals in Austria and Slovakia. Anyone interested could try them directly during happenings in the squares all around Slovakia. The aim was to invite people to the elections to replace the old incompetent politicians with new ones, who would finally achieve a genuinely European Slovakia.

We Must Defeat Extremists

Throughout the campaign, there was a gradually growing concern that populist (SMER-SD, SNS, Sme rodina) and extremist parties (Ľ'SNS) could dominate the EP elections. These parties threatened the clear pro-European orientation of Slovakia. One of the May polls by the AKO agency listed SMER-SD (19,10%) as the leader of voting preferences, followed by the extremists from Ľ'SNS (13,90%), and the coalition PS/Spolu ranked third (13,70%).

The negative emotion of fear towards extremists was reinforced by the shocking victory of Ľ'SNS in the simulated student elections several weeks before the real EP Elections. To add to that, Marián Kotleba's Ľ'SNS supporters were also very active in the streets.

A logical response in the PS/Spolu campaign was to emphasize this threat and point to the role of PS/Spolu as the only relevant challenger of Kotleba in the current political contest. In addition to sharp determination in political discussions and on social networks, there have been several ideological confrontations

directly in the terrain; e.g., at the national commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the tragic death of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik at Bradlo, or at Slavín in the memory of the soldiers who fell in the liberation of Slovakia at the end of World War Two.

The European and Ukrainian flags were a potent emotive symbol. The representants and supporters of PS/Spolu carried them in these events; in contrast with the green flags of Ľ'SNS and banners of the Russian Federation. The signal was clear – come to the EP elections to vote for PS/Spolu: We are ready to fight for Slovakia's clear pro-European orientation on democracy and human rights.

The gathering in front of the Bratislava Park Inn hotel was equally interesting. It took place as a protest against the cooperation of the domestic populist party *Sme rodina* lead by Boris Kollár with the "stars" of the European extreme right: Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, and Geert Wilders. Fortunately, both for Slovakia and Europe, *Sme rodina* was a complete failure in the elections.

We are Uniting for Slovakia's Success (PS and *Spolu*)

The situation in Slovakia is similar to the one in the rest of Europe. Even before these Euro elections, the populist and extremist forces were on the rise. Meanwhile, the ongoing crisis of confidence in the elite resonated. It reflected in ever-lower overall turnout, whereas one of the determinants thus became not the absolute number of supporters of the Euro-Optimist or Euro-Pessimist camp, but the elite's ability to mobilize these camps.

However, we anticipated that there is a demand for politicians who instead prefer to mend the common Europe than to demolish it – and such politicians belonged to two parties: *Progresívne*

Slovensko and *Spolu*; both were on the threshold of electability. In retrospect, it may seem like it was all navigating towards the coalition of PS/Spolu and that there was no other option, but it was not easy.

The voters' demand and the ethos of uniting is one thing, but creating a stable and cohesive alliance of parties that, moreover, had tendencies towards different fractions of the EP (PS to ALDE, or Renew Europe, *Spolu* to EPP) required much time and energy during its initiation, as well as in the campaign. However, this narrative proved to be very useful, and, throughout the campaign, we received highly positive feedback from voters for willing to unite in the defeat of extremism and populism.

A significant portion of responsibility for the result of the joined ballot lays on the shoulders of the coalition leader. Hence, In Michal Šimečka's campaign, we had to not only make sure that he convinces people, but also that his campaign activity cements the 14-member ballot.

In this case, too, the leitmotif hence became Michal's run across Slovakia. During the run, he also completed sections with other candidates and they appeared side by side in discussions as well. It provided people with a clear, first-hand vision of synergy; two parties and 14 people acting as one team.

Such a sense of belonging and team effort has shown that even a society disturbed by misinformation and information overload has a chance to heal at least some of the wounds, and at least to partially reunite. Such hope and optimism, stemming from positive energy within the joined campaign, have contributed to making the vote for the PS/Spolu coalition as an attractive option.

Conclusion

If you have been campaigning, you know how exciting it is to wait for results. Slovakia has the lowest turnout of the EU states in the EU Elections; so many of us were eager to see if we could break this indifference to our destiny. Besides, we voted on Saturday; we had to wait for official results the entire next day. The election night itself, which took place immediately after the elections, was only a pleasant meeting of enormously exhausted colleagues who could not be sure of anything.

The euphoria came the next day. An incredible 20,11% gain, a sovereign victory and winning four mandates, the election of two top experts on European politics, and two leading environmental activists to the European Parliament. All this means the continuation of the new wave of politics triggered by the election of the progressive Mayor of the capital, Matúš Vallo, and a progressive President of Slovakia Zuzana Čaputová.

Slovakia now sees that there is more to us, that we have what it takes to repair our country and not leave it to populists or extremists. We only need to go ahead boldly and stick with it – like a child competing in plank on a Croatian terrace.

GOOD STORY

should be personal. A hero should be created, somebody who is authentic and inspiring, somebody real and trustworthy.

RESULTS BY THE NATIONAL PARTY (2019–2024)

26,24% — JV
17,45% — SASKAŅA SDP
16,40% — HARMONY
12,42% — ATTĪSTĪBAI/PAR!
6,24% — LKS
5,34% — COAL. ZZS (LZS+LZP)
4,98% — LRA
4,35% — JKP
2,90% — PROGRESIVIE
0,92% — KPV LV
0,67% — LN
0,49%% — CP
0,47% — COAL.ATMODA
0,19% — LSDSP
0,18% — JS
0,17% — RP
0,59% — OTHER PARTIES
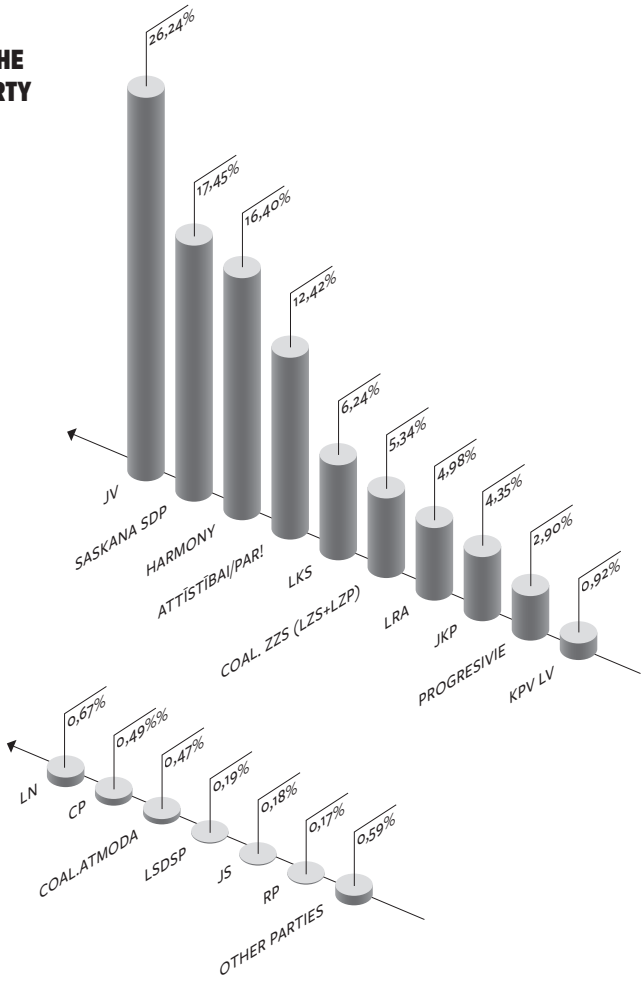
trust

dis-approval

EMOTIONS

HOW WE GOT HERE: JOURNEY TO THEEUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

● **Kārlis Ralfs Lapiņš**

Global political events, such as the refugee crisis in Europe, Great Britain leaving the European Union, terrorist attacks in France, Germany, and Belgium, and the 2016 presidential elections in the US sparked up many long-needed discussions in almost every EU member state. Although, at first, it seemed that it would become a public rejection of liberal and democratic values, it turned out to be a massive push against mainstream politics in general. Voters were favoring outside candidates over the established ones and it should not have come as a surprise for many politicians. The dialogue between them and the public was long time gone and the only thing left was anger. The dissatisfaction of voters was not laying within the flaws of democracy, but rather in the general sentiment of people feeling forgotten by their political representatives. Citizens have every justification to blame mainstream parties and their leaders for their blind ignorance; it is up to those politicians whether they will be able to reform and regain their public's trust.

The sudden political shift was similar in almost every European Union member state. New political parties were emerging and populism was on the rise. Newcomers were encouraging society to stand up against the corrupt elite and regain the country's

sovereignty. Despite the fact that this is something which may be seemingly linked to an ordinary political process, a clash between different groups of society ignited social tensions and many political powers were eager to capitalize on it. Not only did it jeopardize the domestic stability of many member states, but it also left a mark on the future of the European Union.

The rapid integration process of the EU has naturally evoked fear, that later on transformed into broad public obscurity. It has become immensely harder for the European Union to be governed due to the growth of the importance of decisions and political instabilities back home, in the member states. Striking an agreement between all parties is becoming, apparently, impossible and the lack of transparency and legitimacy of the EU's supranational institutions only increased the suspicion of the general public. We could hope that the European Parliament will gain its significance within the legislative process of the EU, but until then we have to face the reality of confusion.

Public confusion is an easy target for political manipulation. The European Union is being unrightfully blamed for a wide series of domestic failures, but it makes up for an excellent external threat. Why shouldn't it? Only a small percentage of people differ the responsibilities of each legislative body and in combination with modern information technologies – the spread of false information is a matter of seconds. Just compare it with the political success of Viktor Orbán, as he initiated a full out war against George Soros. It was not so much about Mr. Soros himself, but about him being an excellent public enemy. He traded currencies aggressively; he was a part of controversial public initiatives; he had involved himself in mysticism; what is important, is that he

lacked opportunities to face false allegations against him. The plot against George Soros turned out to be so successful, that his name figured in almost every right-wing political campaign for years to come. In this case, the European Union is not so much different – it lacks transparency and legitimacy; it is aggressive in imposing legislative acts upon member states; it does not hold the necessary instruments to neglect false accusations. In short, it means that the anti-establishment forces can easily interfere in the political processes and the counterpart will frequently find itself powerless.

Latvia's case was no different. The anti-establishment rhetoric caught up quickly and opened up the political arena for outsiders. Although the European Union was blamed, once again, for many domestic failures, populists and right-wing politicians resisted calling European Union an enemy of the people. Instead, they insisted that the "organization of elite" has to be reformed, so that the public could regain its power over the legislative process. Mostly, populist campaigns were targeted against all so-called "establishment" and liberal parties, but particularly against the former liberal heavyweight *New Unity* (Jaunā vienotība)[1]. On the opposite of what many might have thought, liberals have been present in the Latvian political landscape since 2002. Although

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[1] *Jaunā vienotība* (previously *Vienotība*) was formed in 2010 as an alliance of three political parties – liberal party *Jaunais laiks*, conservative party *Pilsoniskā savienība*, and the social-liberal party *Sabiedrība citai politikai*, which later consolidated into one political party. As the mix of different political ideologies may already indicate, their political approach was centre-oriented, but with a liberal view on country's economy. Party was later labelled as the "Latvian liberal stronghold", because of its belief in further integration processes of the European Union and support for social minorities.

they have migrated from one political party to another, their years-long presence allows others to consider them as the political elite.

The downfall of the *New Unity* marked the rise of anti-establishment forces in Latvia. It became an obvious target for the anti-establishment attacks, due to its extended period of political domination in Latvian politics. From 2009 until 2016 it was in charge of the Latvian government and therefore, may be held responsible for every domestic failure. The former liberal heavyweight experienced a shocking drop in public support and barely got into the next sitting of the National Parliament in 2018. It dropped from 21,87% in 2014 to 6,69% in 2018. The lack of public trust initiated a series of internal rivalries and tore the political party from inside out. Although the party's self-reformation efforts gave them hope for the future[2], it became a serious blow for the Latvian liberal community. During the process, the former liberal heavyweight changed its political stance and turned to a more conservative political approach[3].

[2] As the support for *Vienotība* continued to drop, the party decided to refurbish its visual appearance and regain public's trust by admitting its failures and changing the party's board. For a long period of time, party's leadership was threatened by its internal rivals and opposing groups, which later either left of were forced to leave. Although fragmentation of the former political heavyweight caused rumours about party's future, it changed its name to *Jaunā vienotība* and openly offered regional parties to join its list of candidates for the upcoming National elections. These efforts allowed them to stop the decline of support and provided the much-needed time to reform, while simultaneously acting actively in the government.

[3] *Jaunā vienotība* has shifted slightly towards a more conservative political approach by reducing its support to social minorities and in particular to the groups of ethnic minority. It has openly opposed the usage of Russian language in public and private education facilities, and reluctantly participated in solving the long-lasting issue of *non-citizens*.

This created a liberal power vacuum within the Latvian political landscape. Other liberal parties rushed to get a share of *Unity's* former public support but got caught up in the same struggle as they did. Despite the fact that *Unity's* rivals were from other political parties, most of the popular public figures were previous members of *Unity*. As the public was starting to stand up against the elite, for liberals it meant distancing themselves from their previous partners and re-adapting to the new political landscape. That was the time for the inexperienced to become experienced and for public figures to become politicians, because the upcoming elections were predicted to decide the future of the liberal ideas in Latvia.

Latest European Parliament elections did not give Latvians the long-desired political relief since 2017. Starting from 2017 and consequently following each other, Municipal, National, and European elections drew the society into an extended political campaign, which radically reshaped the country itself. Voters demanded an immediate rethinking of the existing political course, to which political parties attempted to adapt. The biggest challenge for every political campaign was to mobilize its electoral base and only then to increase the support for the particular list of candidates.

Development/For! (Attīstībai/Par!)[4] decided to act courageously. Having taken into consideration the unique mood of the voters

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4 In 2018 three political parties – classical liberals *Latvijas attīstībai,* social-liberals *Kustība Par!,* and centrist party *Izaugsme,* formed an alliance for the upcoming National elections and named themselves as *Attīstībai/Par!*. *Attīstībai/Par!* was labelled as a pro-EU, social-liberal political formation, and later was also named as the Latvian liberal powerhouse.

and the fact that Latvia can only elect 8 Members to the European Parliament, it called for an outside candidate with a flawless reputation and preferably a controversial rival candidate as an adversary.

First, we needed an outstanding leader who would be at the same time "a man of the people". A leader who could enhance optimism and bring hope for the future. A candidate who could out-beat every false allegation and stand strong for the values that the political union possesses. The individual had to be willing to roll up his/her sleeves and engage in every explanatory discussion about the European Union. It had to be an incredibly well experienced and educated person, but with no previous political affiliation. And, of course, it had to be a very well-known public figure.

Second, we needed an adversary. Preferably an adversary who had avoided mandatory sentencing. A rival who could engage in public discussions with us and be ready to get down into the political mud. An individual who would become a target of public anger and disgust. If possible, a very well-known politician with a controversial personal history.

Well, we found both but let us start with the first one. Mr. Ivars Ijabs agreed to become the locomotive for the *Development/For!* list of candidates and carry out the expectedly fierce showdown of political narratives. His candidacy was a direct result of the ruling anti-establishment public sentiment, which prescribed parties to include political "outsiders" in their list of candidates. In this particular case, an outsider is considered to be an individual who was not yet involved in politics but was familiar with the political processes in general. Ijabs is a Ph.D. in political sciences and has been one of the leading professors at the University of Latvia. He

was a member of multiple non-governmental organizations and was actively contributing to the Latvian field of science. He was praised by almost all Latvian news agencies because of his natural skills to deliver complicated ideas in a simple manner. Although he is definitely considered as a notable public figure, he was most critical towards political parties, which in return granted him the much-needed public trust.

On the opposite side, there was Mr. Nils Ušakovs, the most popular Latvian politician and former Mayor of Riga. He and the political union *Development/For!* had a history of rivalry since 2017 Municipal elections. This particular rivalry was a key point within the whole campaign marathon for the last 3 years and, especially, during the European Parliament elections in 2019. After multiple corruption allegations against him and his partners, Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development Mr. Juris Pūce (*Development/For!*) suspended Ušakovs from fulfilling his duties. Minister and the responsible authorities initiated investigation processes against the Mayor of Riga, which then turned out to be one of the main reasons for Ušakovs' decision to step down from his position and announcing his candidacy for the European Parliament elections.

The main task for *Development/For!* was to avoid any contact with anti-establishment powers and to commit itself to unmasking Ušakovs efforts. By setting up the stage of confronting a corrupt politician and stopping him from evading justice, *Development/For!* managed to avoid being called "elite" and a threat to the general public.

The priority of the negative stimulus was to mobilize the electorate. Tired from an extended period of political campaigning,

the voters were assessed as politically disengaged. Even worse, in combination with the typical lack of interest in European Parliament elections, every vote was predicted to become more decisive. Anti-establishment and right-wing political parties were already capitalizing on anger and fear, which sequentially meant that *Development/For!* had to look for other human emotions. *Development/For!* turned to disgust and contempt, which are believed to increase participation during elections. The hope of the liberal alliance was that the previous experience of its voters will motivate them to fight against the adversary and encourage them to head to the polling stations.

The negative stimulus was transformed into one body – Nils Ušakovs. He served the purpose well. It was like jumping into a bandwagon, as legal accusations began to flow over him. His inefficient governing and corrupt behavior already turned the general public against him, and the previous rivalry between him and *Development/For!* became the center of political activities. This gave us the long-needed attention and the platform to deliver our message.

The mission was to capitalize on the previous campaign efforts and finalize the fight against the corrupt politician. During the extended period of political campaigning, we called for the public to democratically "overthrow" Ušakovs in Riga and then stop him from evading justice. Right on time, legal issues forced him to halt his activities and the Minister's actions forced him to engage with his accusers – *Development/For!*.

Phrases like "not allowing to flee", "handing him over to authorities", and "corruption" were used intentionally to comply with the general mood of voters. The Minister's decision, together

with the anti-corruption rhetoric, enhanced the feelings of disgust and contempt, which later ignited a series of discussions about Ušakovs' governance and its links to possible cases of bribery. This opened the door for society to democratically intervene and act pro-actively. Although *Development/For!* could not measure how well the "avoiding a mandatory sentencing" stimulus affected the participation, the political engagement increased. While *Development/For!* did its best to mobilize the electorate, now it turned to the task of gaining support – particularly for its list of candidates.

Negative stimulus does not grant political support *per se*. In order to do that, *Development/For!* had to get back to the public sentiment and, once again, to take into consideration the anti-establishment rhetoric. Similar to the example of negative stimulus embodied in one person, *Development/For!* did the opposite with one of its candidates – the political freshman Ijabs. He was set to project hope and certainty, while his flawless reputation had to increase the trust of the public. Being a political "outsider", anti-establishment accusations did not "stick" and blaming him for political actions became irrelevant.

What helped *Development/For!* the most was the ruling sentiment for political outsiders. In response to the society's willingness to have ambitious newcomers join the political stage, *Development/For!* proposed a fresh source of political motivation and energy. Ijabs became the leading outside candidate, above them all, and his lack of political experience was easily substituted for with a more insightful understanding of political processes as such. Although *Development/For!* fell right into the general political narrative, it was crucial to pass the message to a broader public.

Apart from being overwhelming on the billboards, social media, and radio, *Development/For!* decided to use an unusual way for liberals to deliver a political message – yellow press. Effectively placed political adds helped the communication strategy by projecting Ijabs and his fellow candidates as political outsiders with a personal commitment to improve the functionality of the European Union.[5] These particular ads were carefully crafted with a set of family and on-job pictures and personal political assessments to handover complicated ideas in a simple manner, while smoothly aligning themselves with other articles of the journals. This allowed *Development/For!* to approach all types of voters, from almost every generation, and stand out from other political campaigns.

In addition, *Development/For!* turned the gap between politicians and the public into an opportunity and went to the streets. Conventional campaigning became the most important tool in explaining the political processes of the European Union and creating an intimate link with the potential voters. The presence of the political alliance not only became immense, but it was suddenly surprising that *Development/For!* candidates were the only ones who decided to meet the electorate in-person. This case gained additional media coverage for *Development/For!* and was only reinforced by bringing the former President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves (who happened to be the husband of the

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[5] *Development/For!* turned the society's attention towards transparency and legitimacy issues in the European Union and urged for the European Parliament to receive legislator rights within the legislative process. In addition, *Development/For!* stressed that the only way to achieve sustainable development of the Union is through a fair competition in all fields of the European Union.

3rd candidate on the list, Ieva Ilvesa) to join the campaign along-side the candidates for European Parliament.

Fast-forwarding to the results of the European Parliament elections in Latvia: *Development/For!* managed to get a seat in the European Parliament and continued its successful streak of creative campaigning.

What can others learn from *Development/For!* experience? The liberal world order is not at the brink of collapse, but it calls for an urgent process of readaptation. The sudden wave of populism and rise of the anti-establishment powers was not a coincidence, but rather a consequence of the limited political scope which many of the liberal parties had.

Despite the fact that *Development/For!* might have wanted to blame the anti-establishment parties for their disruptive political behavior, they revived the missing link between politicians and the public. No matter what, liberals had to take a step back and align themselves with the modern political processes. It means that *Development/For!* had to give the floor to the political "outsid-ers"; they have to fight corruption and stand up for a more trans-parent governance. Apart from that, liberals had to roll up their sleeves and get deep into the political mud with their adversaries.

Development/For! intentionally avoided having arguments with the anti-establishment and populist forces.[6] Instead, liberals chose a rival who represented the same negative characteristics

6 *Jaunā konservatīvā partija* (The New Conservative Party) and KPV.LV were the leaders of the irresponsible social bidding and the impossible international action. While *Jaunā konservatīvā partija* was committed to shutting down Russia's media in the European Union and advocated for an unsustainable budget, KPV.LV was calling for equal salaries and social benefits throughout Europe.

that populist and anti-establishment forces were fighting against. This particular decision allowed the political alliance to avoid any unnecessary confrontations and focus its efforts on one particular person.

Without denying the coincidence and perfect timing of legal accusations taking place against the former mayor of Riga, *Development/For!* managed to mobilize the electorate by enhancing the emotions of disgust and contempt. It allowed them to set up a stage where they could fight against the most popular Latvian politician, who also happened to be involved, at the same time, in a series of corruption cases. On the opposite of the negative stimulus, *Development/For!* aligned with the public's strive for political "outsiders" and called for newcomers to join the political scene.

By giving the society an opportunity to act pro-actively, *Development/For!* managed to overcome the political disengagement and exhaustion which tortured Latvian voters throughout the extended period of political campaigning.
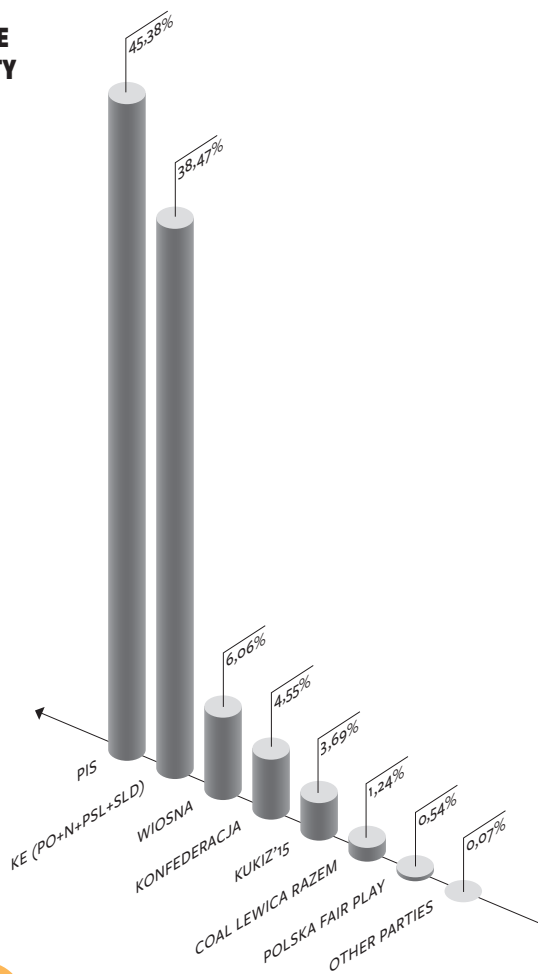
It is crucial to think of creative ways on how to deliver your campaign messages. The mix of disgust and contempt in combination with pride and certainty allowed the campaign planning team to project hope for the Latvian and European future.

Campaigning has to be done creatively and courageously, without fear of making a mistake. ●

GOOD STORY

needs an adversary who can be
called out to go toe-to-toe,
a villain who can mobilize
supporters to keep on fighting.

RESULTS BY THE
NATIONAL PARTY
(2019–2024)

45,38%

38,47%

6,06%

4,55%

3,69%

1,24%

0,54%

0,07%

PIS

KE (PO+N+PSL+SLD)

WIOSNA

KONFEDERACJA

KUKIZ'15

COAL LEWICA RAZEM

POLSKA FAIR PLAY

OTHER PARTIES

appre-hension

anti-cipation

EMOTIONS

PAWEŁ KUKIZ. FROM "ZERO TO HERO" AND BACK AGAIN

● **Jakub Chabik**

Emotional politics and compelling stories

Today's politics are driven by two factors: the rise of anti-establishment populism and amplification of emotional stories caused by social media. From *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) in Italy, through Le Pen's *National Front* and Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland*, contemporary European politics are defined by new groups that come out of traditional groups and divisions.

The Polish example of such is Paweł Kukiz, the former music star, who became a political activist in 2011 and consequentially the head of the group KUKIZ'15, which shortly became the third force in the Polish politics. However, managing political career of the party is different from managing one's own career of a musician. After the short and spectacular rise, Kukiz lost control over his party and his own public image effectively ending his party's existence. Although Paweł Kukiz will continue his involvement in politics, he has failed to form a long-standing force in the Polish political scene.

1984–2011: Poland's top musician

Paweł Kukiz comes from south-western Poland; his family roots are from Lviv, which is nowadays in Ukraine. He spent his high school years growing up in the town of Niemodlin.

'80s Rockstar. SOURCE: Andrzej19/ CC BY-SA 3.0-pl/Wikimedia Commons

He made his way to the top of Polish music boards in the early eighties, as a member of the band "Aya RL". Their hit "Skóra" (Skin) was considered by Polish teenagers of the '80s to be the generation's anthem. His artistic and commercial success continued with the band "Piersi" through the '90s and early 2000s. Perhaps his first emotional voice on public politics was the CD "My już są Amerykany" ("We're already 'mericans") with deep criticism of the transformation of Poland. Alcohol consumption, greedy clergy, and family violence – all of this was in how Paweł Kukiz saw his countrymen, in ten songs, in one of the most successful CD's in history. He criticized Poles for peripherialism in the song "Całuj mnie" (*Kiss me*) of the album:

> *I bought jeans, shoes, a hat and a belt*
> *I'm leaving America – I've been there for 5 years*

But I miss so much that
I can't sleep, I can't eat
My dream is to see your face
I'm carrying the bags with gifts
In the car with alu rim
The whole wallet filled with dollars
And you...
...kiss me – it's such a lovely game
...kiss me – I'll give you everything

The commercial and artistic success followed all nine of his consecutive records. Throughout his musical career, Kukiz was widely recognized by his characteristic voice, meaningful lyrics and ability to gain public attention. Additionally, he played one of the main characters in the successful movie *Girl Guide*; hosted his own tv show and participated in jury panels of national song contests. To summarize the above, he became one of the most recognized faces in Polish show business which he used as the foundation for his political career.

2011–2015: Steps into politics and single-member vote districts movement (jow)

At the same time as he began his public activities in 2011, he became the Councilor of Lower Silesia Voivodship (region), focusing on folk culture and arts. Initially, he was supporting the centric-liberal Civic Platform; in 2005 he was a member of the honorary committee of Donald Tusk, recent President of the European Council and at the time the major political figure in Poland's politics. However, with time, the former musician's public

statements became increasingly anti-establishment. He called for the reforms of Polish politics, which he saw as being dominated by "corrupted parties", including his former favorite one.

Being rather conservative (he was opposing the EuroPride parade and supportive of the Pro-life movement), Kukiz gradually drifted towards soft nationalism, which would later win him supporters and help him in building his political career.

However, his entrance into the political world was marked by the campaign for single-member vote districts. The idea was, essentially, to divide the country into smaller voting districts and have members of the parliament being elected among locals, so that they are "close to the people"', which comes from the UK's system. It became a proposal from the grassroots movement in the first decade of the 2000s, winning public interest as a way to improve Poland's politics and make them "really democratic". In Kukiz's own words, that would allow the country to drift away from being dominated by the big parties and their unelected leaders, "corrupted politicians", "post-communist elites", etc.

The movement gathered enough support to propose the referendum, but the referendum was rejected by the parliament which was at the time dominated by the Civic Platform. When the activists asked "what happened to the lists of support", they heard that they were "shredded". They took the name "Zmieleni.pl" (*Shredded.pl* in Polish) and became a significant power on the Polish political scene, with Paweł Kukiz as the leader. His recognizable voice and face, as well as emotional speeches (marked with frequent vulgar words), became iconic of that time.

Zmieleni.pl transitioned Paweł Kukiz from local to national politics. No longer was he just a face and a voice; no longer was

he a local figure; no longer was he responsible only for secondary, if not niche, topics like folk art. Kukiz grew into the nationally recognized figure, an icon of the unseen, the voice of the unheard, and the remorse of the unrespected.

Turning point: the presidential campaign of 2015

In 2015 presidential election, Bronisław Komorowski, the president in the office, a representative of the governing party, an anti-communist activist, a conservative-liberal, a former speaker of the parliament, and a father of five, seemed to be a certain candidate. The voting seemed to be a sheer formality, as his dominance (over 50% support) was obvious only the months before the election. The freedom activist and the former editor-in-chief of the most influential Polish daily magazine, Adam Michnik, said one day on the radio that Komorowski would lose only if he "hits a pregnant nun on a zebra, while driving under the influence". The absurdity of that statement represented how much everyone believed in his victory. The next weeks and months proved how disastrously wrong everyone was – which, to a large extent, was caused by Paweł Kukiz and his presidential run.

Personal popularity and the support of nationalist activists helped Kukiz to gather enough supporters to register himself as a presidential candidate. He steadily grew in the polls: from 3% only 3 months before the election to 13% the week before.

Kukiz was consistently attacking the "establishment" and "party-cracy", the political scene divided between two large parties (Civic Platform and nationalist-conservative Law and Justice). He presented himself as the "third force". His campaign events were more of a show than a meeting; he spoke the

"We won. Without money, structures, media time; despised and pushed away (...) They laughed at us: Who is Kukiz? Who is supporting him? What is his program? Now they see! Now they see you!".
SOURCE: Adrian Grycuk/CC BY-SA 3.0-pl/ Wikimedia Commons

language of average Poles. His message was clear: parties are the cause of all problems; they were nothing but corrupted oligarchies, seeking only to exploit "average people". He became especially popular with young voters, "25 and under, first-time voters" group, who appreciated his natural behavior, strong language, and anti-establishment attitude. His personal popularity and past achievements as a musician gave him an extra advantage over other (in total, as much as eight!) candidates running from outside of the two main political forces.

Kukiz came third in the first round with over 3 million votes, which accounted for 20,8% of the total support. In the emotional speech that followed this accomplishment, he thanked his supporters, blaming media and "the establishment" for creating the atmosphere of hatred and exclusion for him and his program.

The presidential election was ultimately won by Andrzej Duda, the candidate from Law and Justice. Former minor staff officer

in the office of the President Lech Kaczyński, past member of the European Parliament. A younger, more handsome candidate, having better contact with the people than Komorowski, who initially wasn't considered as a potential challenger.

Duda's campaign was dynamic. He was hard-working and addressed 'average people' better than the president. Also, Komorowski's staff was pathetic – they acted as if they had already won the election and didn't need to bother. People's emotions were with Andrzej Duda, who ultimately came out as a winner – 51,5% to 48,5% with a 55,3% turnout at ballots in the second voting.

Although Kukiz didn't make it into the second round and refused to endorse any of the two winners, it was clear that he has created a new political group in the country. His voters – mostly young males from smaller cities and towns, anti-establishment, anti-immigrant, rather conservative, but at the same time with expectations regarding social transfers and welfare, didn't seem to even exist before his election. However, from that moment on, they would become a point of interest to each political strategist looking to drag that "swinging" part of the Polish society to their favor.

2015 Run for parliament

That was merely a start for the former musician. After this success, he created the political group KUKIZ'15. The name, according to his own words, was an acronym that stood for "Koniec Układu Korupcji i Złodziejstwa", i.e. "End to corruption and thievery"). He maintained his anti-establishment "for average people" attitude with strong anti-corruption and anti-political party message.

He even promised not to take the money that, according to Polish law, the government is paying to all political parties that won more than 3% of the votes.

His candidates were from outside of the traditional political system: local activists, who were popular in the regions, but never wanted to become a part of the party-dominated political system. The list of his candidates was very interesting, as it contained underrepresented or even forgotten groups of the Polish society:

- 'Forgotten Heroes' of the Solidarity Revolution, like Kornel Morawiecki (the legendary member of the hard, anti-communist, opposition and the father of today's Prime Minister) or Grzegorz Długi – a lawyer, labor union activist and relentless defender of anti-communist heroes from the '80s.
- Nationalists, who cultivated traditions of Polish pre-war opposition ("endecja"), like Adam Andruszkiewicz, known for hate speech on gays, refugees, and elites.
- Republicans, the group consisting of prominent intellectuals from leading universities, who were very active in big cities, running disputes, magazines, and portals. The most prominent and talented example of them – Stanisław Tyszka, a very successful deputy-speaker of the Parliament.
- Libertarians, pro-gun, and anti-tax groups from the former Unia Polityki Realnej, far-right political wing, previously associated with Janusz Korwin-Mikke, the evergreen libertarian figure in Polish politics.
- Politically indifferent artists, like pro-marijuana activists, such as Kukiz's fellow musician, rapper and adult-movie entrepreneur, Piotr 'Liroy' Marzec.

Reffugees Stop! SOURCE: Adrian Grycuk/CC BY-SA 3.0-pl/Wikimedia Commons

However, the groups that worked hard for his success were the nationalists and libertarians. Pushed away by the mainstream political establishment, but still very active in local communities, they made up the major part of his candidates and accounted for almost all of his local activity supporters. The "hard work" of local campaigns – banners, leaflets, and presence in local media, was to a large extent carried out by this group.

2016–2017 – In the role of backbenchers

In the parliamentary election, KUKIZ'15 candidates won 1.339.094 votes, 8,8%, and 42 seats in the parliament, coming in third after two predominant parties. The political commentators were

shocked. The out-of-nowhere success, based (as they interpreted) only on the strong personality of the leader, was a complete surprise to them. Although they realized that this group of voters has existed, they knew that good results in the presidential election of a single candidate is one thing, and building structures in all major regions, pulling together lists of candidates, and running a parliamentary campaign is another thing.

The supporters were largely young voters, just as in the presidential campaign. In the age group of 18–29, the supports of kukiz'15 made up 20,9% (according to another poll, 20,6%). This was almost twice as much as the average support. Just to compare – the same party won only 2% of the support in the age group of 60+. These numbers illustrate the potential for the future and that the successful message can break through to the youngest voters.

Kukiz and his supporters initially took on the role of the "third party" (even if they hesitated to call themselves as such). They tried to avoid supporting or endorsing any of the political groups, sustaining the message on the "evil party system that is ruining Poland". The group was almost never bound by the leader's vote – in most cases, during the first year of parliament, they voted unanimously. This was, to a large extent, the consequence of heterogeneity of the group: built by former labor union activists, nationalists, and libertarians, they didn't have a "single voice" in the parliament. Unlike major parties, they formed a loose group that was free to support whoever and whatever they chose to.

However, as the ruling party sought to stretch and then open-break the constitution and the rule of law, Kukiz himself and the members of his group largely supported each other. They did not

formally enter the ruling coalition; they were instrumental in the key votings, when they supported media reform (giving utter control over public media to the ruling party), constitutional court voting (subverting Polish constitutional tribunal to the ruling party), judiciary "reform" (attempting to give power over courts to parliamentary majority) and the new budget.

It is difficult to say what were the reasons and how anti-establishment party chose to be the "side-dish" (as they were called) to the parliamentary majority. The commentators are saying that they all knew what they were against, but not so much what they were for. The inability to form a consistent and constructive program, the tensions between libertarians, republicans, and nationalists, as well as the pressure from the ruling party (which was interested in growing and was incentivizing KUKIZ'15 members to deflect to their side) all combined together created the pressure that the group couldn't survive. It began to disassemble, literally falling apart into pieces, almost from the first months of the parliament.

2016–2019 Losing control over the party and his own public image

What certainly didn't help was Paweł Kukiz's emotional nature, lack of education and experience in politics, as well as inability to build political structures and a narrative, which prevented him from long-term success on the political scene. Inability to lead beyond emotional speeches became the predominant characteristic of the former leader. Emotions, so valuable during the campaign battles, would not be sufficient during the daily routine of the parliament. Paweł Kukiz simply was not able to take one

step more a build a sustainable political presence in the political scene.

His public communications became very emotional, filled with accusations and remorse; one of them became famous when he accused his former colleagues of being sexual fetishists. Later, he admitted that he wrote that one under the influence of alcohol during the weekend (*Saturday took control over my Twitter account*). Kukiz was not only increasingly unable to control his political party, but he was also increasingly unable to control his own obsessions, addictions, habits, and tweets.

At the moment of writing of this article (September 2019), the party has only 16 members, out of 42 who were initially elected.

His electorate drifted towards nationalist conservatives. In European election of Spring 2019, the polls clearly showed that former Kukiz voters were supporting Konfederacja – the new right-wing populists, with their anti-LGBT, anti-tax, anti-abortion, and pro-gun program. Konfederacja was radical; it was strong outside of the big cities and became the "new Kukiz" – the party of protest, the anti-establishment group, whose radical messages were directed especially towards radical youth, the people rejecting cosmopolitism and liberalism in favor of anti-establishment, anti-immigrant, and anti-EU populism.

The major differentiator of "Konfederacja" versus "KUKIZ", only 3 years earlier, was a much better use of social media. While Kukiz's communication with his supporters relied mostly on his well-recognized face and the voice of former musician, Konfederacja was investing in social media. Attractive, colorful memes, vivid Facebook groups, popular Twitter accounts – they all diverted their attention towards Konfederacja. Kukiz became "the

general without an army", with 3,7% support, down from 8,8% in the parliamentary vote.

2019 Going forward: new alliances

When the next election was approaching, Paweł Kukiz decided to form a coalition with the Polish People's Party (PSL). PSL was traditionally strong in smaller towns and villages. Historically, formed from people living out of farming, they extended to the representatives of small businesses from outside of metropolitan areas. During the previous (European) election, PSL formed the coalition with Civic Platform and faced a disastrous result in the regions where they previously dominated. That was, according to analysts and journalists, a consequence of drifting toward left-wing, liberal groups. The coalition of PO and PSL didn't win much, but they lost support in villages and towns. That's why Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, the leader of the peasant's party, decided to go on his own for the next election.

Well, not exactly on his own. It was Paweł Kukiz who joined PSL. Crippled by decreasing support, down from 42 mandates to only 21 (at the moment of constructing the new alliance), Kukiz faced a simple choice: coalition or destruction. Obviously, he chose coalition, which immediately cost him 5 MPs leaving the party. Critics would say that this coalition is the illustration of the Polish proverb about "the blind leading the lame", two weak parties trying to build a synergy to pass the 5% support limit required for entering the parliament. Others would argue – with KUKIZ'15 personal popularity and PSL's support in the villages, they could actually still be a third or fourth power in the Polish political scene. Although there are significant differences (e.g. PSL

being a local establishment, Kukiz being an anti-establishment icon), they share criticism towards liberal values, soft nationalism, and attachment to traditional values.

Paweł Kukiz became the leader of psl's candidate list in his home voting district, Opole. Although it is very probable that he will win the mandate and became the mp again, clearly, the existence of his political party is under question now.

The emotional lesson of Paweł Kukiz

Kukiz can be considered as a typical product of "post-politics", one of many types in the gallery of populists. Somewhere between Beppe Grillo, Thierry Baudet, Vladimir Zelensky, and Joseph Estrada, he is the symptom of the times we are living in.

The narrative served by social media, along with young voters and high expectations, requires some characteristic ingredients: the hero must be popular, authentic and emotional; appealing to counter-establishment voters; easily focusing attention and strong in words and judgments.

Nevertheless, mainstream politicians should also consider the fact that voters, especially those who do not find their expectations addressed by the leading political forces, will be gradually turning to populists like Paweł Kukiz. The good news, though, is that they don't seem to be a strong or persistent part of the political puzzle in today's democracies. ●

GOOD STORY

knows how important it is to use nostalgia properly. The memories from the good old times are a powerful tool to influence mood of the people.

anger

accept-
ance

EMOTIONS

WHEN EMOTIONS WENT THROUGH THE ROOF

● **Milosz Hodun**

The 2019 European Parliament election campaign was quite exceptional. First of all, because of the extraordinary political circumstances surrounding it. But also due to the election results and the themes of the campaign that determined a landslide victory of one of the parties. So, what happened in Poland? And how did it actually happen?

The elections to the European Parliament were treated primarily as a prelude to the elections to the Sejm and the Senate planned for the autumn of the same year. They fell in the middle of the two-year electoral relay that started with local elections in 2018 and will be completed by the presidential elections in May 2020. Thus, Poles go to the polls more or less every 6 months. And the stakes are enormous. Many say they have been the highest since 1989, when the Solidarity trade union won the first (partially) free elections and the communists were ousted from power. This time, it is about the future of the Law and Justice (PiS) government.

Law and Justice came to power in 2015, as the first party in the history of the Third Republic of Poland to gain a majority in both chambers of the parliament, and was able to form a government on its own. What is extremely important is that a few months earlier the candidate of Law and Justice unexpectedly became

President of Poland, which gave Jarosław Kaczyński's party full control over the legislature and the executive. This resulted not only in filling of all ministries with politicians faithful to Law and Justice, but also filling of all possible functions and posts in public offices and state-owned companies with not always qualified, but certainly faithful, right-wing supporters.[1] The same applies to the public media, which turned into the government's propaganda mouthpiece, reminiscent of the regime's television known from the 1980s.[2] Funds from government grants and state-owned companies began to flow in a wide stream to friendly businesspeople (including church ones) and conservative NGOs (often newly established for the needs of a specific design contest).[3]

But, Jarosław Kaczyński was hungry for more. In a frenzy of obsessive aversion to all political opponents, he wanted to take over full power in the country and subjugate all spheres of public life. In order to make it happen, Law and Justice initiated activities aimed at taking control over the judiciary. The PiS majority annulled the appointment of five Constitutional Tribunal judges nominated right before the elections by the previous parliament dominated by the Civic Platform and packed it with its own loyalists.[4] Later on, the law on the National Council of the Judiciary

1 Szłapka, A. 2017. *Repolonization and State Patronage: Current Challenges for Poland*, in *4Liberty.eu Review*, 7, p.64.
2 Compare: *Reporters Without Borders*' World Press Freedom Index: https://rsf.org/en/poland
3 E.g. Harper, J. 2019, August 14. *Polish priest in hot water*, in *Politico.eu*. Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-priest-rydzyk-in-hot-water-over-green-energy/
4 Szuleka, M., Wolny, M., Szwed, M. 2016. *The Constitutional Crisis in Poland*. Warsaw: HFHR.

of Poland (KRS), a body responsible for nominating judges, was amended. According to the new legislation, a majority of KRS members will be elected by the Sejm. In other words, they will be PiS nominees. Finally, he retired some of the Supreme Court judges, by enacting a new law, to make vacancies for his nominees. In December 2017, for the very first time, the European Commission activated a provision of the European Treaties (Article 7 TEU) in relation to the rule of law situation in Poland. According to the Commission, there was and still is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law by the Polish authorities.[5]

In such circumstances, each subsequent election in Poland has a national dimension. They are as it were a referendum for or against the rule of Law and Justice, a referendum for or against further trampling on the constitution and human rights, wrecking the rule of law and pushing Poland to the margins of European integration. This was the case with the local government campaign of 2018, which focused on defending Polish cities and provinces against Law and Justice and on a fight to maintain their status as areas of freedom[6] whose authorities can cultivate the values that PiS fights against and implement social projects that PiS eliminates.[7]

5 *Rule of Law: European Commission launches infringement procedure to protect judges in Poland from political control*, 2019, April 3. Retrieved from https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19–1957_en.pdf
6 After the 2014 election, in 106 largest Polish cities there were 28 mayors from Civic Platform (PO), 13 from Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), 5 from Polish People's Party (PSL), 1 from Your Move (Twój Ruch) and 45 independents. PiS won in only 12 cities and the biggest of them was Nowy Sącz.
7 Only local authorities had the powers to, for example, develop projects regarding IVF, access to gynaecologists, sexual education or support Pride Parades or progressive modern art.

Similarly, the election to the European Parliament focused primarily on national affairs, and not on European, international or global issues. The Law and Justice's campaign revolved mainly around credibility in an attempt to convince Poles that the team of Mateusz Morawiecki, and earlier of Beata Szydło, was the only one that fulfilled the election promises, and to threaten that the victory of the opposition will mean the closedown of social programs such as 500+[8]. Moreover, in its campaign Law and Justice announced the "Kaczyński's New Five", namely a PLN 43 billion package of reforms having nothing to do with the EU.[9]

On the other side of the political scene, the European Coalition was formed. It was an alliance of the centre-right Civic Platform (EPP), the liberal Modern party (ALDE), the agrarian Polish People's Party – PSL (EPP), the nominally left-wing Democratic Left Alliance – SLD (S&D) and the Greens. In other words, it was an alliance of all the moderate opposition against Law and Justice.[10] Since it was a very broad coalition, from PSL fighting for right-wing and small-town voters, to the progressive Modern party and the Greens, it was difficult to create an electoral programme that would go beyond the general framework and would fire the enthusiasm of Poles. The Coalition's programme

8   A flagship social project of the PiS government, which in 2015 gave every family the equivalent of EUR 120 for every child starting from the second, regardless of income. And ahead of parliamentary elections in November, PiS has promised to extend "Family 500+" to cover all children.

9   *Read more:* Ruling party presents five major proposals for 2019 election year, in *PAP*. Retrieved from https://www.pap.pl/en/news/news%2C410195%2Cpoland-stake-2019-campaign-ruling-party-leader.html [in Polish]

10   The new left-progressive "Spring" of Robert Biedroń and extreme groups, the Confederation (Konfederacja) on the right and Together (Razem) on the left, remained outside the coalition.

was limited to criticism of the current government, slogans to restore the rule of law and Poland's strong position in the EU and in the world, as well as uncontroversial demands related to environmental protection and security.

It turned out, however, that the campaign mainly revolved around topics that surfaced in a way next to the mainstream themes planned by the staffs, i.e. cultural and social topics, which polarized large parts of the society, drawing them into a fierce dispute that flared up the emotions of the general public. Those included LGBT+ and paedophilia in church.

In March, Rafał Trzaskowski (KO[11]), as a newly elected Warsaw mayor, signed a declaration on behalf of the city, pledging support to the LGBT+ community. "Everyone is equal before the law. No form of discrimination is allowed, and Warsaw should be open to everybody. Guided by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the country's fundamental law, and the vision of the Capital City as a friendly and inclusive place", the document starts.[12] The declaration provides guidance in such areas as security, education, culture, sport, administration and work. "Warsaw is for everyone. This is not just a political slogan, but a vision I have for my beloved City as one where there is a place

11 KO stands for "Koalicja Obywatelska", Civic Coalition, an electoral alliance of Civic Platform and Modern party created for 2018 local elections, recreated for 2019 general elections (with the support of a leftist Polish Initiative of Barbara Nowacka and a group of popular mayors).
12 The Warsaw Town Hall explained on its official web site why the declaration is important: out of the nearly 2 million people who make up the community of Warsaw residents, up to 200.000 are members of LGBT+ groups, nearly 70 percent of LGBT people have experienced some form of violence over the last two years. For LGBT teenagers, a place where they experience aggression is usually school (26%), with their peers as the usual perpetrators (19%).

↑ Monika Rosa MP and programme for LGBTI. SOURCE: Nowoczesna
→ Anti LGBT graphics by PiS. SOURCE: Twitter Stanislaw Karczewski

for everyone. Political leaders, also at the local government level, need to take a determined stand against homophobia and discrimination, to bring about a positive change in social behaviour. This equality is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland," says Trzaskowski.

PiS immediately started an all-out counter-attack.[13] It focused on sex education and linked it to LGBT+ issues. Right-wing MPs condemned a school sex education programme planned in Warsaw, designed to teach pupils about sexual orientation, discrimination and reproductive health, according to the standards set by the WHO. The party wants to keep sex education mainly in the hands of parents, instead of schools or non-government organizations.

13 Shah, S. 2019, March 11. *Poland's ruling party launches attack on LGBT community at party convention.* Retrieved from https://emerging-europe.com/news/polands-ruling-party-launches-attack-on-lgbt-community-at-party-convention/

A public TV broadcaster (TVP), fully controlled by an ex-MEP from PiS, used all its tools to attack new Warsaw authorities. Manipulations and fake news about the declaration based on WHO guidelines dominated national media for two weeks or so. All right-wing journalists kept repeating that the mayor wanted to teach 4-year-old kids how to masturbate. Visions of BDSM lessons in primary schools were described by ultra-catholic and nationalistic commentators.

PiS leaders willingly joined the battle against the LGBT+ community. The Speaker of the Senate Stanisław Karczewski posted on his Facebook page a meme with a family protected from the rainbow by an umbrella with PiS logo. Elżbieta Kruk said she wanted her home town to be "LGBT free".[14]

Pawel Rabiej, a gay deputy mayor of Warsaw, representing Modern party, added fuel to the fire backing adoption rights to same-sex couples. Rabiej is in charge of Warsaw nurseries and kindergartens, which provoked even more vulgar attacks on the Coalition. The media linked to the government were full of defamatory articles equating homosexuality with paedophilia.

At a party conference, Jarosław Kaczyński warned all voters that by supporting the European Coalition they would allow nefarious forces to influence the upbringing of their children. "Our opponents attack our social policy and, even worse, attack families. They even attack children," Kaczyński said, calling the LGBT+

14 After the elections, the campaign concerning LGBT-free zones was creatively developed by Law and Justice local government officials, who adopted official resolutions declaring their cities and regions to be LGBT-free zones. Gazeta Polska, which sympathizes with the authorities, attached an "LGBT-Free Zone" sticker to one of its issues, which was banned by a court.

declaration "unbelievable". "I did not believe it until I read it," he said. "This is an attack on the family, and an attack conducted in the worst possible way, because it's essentially an attack on children. We will say no to the attack on children. Polish parents have the right to raise their own children. We will not be intimidated. We will defend the Polish family."[15]

Trzaskowski and Rabiej also came in for harsh criticism by members of the Coalition. Civic Platform leaders did not know how to react to attacks of the Right. Grzegorz Schetyna dissociated himself not only from all the considerations concerning adoption rights to homosexual couples, but also from the postulate of introducing civil partnerships. Thus, he once again let down the liberal voters, for whom a failure to introduce civil partnerships during the government of the Civic Platform in the years 2007–2015 is one of the main criticisms and reasons for aversion to that party. On the other hand, Modern party politicians manifested their support for LGBT+ people by taking part in all marches for equality organized in Poland.

As mentioned above, the second important theme of the election campaign was paedophilia in the Catholic Church. On the one hand, it may seem to be extremely important issue in Poland, which is a Catholic country. On the other hand it is a topic that used to be absent from mainstream public debate. From time to time, stories of paedophile priests were presented in the media, but there was no deep analysis of the problem, no reaction of the Church or state authorities – and such a reaction was not even expected by the general public. Much has changed in the spring of 2019.

15 *Op. cit.* 13.

First, on 21 February, the "Don't Be Afraid" (Nie lękajcie się) Foundation published a report on paedophilia in the Polish Church. It states 24 names of Polish hierarchs who are accused of hiding paedophiles and transferring perpetrators to other parishes. The document contains descriptions of sexual offences against minors committed by 20 Polish clergymen, and also explains how they were protected by bishops. The list includes among others the names of: Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz, Archbishops: Sławoj Leszek Głódź, Tadeusz Gocłowski or Henryk Gulbinowicz. The authors of the report affirm that they present "the most scandalous cases in Poland in which paedophile priests were protected by bishops and other superiors and in which the obligation imposed by the document entitled "Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela" was grossly violated[16]. "The cases described below are mostly those in which a final judgement has been passed in court, and so their number does not reflect the magnitude of the problem. The presented cases are documented and described in the Polish media", the document reads.[17]

The Foundation's management, including MP Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus, a former member of Modern party, passed the report to Pope Francis in the Vatican, which was reported by all Polish media.

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16 A code promulgated by Pope Benedict XV in 1917 recognized the existence of a number of canonical crimes, or "delicts", reserved to the exclusive competence of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office.

17 Charity says 24 Polish bishops covered up sex abuses of minors (2019, February 21), in Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-abuse-poland-report/charity-says-24-polish-bishops-covered-up-sex-abuses-of-minors-idUSKC-N1QA2OC.

About a month later, the Polish episcopate revealed the results of its own investigation into paedophilia in Church.[18] According to Church authorities, since 1 January 1990, 382 cases of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy have been reported. 74.6% of the cases had already been concluded, but only one in four ended with the expulsion of a clergyman from priesthood. In 40.3% of cases, other penalties were imposed, including suspension, canonical admonition, prohibition to work with minors, deprivation of office, limitation of service or a ban on public speaking. In 11.5% of cases, paedophile priests were transferred to another parish, to a pensioner's home or sent to therapy. 10.4% of all proceedings ended with acquittal. Most cases of paedophilia that priests were aware of have never been reported to state authorities.[19]

However, a breakthrough moment for the public interest in Poland in the subject of paedophilia in Church was the première of a documentary entitled "Tell No One" by the Sekielski brothers,[20] in which for the first time not only victims, but also their perpetrators, are presented. It tells heartbreaking stories about abuse, fear and trauma. The documentary presents victims psychologically destroyed, even in adulthood, by their childhood experience, priests caught on hidden cameras confessing to wrongdoing, and convicted offenders still working with children.

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[18] *Poland's Catholic Church admits clergy sexually abused hundreds of children* (2019, March 14), in DW. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/polands-catholic-church-admits-clergy-sexually-abused-hundreds-of-children/a-47925597

[19] Since 13 July 2017, an obligation to notify the authorities of the offence of paedophilia has been introduced to the Polish law.

[20] The documentary was crowdfunded. The film was released on YouTube and was viewed there over 21 million times in the first week. Later on, it was broadcasted by TVN, a private TV station.

Tell No One by the Sekielski brothers. source: youtube.com.sekielski

One of the priests exposed in the documentary was personal chaplain of Lech Wałęsa, former president of Poland, who initially refused to believe the story, but ultimately condemned the cleric. The film also shows examples of paedophile priests who, instead of being punished, are transferred to other parishes where they keep working with children and commit sexual crimes against them. Across the country, the film has triggered soul searching and raised questions, including whether the same bishops who moved perpetrators from parish to parish for years will be capable of cleansing the Church.[21]

Church leaders called it "nonsense". Some of the bishops ignored it. But others apologized the victims and offered help. On

21 The money for the documentary was crowdfunded. The film was released on YouTube and was viewed there over 21 million times in the first week. Later on, it was broadcasted by tvn, a private tv station.

Sunday before the EP elections, a letter from the Church leadership was read in all Polish churches. They apologized and asked for forgiveness.

However, the reaction of politicians of the ruling right-wing party was unequivocal. Jarosław Kaczyński described a discussion about paedophilia as a "brutal attack" on the Church and portrayed the LGBT+ rights movement as the key threat to children in the country. Another PiS MP, Zbigniew Gryglas, compared the documentary to "Mein Kampf". Deputy Speaker of the Sejm Ryszard Terlecki asserted that it was part of a conspiracy to shift the EP election results.[22]

The opposition tried to take advantage of the interest in the subject and the social outrage, demanding the establishment of a special parliamentary committee which would investigate the issue of paedophilia in Church and submit notifications to the prosecutor's office on suspicion of committing crimes by hierarchs who did not report cases of abuse to the police. Jarosław Kaczyński did not agree to setting up such a committee and stated that he could possibly agree to a committee fighting against paedophilia as such. In addition, under the guise of combating the phenomenon, the ruling party pushed through the parliament an amendment toughening the provisions of the penal code, in order to show the public how it fights sex offenders. The purpose of the amendment was to totally toughen penalties, limit

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[22] PiS is also implicated in abuse cover-ups. One of the party's top MPs, Stanisław Piotrowicz, made his name in 2001, when as a prosecutor in the Subcarpathian Region he dismissed a case against a priest accused of raping six girls. Today Piotrowicz is the face of PiS's attack on the courts, the Constitutional Tribunal, the National Committee, the Judiciary and the Supreme Courts.

suspended sentences and non-custodial penalties, as well as toughen the conditions for parole, including deprivation of the right to it.[23] That was done only for show, had little to do with helping the victims of cassock rapists and was criticised by human rights defenders.[24]

Of course, the public media and the private media that are financially dependent on the Right have come to the government's rescue. They all trivialized the problem of paedophilia in Church. For instance, TVP emphasized in the main news bulletin "Wiadomości" that in Poland only 0,08% of clergymen are sex offenders (in Germany – 4,4%, in Australia – 7%) and presented infographics, which showed that the largest group of people convicted of paedophilia are... bricklayers.

Paedophilia and LGBT+ became the main themes of the EP election campaign in Poland. In particular, in the last few days of the campaign, these two topics have dominated the public debate. This happened quite unexpectedly and was not planned by the electoral staffs. Both topics attracted a lot of publicity thanks to external entities over which the parties had no influence, and were immediately pressed into campaign machines.

23 Only a few of the changes concern sexual crimes against children under the age of 15. The maximum penalty for rape is to be 30 years, the offence is not to be time-barred and the court in such cases will be obliged to impose a lifetime ban on working with children. Such a change does not hit the nail on the head with the problem which has become a pretext for bringing this bill forward as a matter of urgency, because the majority of crimes committed by priests against children consists in forcing them to engage in what is known as "other sexual activities", i.e. not rape.

24 There was criticism from lawyers and human rights activists, especially as regards the introduction of life sentences without parole. Especially in the light of the European Court of Human Rights' ruling that claims that a life sentence without any possibility of parole is inhumane.

The emergence of the topic of LGBT+ has been definitely beneficial to Law and Justice, which has always had a very categorical opinion on all, and in particular sexual, minorities. Law and Justice went for its old manoeuvre known from the campaign against the "gender" ideology.[25] Like "gender", the term "LGBT+" has been dehumanized, depersonalized and called hostile ideology. Jarosław Kaczyński, using best practices from the Kremlin, described LGBT+ as a factor alien to the Polish tradition and culture, as a destructive movement that does not deserve protection or acceptance. The main ally of the Right in the crusade against LGBT+ was the Catholic Church, which principally opposes everything that does not comply with the so-called traditional family model. PiS presented the fight against LGBT+ as a fight for the protection of the Polish family and Polish children. In constant media coverage, it equated LGBT+ with paedophilia and sexualization of small children. For two weeks, politicians of the ruling party reiterated a message that the aim of the Warsaw LGBT+ declaration was to teach masturbation in kindergartens. This approach to the issue meant that even people who had previously been indifferent turned against sexual minorities and their demands.

Such a presentation of the subject caused the European Coalition to be driven into a corner. It was difficult for them to fight absurd accusations of promoting paedophilia and masturbation. The rational discussion on the protection of the rights of non-heteronormative people turned out to be extremely difficult also due to the divergence of views on that within the Coalition itself.

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25 For many years now, the Right and the Church have fought against "gender" as a leftist ideology, incompatible with the Polish culture and tradition.

On the one side, there was conservative PSL, on the other, the politicians of Modern and Green parties who support marriage equality. And in the middle, there was a very indecisive Civic Platform, which was not able to clearly support civil partnerships. The message was inconsistent, and thus it provoked further attacks. The Coalition was losing.

The fact that the issue of paedophilia in the Church surfaced seemed to be favourable to the opposition. Showing pathology in the Church that explicitly supports the government of Mateusz Morawiecki, and the lack of reaction of state authorities to this phenomenon could have an adverse effect on the ruling party's reputation. After all, it was all about sex crimes against children that outraged the public. Demanding clarification of the scandal and punishment for the culprits, opposition politicians could draw attention of the general public to the problem important for progressive voters, namely the lack of actual separation of church and state in Poland, and to remind the general public about a number of scandals at the meeting point of church and public money. Calls to face the issue of paedophilia in church symbolized the need to redefine the role of clergy in public life in general.

Law and Justice, initially insecure, started a counter-attack. The party presented itself as a sheriff who would solve the problem by toughening penalties. But most importantly, PiS equated the subject of paedophilia in the Church with LGBT+. It presented the whole thing as an attack on what is most important for its voters – on the Church and on the family/children.

Mobilisation turned out to be the key to winning these elections. It seemed that the European elections, which normally attract city dwellers to the polls, favoured the opposition. What

is more, commentators were convinced that the issues related to the worldview, so important for progressive voters, will draw a lot of them to the polling stations. And that was exactly what happened. However, another issue was not taken into account. By constantly talking about a threat to the most important conservative values, Law and Justice also caused mass mobilisation of its voters. Over one million people who did not vote in the previous elections voted for Kaczynski's party this time. These were largely people who wanted to show that they would not allow the good name of the Church to be tarnished and for introducing a threat to the "man+woman+children" family model. At the same time, part of PSL's voters, who could not find their place in the broad opposition coalition or accept the opening to the demands of minorities, stayed at home. Thus, the votes of the parties making up the European Coalition did not add up.

The final election results surprised everyone. The turnout was 45,42%, easily the highest for any European election since Poland joined the EU in 2004. It was almost 20 pp higher than five years ago. Law and Justice (PiS) gained the greatest support – winning as much as 45,38% of votes – while the European Coalition (coalition of Civic Platform, SLD, PSL, Modern party and the Greens) came second with 38,47%.[26] The campaign based on emotions gave PiS a yet another success – it suggested topics for the next election campaign and brought them closer to winning the elections to the Sejm. ●

[26] Robert Biedroń's Spring with 6,06% will also have its MEPs in the new five-year term. The 5-percent threshold was not exceeded by the Confederation (4.55%), KUKIZ'15 (3,69%), Left Together (1,24%), Poland Fair Play Non-Partisan Gwiazdowski (0,54%), Polexit – Coalition (0,06%) and Unity of the Nation (0,02%).

GOOD STORY

takes great care of the language. It controls the way people view the world, it frames others and does not accept someone's frames.

RESULTS BY THE NATIONAL PARTY (2019–2024)

- PNL — 27,00%
- PSD — 22,50%
- USR/PLUS — 22,36%
- PRO ROMANIA — 6,44%
- PMP — 5,76%
- UDMR — 5,26%
- ALDE — 4,11%
- OTHER PARTIES — 6,57%
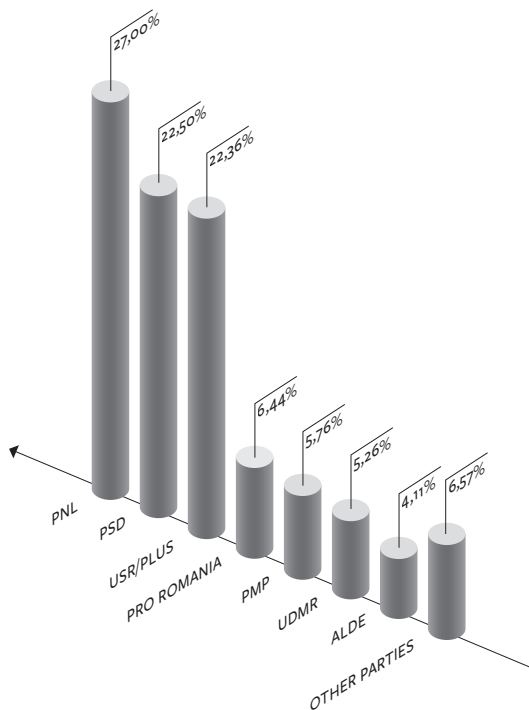
trust

EMOTIONS

▶ Article was written while on the campaign trail for the Romanian presidential elections taking place on the 10th of November.

▶ All photos by Alex Negulescu and Steluța Popescu.

THE STORY BEHIND 8 MEPS

● **Catinca Hanganu** and **Serban Marinescu**

In the early months of 2019, a deal was struck between two new, reformist, forces in Romanian politics, with a clear goal of committing Romania to European values, offering a viable alternative to the old political class and getting competent, principled, MEPs in the EP on the 26th of May. They were running against the social democrats, whose slogan was "Patriots in Europe", Romania's own brand of Eastern European populism mixed with nationalism[1].

Despite all odds, all polls, and all expectations, the fresh Alliance formed by former European Commissioner Ciolos' party, PLUS[2], and Romania's 2016 political star Union Save Romania

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[1] After a landslide victory in the december 2016 parliamentary elections, the social democrats focused primarily on weakening anti-corruption legislation. Less than one month after getting into office, the Government issued the infamous Emergency Decree 13, which decriminalized abuse of office and which would have directly benefited PSD leader Liviu Dragnea. After extensive public protests in all major cities and external pressure, the decree was cancelled and the proposed changes for weakening the anti-corruption fight were attempted by changing the Penal and Penal Procedure codes in the Parliament.

The social democrats' public discourse was filled with anti-european sentiment, with cries of "we should be allowed to decide what to do in our own country; Europe has its own similar problems and should not be preaching to us".

[2] PLUS was formed around former 2016 Prime Minister Dacian Cioloş and was made up mostly of the technocrat team that governed Romania for one year following

(USR[3]), got 8 MEPs elected and delivered the first Romanian leader of the EP Group, the newly formed Renew Group. No one expected it, no one saw it coming, and no one believed it was possible until the final results came in.

This is the story of how it happened, but more importantly, this is the story of why it happened. Leaving aside the somewhat historically unexpected meeting of the minds, of two leaders and their parties seeing eye to eye on the short, medium, and long term solution that benefited the country, and having the wisdom to implement it, this is the story of why being passionate about principles delivers results, of why logistics and rationality facilitates better emotional communication and why details matters.

The setup

Two new parties and their candidates, all with almost no political experience (USR having only two years of Romanian parliamentary experience) joined together in an alliance for the least attended elections in not only Romanian electoral history, but the European electoral history as well: the elections for the European Parliament. That seemingly powerless, undemocratic, closed institution that no one, ever, pointed out as being the driving force of tangible beneficial reform in Romania.

the terrible Colectiv fire. It is a pro-European, centrist political party which got registered in December 2018.

3   USR became a nation-wide party in June 2016, immediately following founder Nicușor Dan's success in the Bucharest's race for mayor that month. It got 9% at the polls in December 2016, becoming Romania's third largest party, and gained even more fame by the staunch opposition it showed in parliamentary debates to PSD's initiatives to weaken the rule of law.

Campaign bus. SOURCE: USR

With the Alliance polling at around 10 percent in the beginning, a technical team of europhile enthusiasts and fresh candidates set out to win hearts and minds in less than 10 weeks of time. Eight people ended up as members of the European Parliament, representing the most pro-European force Romania has ever seen, with the help of the bus, rain, music, and emotions.

The campaign bus

Conveying emotions does not happen in a logistical void during a political campaign. To capture the vibe, feelings of the people, one needs a fully functional technical set up. USR and Alliance 2020 USR PLUS had mobile campaign HQ, staff, and candidates traveling throughout the country for two months on the bus. Candidates came on board for certain legs of the campaign based

Inside campaign bus. SOURCE: USR

on the corresponding regions. As they boarded off, other candidates joined in.

Having an intense daily schedule of meetings with voters and volunteers across the country, in various cities, created the perfect set-up for candidates to want, and be able, to share stories and concerns of people they met on the streets. Our pre-campaign technical preparation set-up allowed us to capture all of that and share it with the world.

The bus staff was made up of two photographers, two videographers, a high-speed internet connection, two volunteer organizers, flags, leaflets, and enthusiasm. We wanted to be prepared to capture those moments and stories being told, as soon as they have actually happened. Everything that was filmed or photographed was posted within 24 hours on Facebook, with branding

and everything. From mothers urging their kids to go to European universities, rather than staying and studying in Romania, from kids having grown up without their parents because they were off to work in Western Europe, from grandparents who have seven-year-old grandkids that they have only seen on Skype, we made all their stories available to the wide public[4].

The campaign bus became a home on wheels for the crew and a temporary lodging set-up for the candidates. Blankets, pillows, notepads, printed speeches, and fluffy toys were part of the crew. There was a daily vitamin-taking schedule; sandwiches were shared, not own or bought, while home-cooked meals brought by newly arrived were welcomed with cheers.

We even had a mascot, aptly named "Sleep". It was a fat reindeer, named after something everyone was lacking – "Why don't we sleep? Where's sleep?.... – He's in the back of the bus, go hug him and stop complaining!"

The sense of camaraderie, of adventure, of responsibility, of history in the making, left a profound emotional mark on everyone: candidates, campaign staff, and local branches. No one had campaigned like this in Romania, no one had campaigned for "we'll get far without fraud" before, no one had taken the EP elections seriously, no one had linked the European Union with Romanians' well being in such a brutal and obvious way. European values used to be abstract; we were making them tangible.

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4 17% of Romania's population lives and works abroad, with only war-torn Syria having a higher percentage. The main reasons are lack of jobs and opportunities and lack of functioning public institutions (https://emerging-europe.com/news/new-statistics-confirm-romanias-demographic-catastrophe/).

Romania's notorious lack of infrastructure was no longer an abstract concept: bad roads meant a lack of job opportunities, which in turn meant that your kids would go and look for jobs abroad. Which, unfortunately, meant not seeing your grandkids except for on Skype and for official holidays. The bus was the place where you shared those stories, personal or overheard on the streets; the social media would turn them into the voice of the many.

The last rally in the rain

Political rallies in Romania have a bad reputation after so many Ceaușescu-era manifestations. Attendance used to be mandatory and absence resulted in penalties for state employees. Even in the past 30 years, political rallies of the classical parties have become infamous for public servants being bussed en masse from villages and nearby cities. No authentic emotion, rather apathy and a sense of duty, reeked from traditional gatherings. Both, members and supporters, were skeptical of attending a political rally of a new, different type of party and alliance.

Who liked us and why their parents didn't

Most USR/The Alliance members and voters are young professionals in their mid-30s and 40s, with young kids of their own, who took full advantage of the benefits brought about by Romania joining NATO (2004) and the European Union (2007). For them, the civil and economic liberties that EU membership brings about are somewhat of second nature.

For their parents' generation, however, both the fall of communism and the transition period occurred at the age when people are more reluctant towards a change. NATO, the EU, capitalism,

Last day of the campaign. SOURCE: USR

liberalism, and European values meant a new scary world, different than what they were accustomed to. Fear of change was more the norm than enthusiasm for new opportunities. One thing that members and activists usually share when they get together is the stories about how reluctant they are to share their political involvement with their parents. The 60–70 year-olds have been scared by the populist propaganda that if USR and Alliance ever come to power, they will cut pensions and probably sell the country to foreigners[5]. That was the gap to bridge.

5   The Alliance was regularly described in the press and by high-ranking PSD officials as the artificial creation of Romanian and international secret services. Because of this, the Alliance was not interested in the wellbeing of Romanians, but rather responding to "commands from abroad". One of the strangest accusations made to support this theory was that Dacian Cioloş, co-leader of the Alliance and PLUS party President, was the offspring of George Soros.

For the last rally in Bucharest, happening on a Friday, just two days before the voting day, we picked Izvor park, which was close to the infamous Casa Poporului, Ceaușescu's grandiose project, currently housing the two Chambers of Parliament.

The reasoning behind the location was two-fold: On one hand USR and Alliance 2020 USR PLUS was reclaiming the public space in the center of the city, asserting its place as one of the main parties in Romanian politics. On the other hand, we were being both brave and cheeky: both the front and back of the stage were covered in the campaign slogan, "we'll get far without fraud", a tongue-in-cheek for the corrupt political class sitting in the Parliament – We're here, we're big, and we are not going anywhere.

We gave the political rally more of a picnic-like vibe, for people to meet and mingle, play and get together with their soon-to-be-representatives in the European Parliament in an informal fashion, in the vicinity of one of the Bucharest's most formal and grandiose buildings. We were taking back public space and making politics something that is a part of daily life, that influences the everyday realities: quality of hospitals and healthcare, of kindergartens and schools our kids go to.

Build it and they will come

We had bean bags, balloons, soccer balls, and picnic blankets. A couple of hours before the speeches started we had few hipster DJs playing a set of Romanian 70s and 80s music: something that our young adult electorate could enjoy together with their parents. We'd asked participants to invite their parents and grandparents to the rally to show that USR and the Alliance are welcoming and are open to anyone, regardless of age; that

change and hope for a better life are the common ground. We are friendly, we can enjoy music together, and we can make plans together for our common future, under the European flag. And we have no plans of selling the country to foreigners.

Every detail matters

The choice of music being played on the stage was an interesting discussion. From the beginning, we chose the alternative rock band to play at all of our rallies. They were the people we knew. They were politically outspoken, always on our side, their music was powerful, energizing, dancy, and with the right message. Choosing them was easy because they represented our generation. Not too new and underground, not overly-abused, nor radio pop. They were the sound of OUR future. Then, for the last rally, we wanted something more – DJs playing longer, because the rally was turning into a picnic-meets-music festival-meets-political rally event. Music-wise, all of the old parties were stuck in patriotic-traditional music or with lame pop stars of the moment playing for a fee, but without any emotional attachment to the ideas expressed on stage.

What we needed was something that would appeal to all generations, something local, but also optimistic and of good quality. What we found was the trio of DJs doing some sort of Romanian music archeology, crate-digging for not-so-known Romanian music from the 60s and 70s, pop, jazz, rock, psychedelia, all the sounds of that moment. That was a period full of optimism in Romania, even though the country was under the communist regime. Those were the golden days before the storm, before Ceausescu's dictatorship completely took over and ruined everybody's hopes.

That music, even though it is associated with the communist period, is from the most optimistic, light-hearted, and happiest period of Romanian music. It's about an optimistic, happy future. It's the future that never was. It's retro-futurism of the best kind. It's something that my grandmother and my mother could dance to with my kids, with everybody enjoying it and feeling good about themselves, their future, and very importantly, about their past.

It was something trans-generational, something that can put all generations on the dancing stage and make peace with their generational conflicts. Everybody comes together, forgets their past differences, and works for a better, shared future. Bang!

A couple of days before the rally we asked our volunteers to add a new flyer to their leafleting bag: it was the invitation to the rally. It looked more like a festival flyer rather than a political rally flyer. The main visual image was that of a father holding his young daughter on his shoulders. It featured two live bands, the DJ act, and it exuded an air of "we've had a rough couple of tens of years, but now we're ready to take matters into our hands and make Romania ours". On social media, we asked participants to bring sandwiches for themselves and other participants, in the spirit of community and camaraderie.

Here comes the rain again

One hour before the political part of the rally started, the weather authority issued a Code Orange for thunderstorm and heavy rain, just as people were leaving work on an otherwise pleasant summer Friday. The city got flooded and the subway was overcrowded; Bucharest came to a wet standstill. The weather gods

Leaders' meeting. SOURCE: USR

were not on our side. None of those already present on the rally left. Yet, no new people were joining.

People were handing out raincoats; umbrella-sharing was a great way to meet other participants. There was something profoundly heartwarming about people crowding together with their kids and pets under dark blue umbrellas with the 12 stars of the European Union.

The keynote speaker, Guy Verhofstadt himself, had a bit of trouble getting to the stage because of too much mud, but he managed to make it in the end and gave an exhilarating speech to those few left still standing. He spoke about the great goal of the new group in the European Parliament: that Europe is not only a market, not just a guarantee of rights, but that it is firstly a community of human values and principles – rule of law, fight against

corruption, especially when the corruption is perpetrated by elected officials, who are trying to change legislation in order to get themselves off the hook. He spoke about a Europe of democracy.

The audience, those few brave battling the weather, placed their kids on their shoulders, carried their pets in their arms, and kept on asking for more and more of the umbrellas, but never left.

Who gets to be on stage

Political rallies are always strange for new and grassroots parties with strong internal democracies. Scripted flows of enthusiasm in a public space, coupled with the reasonable question of "who gets to be on stage and be acknowledged?" tend to lead to a somewhat unengaged audience.

All Alliance 2020 USR PLUS EP election rallies had a set sequence of speakers, as well as speaking times, introductions, MC's, topics, and rationale behind them being on stage and not other candidates. One thing that happened spontaneously, at the end of all our rallies, was that all of the local volunteers were invited to join the candidates and the speakers on stage and the crowd was clapping for them as much as they did for the people whose faces they had already seen on banners and outdoor advertisements throughout the campaign. "Please come on stage, because next time you might be one of the candidates or guest speakers" – This empowers people. It empowers your base, it makes members more inclined to run for a public office, and it makes supporters more inclined to join your political party. Politics is no longer for the chosen caste of people with family or business connections; it is open for everyone with a direct interest in the well-being of their community, city, county, or country.

Taking care of your own

USR MPS delivered food packages to volunteers in precincts who were making sure the voting carried out without any issues. "We'll get far without fraud" was, in the end, a phrase that encompassed the main reason why Romania as a country had lagged behind, despite her numerous diaspora living abroad and making a name for themselves.

Precinct volunteers during a voting day are important. How they feel and how they relate with fellow volunteers from more established parties matters a lot. On a voting day, their "volunteer" workday sometimes amounts to 22h, something they may or may not be, physically or mentally, prepared for. They need to be not only well-fed and hydrated but also to have a strong sense of belonging, of not feeling alone, especially if something goes really bad, which is very likely in rural areas.

Yes, fear of fraud on election day was real. Fear that everything that we have managed to convey, to all the people whom we have met and talked to, on the streets might be stolen away at the precinct on the voting day. It could all be in vain. Again. Because of fraud, without which we would get far.

All of the candidates were legally entitled to visit and inspect precincts on the voting day and that is exactly what we did. We sent them anywhere and everywhere to guard our votes and the integrity of the voting process. At the non-mobile HQ, we had a helpline for people in precincts. When something fishy was happening or they had a suspicion of potential influence on voters, such as a mayor standing outside of the precinct instructing people on how to vote, we would send one of our MEP candidates to stand alongside him and reassure people that they

could vote for whomever they wanted, without a fear of getting reprimanded.

Getting 8 MEPs elected was not an easy task. Truth to be told, no one expected 8. Most people expected 6. Two million people got out and voted in order for 8 MEPs to happen. Their votes mattered and we made sure that they got counted. Their votes were informed, and we also made sure of that. Their votes started the change in Romanian society via Brussels and we'll make sure they will not go to waste after five years in Brussels.

Victory is always emotionally charged, while surprise victory even more so. Alliance 2020 USR PLUS came in third, but the only thing people actually talked about after the election day was **our** victory, our unexpected success. We came in third, with about 10.000 votes separating us from the socialists. The national liberals won; the socialists came in second. However, our ranking as third was the only thing that made the news. It also was the only thing that gave people hope for a better, happier future. ●

GOOD STORY

offers a better, positive alternative to the current state of affairs. It gives hope to those who are looking for change and can be mobilized.

Gergő Papp is a communication adviser for the Hungarian Momentum Movement Party. After Momentum appeared in Hungarian politics with its successful signature collecting campaign against Hungary's Olympic bid, he was the party's Communications Director. In this position he was responsible for building up Momentum's image, transforming the party in the public eye from a one-issue movement to a serious contender opposition political party. Currently, he is the Press and Media Director of Momentum MEP Anna Júlia Donáth.

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and the Polish Chamber of Commerce
"Digital Poland 2020", a scholarship
holder of the Marshal of the Mazowieckie
Voivodeship competition for the best
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a place brand.

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Currently Bucharest based, she has a BA
in Political Science from the University of
Bucharest and considers individual rights
something worth fighting for.

European Liberal Forum

(ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 46 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen.

ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

Projekt: Polska

are people who are dreaming of a modern, open, and liberal Poland. Those, to whom a democratic, effective and citizen-friendly government is a key goal, and who help accomplish this goal while enjoying themselves, forming new friendships, and furthering their own interests.

The Projekt: Polska Foundation is our framework, a group of professionals with immense experience in direct action: entrepreneurs, leading ngo heads, civil servants. www.projektpolska.pl

ROBERT PLUTCHIK'S WHEEL OF EMOTIONS (1980)
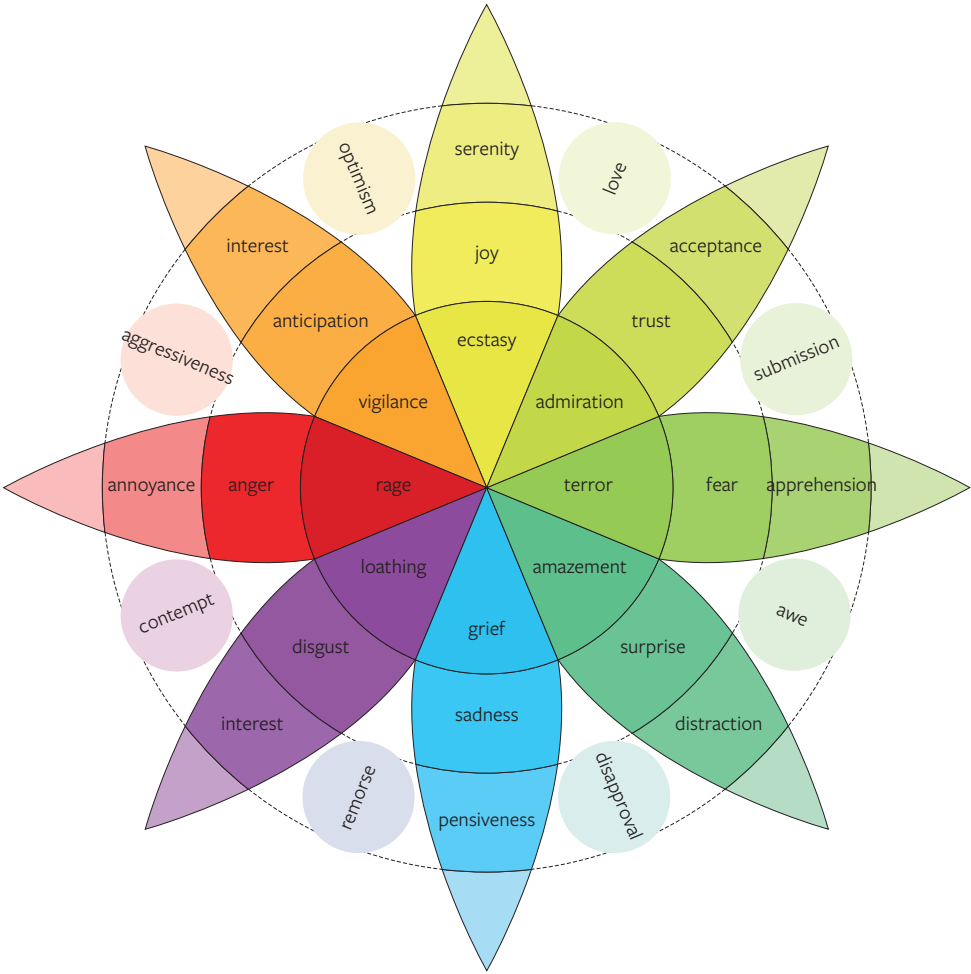
serenity
optimism
love
joy
interest
acceptance
anticipation
trust
ecstasy
submission
aggressiveness
vigilance
admiration
annoyance
anger
rage
terror
fear
apprehension
loathing
amazement
contempt
disgust
grief
awe
interest
sadness
surprise
remorse
pensiveness
disapproval
distraction

Elections to the European Parliament in Central and Eastern Europe proved that emotions play an important role in political discourse. The primary axis of the European narrative was built around stories that captivate the imagination and concern issues that are most understandable to people, not around charts and meticulously thought-out arguments. As much as resorting to a play on emotions is not surprising to populists, when it comes to liberals, we observed a new, one could say, un-typical, campaign. In this publication, experts from Central Europe show how storytelling and the use of play on emotions influenced the elections. They sketch out the essential developments on the political scene in the region with a reflective analysis of the newest mechanisms used by key actors.

HANDBOOK OF STORYTELLING