EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA: EASTERN CASE

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Abstract

European identity exists within nationalist identities. This fact came into existence especially after European Union (EU) came together and evolved. European identity, especially in the post-truth era where emotions are being used by politicians to justify their policies, identity politics is useful more than ever. But using populist policies might cause a shift in identity. In this paper concept of post-truth will be examined and a connection between post-truth politics and populism will be linked. After that, European political identity evaluation and acknowledged European values of the EU will be examined. Conclusion on a shift occurring in Eastern European identity will be reached due to the evaluation in which Eastern European countries have a stronger tendency towards populism.

Key Words: European Identity, Post-truth, Populist Policies, European Values, EU

Özet

Avrupa kimliği ulusal kimliklerle birlikte var olmaktadır. Bu olgu, özellikle Avrupa Birliği (AB) kurulduktan ve geliştikten sonra varolmuştur. Avrupa kimliği özellikle politikacıların, duyguları kendi politikalarını meşrulaştırmak için kullandıkları hakikat-ötesi (*post-truth*) döneminde daha da kullanılışlı hale gelmiştir. Nitekim popülist politikalar kimlikte bir değişime sebep olabilir. Bu çalışmada hakikat-ötesi konsepti incelenecek ve *post-truth* politikaları ile popülizm arasında bağlantı kurulacaktır. Sonrasında, Avrupa'nın politik kimlik gelişimi ve AB'nin kabul edilmiş Avrupa değerleri incelenecektir. Doğu Avrupa ülkelerinin popülizme daha kuvvetli bir meyili olduğu gerekçesiyle Doğu Avrupa kimliğinde bir değişim olduğu üzerine bir sonuca varılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Kimliği, Post-truth, Popülist Politikalar, Avrupa Değerleri, AB

I.   Introduction

Do we live in a post-truth era? How do we define the post-truth era? There are many interpretations of the term post-truth, especially since 2016 with the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (UK) and the election in the United States of America (USA). As Fukuyama points out, in both UK and US elections, voters were concerned with the loss of jobs and deindustrialization. The voters' concerns were mainly based on economic considerations and the idea that immigrants have been taking jobs and establishing new cultural identities (Fukuyama, 2018: 15). According to Fukuyama, in the meantime the right-wing became to be viewed as the sole protector of national identity relating to race, ethnicity or religion. In most cases, political leaders were supported by the idea of disregard and loss of dignity of the nation which eventually results in emotional response (Fukuyama, 2018: 16). All these bring out resentment, yet in a twisted way. Also, Wilsdon argued that both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump have shaken the status of truth and accordingly brought about the crisis of democracy since there has been *"a shift from scientific advice to knowledge brokering"* (Wilsdon, 2018: 46-48). Considering emotional evaluations and science being shifted in the means of knowledge brings us to the post-truth concept. Combined with the political environment and public resentment, Marshall and Drieschova point out another fact: Distrust of the public in expert knowledge and technological changes resulted in a variety of media usage allowed post-truth politics to rise (Marshall and Drieschova, 2018: 100). Although there still has not been a particular consensus on its exact definition, one can say that the term post-truth refers to the position of willingly accepting lies rather than the complete truth. At this point, there is an important question to consider: If truth is to be sacrificed, then what is given?

Politics over misspeaking, disinformation and misleading has substantially intersect with populist groups and parties, populist leaders. Populist parties have been on the rise for a while and in recent years in the European Parliament as well. The populist leaders have long been consolidating their positions in Eastern Europe and the politics of post-truth is maybe more vivid than ever. An important feature of post-truth politics is identity politics. Constructing a new reality over approaches such as "those dangerous ones" and "us Europeans" are possible instruments for populist leaders and parties which are either running elections or already in power.

What comes next? What happens when populist parties build their policies over lies

and identity politics? In this paper, it will be argued that in Eastern Europe, post-truth politics creates a shift in constructing European identity which causes Eastern Europe to grow apart from European values and identity as they were known and accepted up to this date.

In this paper, we aim to explain post-truth rhetoric, sum up the main fabrics of populism, scrutinize the correlation between identity politics and populism and in the last part there will be made an identity evaluation of Europe. Later, three case countries of the EU with relevant post-truth politics will be given since all have witnessed a tendency towards populism. These selected case units are Poland, Hungary and Belarus. The cases are selected in the Eastern European geography since this region has shown a stronger tendency toward populism compared to those in Western European (e.g., accepting amendments rather than giving a speech). These countries were preferred in order to underline the European identity and its relation to the EU given that Poland and Hungary are members of the Union whereas Belarus has firm relations. Eventually, the paper will argue the particular shift in the identity of Eastern Europe through the politics of lies.

II. Concept of Post-truth

There has been a serious discussion over the term "post-truth." While a considerable number of scholars have tried to analyse what the term implies; there is still no consensus over a certain definition. Apart from the definition of academia, the post-truth was chosen as the word of the year in 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries which defined the term as "*relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). The fact that the word was also defined as an adjective is an important point to consider. In this context, post-truth is mostly associated with the noun "politics" since the phrase was mostly used in the years of the referendum on Brexit and the election in the US (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

The term was used for the first time by Steve Tesich, a playwright, in 1992, in his article *A Government of Lies* which was published in The Nation Magazine. Tesich discussed that after "The Watergate Syndrome" there came the post-truth era (Tesich, 1992). After the revelation of Watergate Scandal[1] which involved the President of the USA, the American

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[1] Watergate Scandal took place in 1972 with robbers were found within sound locators and other technical equipment. It was found out that the robbers went to the Office of Democratic National Committee in Washington D.C. to place sound locators. Latterly Washington Post exposed that President of the time Richard Nixon was involved and there was more than just placing sound locators. He resigned two years later, changing

people had lost their focus on truth. The situation worsened following Iran/Contra Scandal[2] in comparison to the crimes of Watergate and as a result, a new syndrome of overlooking the truth was spread (Tesich, 1992). Another commonly known usage of the term was by Ralph Keyes who interprets the term as follows: "*Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth*" (Keyes, 2004: 27). Keyes argued that it is easier to be manipulating the truth rather than lying and accepting the misbehaviour. In his account, everyone lies but no one wants to be a liar (Keyes, 2004: 9).

Another argument on the subject is related to psychology but on a collective scale. Rietdijk underlines the fact that post-truth politics undermine one's epistemic self-trust and thereby one's epistemic autonomy which makes it similar to a form of manipulation known as gaslighting. Although gaslighting refers to an individual practice, post-truth politics can be described as a collective-manipulative act (Rietdijk, 2021: 1). Rietdijk views gaslighting as "*aims of having the victim doubt their own judgment, perception, and sense of reality*" (Rietdijk, 2021: 1). In this case, in the post-truth era, the more a person doubts his/her values the more he/she becomes open to manipulation. The more lying and 'misspeaking' are accepted as ordinary things, it becomes easier to justify them.

Though the politicians have lied and manipulated early on, why has the "post-truth" rhetoric become so popular at this very period? As Tesich puts it "*In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world*" (Tesich, 1992). What is distinctive about this era is the choice of accepting anything less than facts. Rowinski argues that there is a willingness to believe what is told, and trust in the speaker has secondary importance (Rowinski, 2021: 27). This way, many accusations, and statements can be latterly called "misspeaking" or even "joking". When it comes to politics, new rational thinking and new normal absurdly lack of complete truth; but only allow a version of it.

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the concept of trust on officials for American public.

[2] At the time of election campaign, Ronald Reagan promised American public that U.S. government would be helping anti-communist groups in world, which became "the Reagan Doctrine." After he won the election, it came out that his government sold arms to Iran which was at war with Iraq at the time. It was illegal to sell arms to Iran at that time and on top of that money came from Iran was used to fund contras. Due to the Second Boland Amendment forbid funding contras in Nicaragua whom were fighting against leftist Sandinista regime. Scandal is also known as "Irangate."

The question of how the era of post-truth politics began is another issue to point. Indeed, how did this concept come to life? Up to this date, many scholars have argued that the roots of the post-truth lied under postmodernism. McIntyre defines postmodernism as *"a set of beliefs associated with a movement in art, architecture, music, and literature that tend to discount the idea of objective truth and a politically neutral frame of evaluation"* (McIntyre, 2018: 174). Postmodernism paves the way for the explanation of post-truth politics as a perfect tool for politicians since it allows space for various interpretations. McIntyre identified that the origin of post-truth could be traced back to colleges and universities since it was first the scholars that had started the argument that anything could be open to interpretations as a text can be seen in a postmodern view (McIntyre, 2018: 123-124). This way, the postmodern view allowed the rhetoric to be denied in accordance with many personal explanations. Anything that was told could be an opinion, not necessarily a fact. Therefore, the concept of truth became dependent on the person involved in the situation. Thus, it became crucial to take into consideration who is telling "their truth".

Explaining the difference between the two concepts is important in order to understand where politics are involved. Prado explains the difference between post-modernism and post-truth in a comparative manner. In his point of view, postmodernism accepts truth as being relative to groups not to individuals as it is accepted in post-truth definitions (Prado, 2018: 6). Post-truth, on the other hand, is a collective version of using false facts to justify policies. For this very reason, Hussain describes post-truth as a corrupted version of postmodernism (Hussain, 2019: 160). Post-truth is eventually evolving into the rejection of anything else but one's own opinion, the more a person loses objectivity, the bigger rejection is allowed towards the counter idea or information. The driving factors for people to misperceive can be listed as the presence of lesser criticism on media, putting trust into emotional connections rather than experts, the anti-scientific approach and eventually loss of trust in democracy. McIntyre notes that science denial on topics like vaccination is a tactic being used for post-truth (McIntyre, 2018: 14). One of the biggest results of this has been lived through the Covid-19 pandemic. At Munich Security Conference Director-General, Tedros Adhanom was explaining why World Health Organization (WHO) was working with major media companies, he stated that "*But we're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous*" (WHO, 2020).

In an era of post-truth, combined with the denial of science and mistrust of democracy caused the construction of normalization of lack of honesty. Since people are more likely to act and choose according to their personal feelings, they are more likely to be manipulated and directed. Loss of trust in truth rather than normalizing a version of truth creates a blank space to be filled best by those who have the right words and right moves. Then just as Tesich puts it, "*We are rapidly becoming prototypes of people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams*" (Tesich, 1992). Post-truth politics is vital since they offer a ground for populist groups, parties, and leaders for their post-truth practices.

III. Populism and Post-truth

It is important to explain by who and how post-truth politics may take place in order to understand the reasoning behind such trending policies. As Velasco argues, over one-third of humanity lives under populism while some of those are turning authoritarian (Velasco, 2020: 1). Populism is a contested concept. Müller explains populism as a "*permanent shadow of representative politics*", and he argues that populists are not against representation, but they only support the idea of them being the legitimate representatives (Müller, 2016: 119).

Mainly, there are two obvious claims on being populist, an anti-elite approach and a specific definition of "the people". Firstly, populists create a common enemy of the people with the rhetoric of elites. As Waisbord puts it; "*Current populist rhetoric resonates with anti-elite sentiments, frustration and disenchantment with the failings of democracy as well as anxieties and opposition to aspects of globalisation – major shifts in labour and employment, breakdown of social welfare policies, immigration, and multiculturalism*" (Waisbord, 2018: 18). No matter how unsuccessful their policies are, the assumption is clear; any policy is better than a group serving others rather than "the citizens". If it was only about criticizing elites, then any party in an election would be populists. This point leads to the next important feature of populism; the nativist approach which eventually contributes to a growing fragmentation among the public and builds pressure on each other. There is a clear polarizing approach between "us" and "them." Anyone who is not the people, is necessarily illegitimate. "*And anything said by the non-people is instantaneously disqualified*" (Waisbord, 2018: 27). Müller defines populists as anti-pluralists, that they are the sole representatives despite the elite forces (Müller, 2019: 119). Basically, on the list of threats to their policies and place in the power of populist leaders and parties, there are government officials, experts, academics, exclusionism; immigrants, refugees, culture, and identity; economic disadvantages compared

to the EU in total. Anyone who argues otherwise against a populist leader, such as experts pointing out the exact calculations is natural deemed as opposition and illegitimate.

With the postmodern approach being a tool in a post-truth era, facts can change over time, especially facts brought by experts who take place in the opposition. Populists accept both truths-scientific and manufactured yet one is superior to the other which evolves around the people's feelings eventually becoming votes and public support for the policies. Jane Suiter points out the fact that emotions are key for voters of populists since they can exploit feelings of resentment and anger, and the tendency is to blame immigrants (Suiter, 2016: 26). Post-truth manipulations can be seen as seeking supremacy. "*Because the final aim of the post-truth politician is to consolidate power*" (Rietdijk, 2021: 12). Once it is consolidated it is easier to remain in power since "*Once truth is rendered subjective, once truth is made entirely personal, post-truth users cannot be held accountable for whatever they say*" (Prado, 2018: 2). Therefore, it can be argued that as populist leaders and parties consolidate their power in politics so do their politics pose a threat to the truth. The information, that is not deemed useful can be rejected, covered, directed, or manipulated.

There are two main sides of populism that sometimes lean toward each other which addresses different emotions of the public. Speed and Mannion sum up the difference between right-wing and left-wing populism as both parts suggest the people prevail while left-wing puts the people before the business elite, right-wing puts people before the elite which supports a third group of their choice (Speed and Mannion, 2017: 250). "*The more ethnocentric the conception of the 'people' the more xenophobic the positioning against the 'other'*" (Speed and Mannion, 2017: 250). This third group can differ from state to state, and it is approached with motivated reasoning. For example, Mexicans became the third group, especially in the 2016 elections in the USA, and Chechen people in Poland.

Other than contested concepts, there raises the question of whether populism is a challenger to democracy or not. Benazir points out that since people are the subject and the sovereign, democratic systems must act in their interests of them (Benazir, 2021: 22). According to Müller, democracy requires recognition of living with freedom and equal terms as diverse citizens since it requires pluralism (Müller, 2016: 3). As Galston puts it, basically democracy requires all citizens to be equal and inclusive to the political process, a key feature is majority rule, and it is only limited by preserving citizens' liberties and powers such as freedom of speech (Galston, 2018: 9). Democracy has pluralism and diversity as a fabric.

Because populist politics suggest that politicians must work for the people, some argue that populism is a product of democracy. On the other hand, with questionable elections taking place, people started to believe that they cannot make a difference in politics. This drew them away from the democratic process. Eventually, when people start to participate in politics less, it is a danger to the robustness and persistency of democracy. Therefore, in time, democratic values may fade.

IV. Populism as a version of Identity Politics

Arguments on defining populism have another aspect which is vital for understanding populism and its relation to post-truth and Europe. Müller points out that populism is a form of identity politics (Müller, 2016: 3). As Koruk sums up, populism is identity politics that advocates "real people" against elites and these so-called real people bring populist leaders to government (Koruk, 2020: 27). Constantly addressing a particular part of the nation as real people and rest of population or even the opposition as "others" create a tension within the population which eventually begin to create a social division among people. Therefore, identity is the most underlined part of populist politics. Identity is a social construct brought in given time. Of course, in time, it can shift into different versions as it did many times in history.

Identity politics today is evolving around mainly race and ethnicity, therefore populist parties bring arguments on immigration. Construction of fear and diversion of concepts into a negative mean that silently the new definitions of "threat" steer values toward racism, xenophobia and anti-cosmopolitanism which is spreading across Europe through populist parties. According to her research, Stojarová stated that in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Slovakia, also known as Visegrad countries, since 2015 far-right parties have started presenting immigrants as threats and criticized the EU and mainstream parties also promoted such topics (Stojarová, 2018: 32). Kaya made extensive fieldwork research in 2017 March and May with right-wing party supporters which includes *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) of Germany, Front National (FN) of France, Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle -* M5S) of Italy, Golden Dawn (GD) of Greece, The Freedom Party (The Partij voor de Vrijheid - PVV) of Holland (Kaya, 2018: 1-2). According to the research, of Kaya minority groups such as Muslims, migrants and refugees are opposed by these right-wing parties (Kaya, 2018: 2).

Populist parties in Europe have a considerable amount of success today. The reasons behind populist rise have direct connections to identity politics which divide communities. For example, Euroscepticism is generally evolving around nationalization policies. Noury and Roland explain the populist rise in Europe with economic causes such as globalization, trade openness, rising inequality, and results of the Great Recession and cultural causes as opposed to multiculturalism, and opposition to cultural evolution; they also point to opposition to immigration as one of both economic and cultural reasons (Noury and Roland, 2020: 429). Speed and Mannion proposes an alternative explanation, according to the cultural backlash thesis there has been certain progress toward building tolerance of different lifestyles, religion, and cultures than one's own, and eventually a counter backlash- populism has evolved (Speed and Mannion, 2017: 249). At last, it can be argued that to remain in power, populist party politics begin to disrupt values and concepts such as trust in democracy and freedom of thought, especially in Europe, one of the places in the world that have accepted democracy as an inherent and written value.

V. How Did European Identity Come into Being?

Who are these Europeans? How do we define them? Although there are various studies addressing the definition of European identity, there is still no common explanation. Although a common and solid identity definition is out of the picture, there are efforts of building a European identity which consists of nations sharing a historical background and common values. As Chopin puts it, which should be noted as a very exclusionary point of view, EU Member States are considered as sharing the same values, principles, and interests as the core of European identity, even though they have different national and historical backgrounds (Chopin, 2018: 5). Especially efforts of European elite and EU has had a determinative effect on the construction of European identity.

The political climate back in the time allowed the European elite to act together on common ground. After World War II, Europe was in ruins and under American protection. American protection had two ways. It was crucial for Europe to have an ally against the common enemy – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on Europe's Eastern border which began to swallow states even before the war ended. On the other hand, during the reconstruction of Europe, especially with the Marshall Plan, the USA gained influence over the Continent. European elites wanted to build a stronger Europe, knowing that if divided they would remain in danger. This idea resulted in the Treaty establishing the Coal

and Steel Community. The community began with six members and came up to this date with 27 member states as EU.

The widening and deepening of the EU have also an important role in constructing an identity. While adding up and reaching 27 members, the EU also benefitted from their geographical locations. Tekiner argues that the widening of the EU towards the East with political motives had an important cultural impact and was the key to unifying Europe on a cultural ground (Tekiner, 2020). Also, the more institutionalized Europe as a whole, the more it consolidated citizens into a community.

EU is built on values set down in treaties (Chopin, 2018: 2). An important treaty entered the agenda in 1973, the Declaration on European Identity. Nine members at the time agreed on the core values of Europe. In 1984 the Adonnio Committee was founded in order to promote European identity. A report was built in 1985 involving the objectives of this Committee, Report of Adonnino Committee involved intentions of strengthening the European community by bringing people closer (Report from the ad hoc Committee on a People's Europe, 1985).

Maastricht Treaty, the Treaty Establishing the Union (TEU), proposed "common" policies. Especially Article 2 of the Maastricht Treaty which entered into force in 1993 underlines values which are assumed to be common to all EU citizens. Common values of the members of the EU are specified in Article 2 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on EU (2012), which were "*the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities*" (the Treaty Establishing the Union, 2012). Besides these, Article 2 also refers to a society which possesses values such as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men (the Treaty Establishing the Union, 2012). With Maastricht Treaty constituting citizenship, consolidation of political common identity has strengthened besides economic unity. Another important strategy for making and consolidating of European identity was the Schengen Agreement. With a borderless Europe, citizens started travelling to different countries with the same political citizenship rights. With all kinds of free movement, patterns of mobility, exchange, and interaction between Europeans, Schengen Agreement created a de-nationalisation (Favel, 2010: 190).

EU's institutions and a common way of living without borders, a shared historical

background and values approved by treaties have eventually resulted in the construction of identity. It is also important to note that European identity is not above the national identity of the citizens or displaces them, the European identity co-exists with national identities (Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz, 2012: 106). Therefore, many citizens see themselves as both European citizen and a citizen of a nation within the EU. There have been theories suggesting citizens would eventually agree on a common identity definition. But history proved otherwise.

Europe has passed many levels toward a supranational institution and many elites tried to enhance the process of identity unification as a ground of integration. With populist parties on the rise, identity, and nationality both stay in the focus. In time regional nationalists and sceptics grew. In some places in Europe regional nationalism movements gained numerous supporters and began to be represented by political parties (Papadogiannis, 2019). For example, the centre-left Scottish National Party (SND) supports all-European citizenship while the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is highly sceptic against the EU but still accepts the European identity (Papadogiannis, 2019). An example from Denmark shows that The Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokratiet*), is supportive of European Union by arguing that the EU has "*ensured peace, stability and prosperity*" and the European community is essential for European populations (Socialdemokratiet, 2022). An opposite example of Denmark is the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti* - DPP). DPP which is a right-wing party is in opposition to EU membership due to its policies (DIPD, 2022). Democrats 66 (D66) party of Holland is pro-EU and underlines that Europe benefits from Dutch participation (D66 International, 2022), yet as Henley summarizes, Forum for Democracy (FvD) party seeks to return "Europe of Nations" and is opposed further integration (Henley, 2019). As Brzozowski puts it, *Les Républicains* (LR) from France is a right-wing party and has increasing Eurosceptic views (Brzozowski, 2018), a contrary example is given by Gil; *La République en marche* (LREM) which is a party clearly positioned in the center, not specifically right or left wing but pro-globalist (Gil, 2018: 204). As Barbière puts it, Belgium which hosts the main EU institutions brings out an example which is New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* - N-VA) currently supports a less integrated EU (Barbière, 2019). As it can be seen, there are different arguments and supporters of being a member of the EU. Although it is not the same anywhere in Europe, identification involves Europe. But EU does not see the same response and the EU in general or further integration of the EU is not always something to root for.

VI. Eastern European Examples: Poland, Belarus, Hungary

A. Poland

Poland is a member of the EU since 2004, the same year as the other four former USSR satellite states which are Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, with the enlargement including ten countries in total (Eur-Lex, 2007). Poland has a populist party which is the Law and Justice Party (PiS), ruling since 2015 and mainly using many manipulative tools toward the public and bringing about a version of facts to implement policies and eventually remain in power.

In Poland, the nationalist PiS adopted an amendment in which academic studies about some parts of Poland's history have been restricted. The restrictions are the result of an amendment adopted and effective since 2018. Amendment to the Law on the Institute of National Remembrance was signed by the current President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. The amendment defines any act such as claiming that Poland had responsibility for Holocaust as a crime, As Grzebyk stated, expressions which might be perceived as an insult to the Polish government; notions such as "Polish concentration camps" are included in a general prohibition (Grzebyk, 2017: 289).

It is against the right to freedom of expression which is also a value of European identity. But by using concepts such as nationality and identity, the Polish Government is normalizing restrictions on such topics.

Another attempt at post-truth politics is using nationality and nostalgia in order to address the sensibilities of the Polish citizens. As Regev sums up, there has been a lack of information in museums of history, especially the ones about World War II (Regev, 2016), consequently, exaggerated heroism was created. As Stanley Bill puts it, for example, there is the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa in the memory of the Ulma family who hid Jewish people and implicitly sacrificed their own lives during the Nazi occupation (Bill, 2016). As Stanley Bill puts it, Museum is telling the story of the war from the perspective of celebrating only national achievements, not the full truth itself (Bill, 2016). It is today unknown, how many Poles helped Jewish people to take shelter, yet it is among the possibilities that the Ulma family was reported to the Nazi officers since there were other people among the Poles under the Nazi regime who didn't or couldn't choose to

give shelter to Jewish people (Regev, 2016).

In Poland populist government put strict rules on the media. Trzcińska wrote in her study that there are websites which are critical of all parties serving as a kind of 'third way' between all supporters and oppositions to expose all sides (Trzcińska, 2018: 19). Just as it was done during the communist government of Poland, now the public is using sarcasm and humour to ease social anxiety and express their opinions, an example can be given from article of Trzcińska referring an article employing the Lord of the Rings to criticize (Trzcińska, 2018: 19). Since any other way of conversation is either problematic or even dangerous, especially youth is expressing their opinions through media with deniable sentences to dodge any possible incrimination. With, the Government passing another media bill[3] regulating media in 2021, it restricts any company that is not based in the EU to have power in media (The New York Times, 2021). US-based opposition media channel TVN is one of the many broadcasters to be affected by the regulation. Increasing control over media strengthens the effect of relative truth and in the absence of questioning voices, relative truth becomes "the only truth" in time.

Among the post-truth politics of the Polish government, there are so-called facts offered which can be proven otherwise within a maximum of an hour of internet research. An independent website from Poland made a list of seven lies told by the Prime minister and these can also be proven when research is made by public institutions. According to Pronczuk and Kocejko, Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki lies about the amount of Chechen and Ukrainian refugees in Poland, the rise in salaries, and the growth of the industry. The source gives reference to the official numbers; all information about the topics mentioned is accessible from the Office for the Foreigners (a department of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, responsible for refugees), Main Statistical Office and Eurostat (Pronczuk and Kocejko, 2018).

The Law and Justice Party of Poland is also accused of circulating conspiracy theories. As Duval Smith puts it, 96 people aboard in total including the former president, Lech Kaczynski died in a plane crash in 2010, latterly by a government inquiry, bad weather and the pilot were blamed (Duval Smith, 2016). As Duval Smith puts it, Kaczynski was the twin brother of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who is also a former president and now Deputy Prime Minister of Poland (Duval Smith, 2016). As Shotter and Foy put it, in the crash, Poland lost

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[3] Here it is given as "media bill" since current sources in English refers as "media bill" or "new media bill".

her President, commanders, senior priests, central bank chief and many more, which made many Poles see the disaster as their 9/11 (Shotter and Foy, 2020). As Schindler puts it due to the official announcement of Russian and Polish officials in 2011, the plane crash happened due to pilot error and dense fog (Schindler, 2018). On the other hand, current Polish Government blames Russia occasionally. As Goclowski and Zuravski puts it, Primarily PiS used the crash in the election campaign against the opposition which ruled Poland for eight years (Goclowski and Zuravski, 2020) and eventually some citizens and other opposition members started blaming and building conspiracy theories over the crash involving the former government.

The last example from Poland occurred during the pandemic crisis; the government tried not to delay Presidential elections which have been another issue in post-truth politics of Poland. The presidential election time was planned to take place on May 10th. Ongoing pandemic conditions initiated a discussion about considering rescheduling the elections. PiS was not in favor of it, and their defiance politicized the election atmosphere. When the election was postponed due to the pandemic, this time opposition parties criticized the government for risking the lives of the citizens by running the election. The election was postponed and due to restrictions, opposition candidates could not meet with voters in addition to holding democratic debates (France 24, 2020). Later, on June 28, Andrzej Duda, who ran independent yet had the support of PiS, won the Presidential elections without a big difference besides the public poles showing higher majority support for PiS and their candidate (New York Times, 2020). The current government is implementing laws which change the system gradually while shifting or even changing the "European" part of Polish identity.

B. Belarus

The second case of post-truth politics shifting identity away from the European identity is Belarus which is accepted as a "European country" and still has firm relations with the EU. According to the EU's diplomatic service, The European External Action Service (EEAS), relations between the EU and Belarus are based on respect for common values, respect for human rights, democracy, and rule of law (EEAS, 2016). As will be explained in this chapter, it is seen that Aleksandr Lukashenko is in power since 1994 and his government is applying strict populist rules. At the 6th Belarusian People's Congress on February 11 of 2021, Aleksandr Lukashenko, President of Belarus said that "*The world and Belarus are living in*

the era of post-truth" (Belarus.by, 2021). According to Aleksandr Lukashenko, people are spending too much time on social media which was manipulated by "*Internet giants*" and because of the search algorithms and social networks, people are becoming addicts and lose their connection with real life and social skills (Belarus.by, 2021). This discourse connecting the internet and media with a threat to social life and misinformation clears the way for populist/ far-right decisions to impose strict control on media. Demonstrators clearly object to the government's censorship policy, yet protests face harsh suppression and repression of journalists continues. This is one of the features where the government of Belarus mobilizes the masses by turning to the roots of identity politics.

Protests have become a part of daily life in Belarus in the 2000s. After the questionable Presidential elections, Belarussian people marched the streets and the government answered with an arguable police force claiming that protesters were armed. Yet there was no evidence of it. George W. Bush defined Belarus as "*the last remaining dictatorship of Europe*" and accused the President of rigging the elections (CBS News, 2005). As Bayer puts it, after 17 years, Lukashenko now is widely referred to as "*Europe's last dictator*" who proved the term by jailing opponent candidates and preventing their relatives to vote (Bayer, 2020). As of November 2021, according to Viasna Human Rights Center, 835 individuals including bloggers, campaign members and protesters who are involved in political activities after the 2020 election are held as prisoners (Viasna Human Rights Center, 2021).

After the controversial election, as Williams puts it, Lukashenko portrays protests as harmful to Belarus and connects them to the opposition parties, to this end opposition cannot be allowed to gain power (Williams, 2021). Every year, Belarus seems to be moving away from the democratic system. When it comes to opposition, in Belarus' case, the incident of Flight 4978 is important regarding post-truth politics. The destination of Flight 4978 of Ryanair was set to Lithuania when a "security alert" was given. As Lister puts it the pilot had to change the direction to Belarus, change of direction of the plane led to the arrest of Roman Pratasevich, an activist campaigning against Lukashenko's government (Lister, 2022). As Lister puts it, although Belarussian government officials insisted that there was a bomb alert and the captain decided to land in Belarus, the international community condemned the Belarusian government for staging the false alert and manipulating "*a state-sanctioned hijacking*" (Lister, 2021). Following the police brutality over the election protestors and the

Ryanair incident, the European Council introduced economic sanctions against the Belarussian government with other implications such as the ban on flights over Belarusian air (European Council, 2021). As Lister summarizes, after sanctions, Roman Protasevich who was taken into custody was released (Lister, 2021).

Another example of post-truth politics in Belarus is related to language. Multilingualism is a feature of Belarus. Being a former USSR member, Russian is still used by the majority. Belarussian is and was mostly preferred by intellectuals especially in the nineties to promote the idea of political separatism from Russia and the usage of Belarusian is and was a symbol of the oppositionist movement (Goujon, 1999: 662). While the Belarussian government has pro-Russian features, Roloff and Dunay argue that since Russian is the widely used language in Belarus, Russia has undeniable influence over the public by giving information through media channels such as other countries like Tajikistan and Ukraine (Roloff and Dunay, 2018: 28).

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, the Covid-19 pandemic as well raised questions about the populist government. While the pandemic restrictions were effective worldwide, in Belarus Covid-19's effects on people's lives were ignored and news revealing the truth about the outbreak was denied. As Jegelevicius puts it, tests were available only for those who had symptoms and contacted ill but at the peak of the pandemic that was not enough (Jegelevicius, 2020). According to Jegelevicius, Alexander Loban, a Belarussian doctor sent a letter to the President and asked him to close the borders instead he was taken to hospital with a temperature of 37.1°C on the thermometer and spent a week alone with no symptoms of coronavirus; even the Belarussian Orthodox Church which supports government asked people to encourage in online participations on education (Jegelevicius, 2020). The people of Belarus tried to manage the pandemic themselves and regardless of what the government preached they implied self-isolation. Research made by the SATIO and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation (2020) has shown that in 2020 %70 of the parents in Belarus did not send their children to school and %66 parents argued that they would switch to remote learning easily if they must (SATIO and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, 2020: 5). As Shingaryov argues, the President claimed that nobody would die from Covid-19 and amongst other reasoning he claimed all the death occurred during the time being were because these patients had previous illnesses before the virus (Shingaryov, 2020). The majority of the citizens found his reasoning unethical (Shingaryov, 2020), which can be argued as one of the

most obvious characteristics of post-truth politics. As Shingaryov puts it, the Belarusian state suggested many things could cure Covid such as saunas and butter, latterly, after public reaction, he explained he was only "joking" (Shingaryov, 2020). Because post-truth allows a part of the truth or a version of it, it is easier for populist leaders and governments to legitimize their unaccepted discourses as jokes.

The way the government of Lukashenko (mis)managed the pandemic took international attention. But most importantly, lack of trust in science and ignoring the scientific facts had serious consequences. Regardless of what populist governments trying to do it is important to note the fact as Loftus puts it, "*There is no room for "post-truth" in the management of this (Covid- 19) crisis*" (Loftus, 2020) since inadequate protection of public health is a direct threat to the world. Financial indicators of Belarus were the primary reason for ignoring the virus; although economic growth was and is on track, there was and is increasing inflation in relation to Western sanctions (Wiiw, 2021), the Belarussian government created an alternative world where coronavirus was exaggerated, and lockdowns were not necessary. In addition to this, the crisis was used to put further restrictions on media and freedom of speech.

C. Hungary

Post-truth politics are probably more visible in the international media than in Poland and Belarus, post-truth politics are a known part of populist Hungarian politics for a long time. In an interview with Komuves, Peter Kreko stated that "*Hungary is a post-truth laboratory where the system includes elements of both the Western fake news world and the communication strategies of autocratic illiberal regimes of the East*" (Komuves, 2018). In the case of Hungary, Feledy's report shows three features can be listed as populist features: anti-expert rhetoric, post-truth politics and renationalization (Feledy, 2017). As Randeria puts it, Changing the constitution, altering the system of nominating judges for the constitutional court to subvert the independent judiciary, and issuing laws to tighten control on media to limit the freedom of expression are some examples of policies of the populist government of Hungary (Randeria, 2017). While illiberal policies, fake news and propaganda are promoted by the government and consequently normalized, they also clear the way for further populist policies.

It is possible that post-truth politics related to the media might be the most obvious

manipulative move of the Hungarian government. As Mallinder puts it, one of the arguments on this issue is that following his third straight election victory, Victor Orbán initiated a Soviet-like media propaganda towards multiculturalism and migration by using television channels (Mallinder, 2018). During the election campaign, the government tried to discredit the opposition with fake news so they would lose public support. Other designated rivals were universities and science. By targeting universities, Orban's government aim to prevent the diversity of opinions and took science under control too. "*But liberal democracy cannot survive in the absence of a diversity of opinions, free public debate and spaces of dissent, which autonomous universities provide*" (Randeria, 2017: 3). Suppressing academic opinions is a feature of populism which threatens democracy.

When it comes to democratic values, probably the most important post-truth politics of Hungary surrounds around the law-making. According to the newly passed law, Orbán gained further space on enforcing acts of populism. One of the examples of these kinds of legal regulations is the "Enabling Act" as the public calls it. Formally "the Act on Protecting against the Coronavirus", this act ultimately allowed the government to take decisions independent of the parliament (Verfassungsblog, 2021). According to Kovacs and Trencsenyi, legalization of such politics facilitates implementing government policies more rapidly, in the name of the people of course, and intimidate and suppress the opposition (Kovacs and Trencsenyi, 2020: 11).

Orban uses fear to manipulate people and implement post-truth politics. For example, organizations and individuals supporting the EU are presented as foreign enemies. These focal points are especially targeted since they advocate human rights and directly oppose the government; eventually, they are "the enemies". On the other hand, in Orban's narrative EU is the main enemy. Under a populist government, Hungary moved away from the European economic system under the ideology of "nationalization." Hungary, a member of the EU since 2004, is bound to European values and European identity by treaties. Despite being a member, in return for the EU's criticism of Hungary's domestic policies, the current government is clearly taking a position against the EU. By being drawn away by the EU and leaning toward China and Russia, the Hungarian government is creating a shift in the identity of Hungary with post-truth politics. As Fukuyama puts it, Victor Orbán defines Hungarian as ethnic Hungarian, which means if a person is not ethnically Hungarian is not part of the nation and collective identity is rejected altogether (Fukuyama, 2019). Migration takes an important role

here. As Randeria argues, by extolling the virtues, Orban has positioned himself as a defender against Muslim migrants (Randeria, 2017). As Randeria puts it, Orbán is questioning the EU's values and argues that they are undermining the liberties of Hungarians (Randeria, 2017).

Populist parties are prone to tell a different narrative of the past. They construct their policies on people's sensitivities so using and reshaping historic facts is a well-established idea. One of the examples is the normalization of Holocaust history as was the case in Poland. As Pető sums up, in 2021 a statue of Admiral Horthy became a subject of public debate and remained as public property, after he was celebrated as a democrat by a Hungarian mayor (Pető, 2021: 241-242). But the problem with the statue is that Admiral Horthy was a controversial leader in the interwar period of Hungary in World War II. Pető points out that Horthy was an ally of Nazi Germany and one of the people who are responsible for the deportation of 430,000 Hungarian Jews after 19 March 1944 (Pető, 2021: 241). Keeping such statues and the reconstruction of the values by focusing on a part of history eventually triggers mistrust of historical facts and also enables the normalization of leaders with oppressive perspectives. This policy also gives a feeling of nostalgia within a feeling of pride replaced with disappointment over the past.

It is evident that the post-truth politics of Hungary has created a society that accepted relativity in facts and counts on themselves for truth. According to research made by Ipsos in 2018, %68 Hungarian people believe that they can distinguish real news from 'fake news', % and 60 believe people are misled by politicians, especially regarding the ratio of immigrants in the population. %63 of Hungarians believes there is more lying and misuse of facts in politics and media compared to 30 years before (Ipsos, 2018). It is important to acknowledge that in time, identity may change, a new reality may not involve the complete truth and losing trust in values such as democracy may eventually bring a new reality where new historical evidence on wars and Holocausts might reflect differently.

VII. Conclusion

The post-truth society is not a product of recent developments, it was already processed and accelerated with events such as Brexit. European identity is questioned so is the EU and this may lead to its rejection by the majority of the people in Belarus, Poland, and Hungary. In Europe, identity is losing its democratic features as nations lose their sense of community and lose trust in shared European institutions which take a major role in integration. It is possible

to say that in the end, people might start to stop demanding truth because they are losing faith in democracy and politics. The ethical crisis of politics is maybe the most important fact that brings post-truth society.

As it can be seen in the case countries given above, the majority of post-truth politics contradict European values. Freedom of speech, democratic values and trust in science are threatened by these new trends. For example, populist parties advocate that supporting minority rights is similar to supporting job-hunting migrants; this example reflects that truth might depend on the person speaking. At the heart of populism, the rhetoric takes the first place; there is a clash between "real people" and "the elites". Nowadays, especially in Europe, populist politics present a clash between values and living.

It is important to reach the correct information and know enough about the policies of populist governments claim that they are brought by the public and to save the country. It is vital to read their real agenda to understand what might and will be the results of their actions and somewhat resist this new acceptance of "almost truth." As in the examples, populist parties instrumentalize democracy to gain power, and yet they do harm it with post-truth politics. Of course, such change brings new outcomes and in time, new values are being settled. Brexit is an example of how to be European at the same time not being attached to any values written by the EU. The identity of communities changes over time, the important thing is shifts that might evolve into fascism that broke out in Europe which resulted in World War II and the world paid the price. As many populist parties gain power, there will be fewer "European values" in European identity, less democracy, less freedom and as a recent trend, less truth.

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