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The return of economic nationalism to East Central Europe: Right-wing intellectual milieus and anti-liberal resentment

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Abstract

This article emphasises the non-economic goals of economic nationalism and in particular its often overlooked political goals. Drawing parallels between economic nationalisms in Central Europe and East Asia, it focuses on Poland and Hungary and asks why did these countries turn to economic nationalism. The article traces this turn to ideational foundations developed by right-wing intellectuals over the last two decades, arguing that right-wing intellectuals believed that liberalism has failed what they conceived of its most important (political) purpose, the need of a radical break with the communist past. Based on a study of the writings and careers of leading Polish and Hungarian right-wing intellectuals, the article draws attention to the nature of the perceived threat to the nation. It contributes to the sociology of nationalism an analysis of how such a threat emerges and translates into a guiding idea of illiberal economic policies.

KEYWORDS

Eastern Europe, economic nationalism, far-right/radical right/populist right, postcommunist/post-Soviet

1 | INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Crisis of 2007–2008 spurred an interest in "economic nationalism," first as a potentially threatening and "rising spectre" (Economist, 2009), then as a threat that failed to materialise and take the form of a

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withdrawal of national economies from world markets (Pryke, 2012). Various explanations for this failure were proposed. They ranged from the rising complexity of world markets to the fact that economic nationalism itself is a complex phenomenon defying attempts to define it in terms of specific policies, as argued extensively in the literature (Helleiner, 2002; Pickel, 2003; Pryke, 2012; Shulman, 2000; Woll & Clift, 2013). No particular policy content defines economic nationalism as such, with the policy options it advocates going from protectionism to economic liberalism and neoliberalism (Harmes, 2012; Kangas, 2013), depending on the context and the country's level of engagement in international markets. Thus, at one end of the European continent, “economic nationalists” can demand “British jobs for British workers” (Woll & Clift, 2013), while at the other end, the economic nationalism of Ukraine or the Baltic states translates into unabashed support for European integration as the guarantee of national survival par excellence vis-à-vis perceived Russian threats (Abdelal, 2001; Kuokštis, 2015). Studies of economic nationalism seen in opposition to liberal market integration have been restricted to notions of “resource” nationalism (Vivoda, 2009).

Throughout the 2010s, there was an increase in cases of “economic nationalism,” mostly identified as such because its proponents invoked the defence of their nation against liberalism. Thus, while it is true that no country responded to the World Economic Crisis of 2007–2008 by massively retreating from world markets, social scientists have seen phenomena such as the Brexit campaign or Donald Trump's protectionist trade policy as signs of populism or “ethno-national populism” (Berezin, 2019, Bonikowski, 2017, Gusterson, 2017), without, however, focusing much on the claim that what these actors pretend to enact are instances of “economic nationalism.”

In the European Union, it is in particular the former best performers of European integration, Poland and Hungary, that throughout the 2010s became some of the most vocal challengers of liberalism, both economic and political. According to various analyses, these countries have enacted “banking” (Mérő & Piroska, 2016), “finance” (Johnson & Barnes, 2014), or “economic nationalism” (Bohle & Greskovits, 2018). Together with Russia, they pursued a model of developmental statism explicitly invoking economic nationalism and openly seeking to confront liberalism as the major threat to their countries (Appel & Orenstein, 2018; Bluhm & Varga, 2020). It is, however, unclear why these countries would embrace economic nationalism. Several explanations focus on discontent with the economic results of globalisation (Appel & Orenstein, 2018; Toplišek, 2020) or the societal demand stemming from domestic business following the late 2000s crisis years (Naczyk, 2014; Scheiring, 2019).

This article's contribution is a study of the development of economic nationalist ideas; it argues that important parts of these countries' political and intellectual right-wing elites sought a break with liberalism already around the turn of the century. It builds on the argument that while there is little that makes certain policies particular to it, economic nationalism nevertheless originates in a specific perspective, an “organic” or “holistic” depiction of economy and society (Nakano, 2007; Szlajfer, 2012). This perspective sees socio-economic measures as instrumental to ensuring goals of “national survival.” Here the notion of an “existential threat” to the nation serves as an important element in approaching the resurgence of economic nationalism, as economic nationalists frame the rationale for their policies as existential threats to the nation. Responding to such threats requires safeguarding the *nation-state* against the opponents of economic nationalists, and this goal of safeguarding the state essentially entails a political project that predates and prepares the ground for the economic agenda.

The article explores these characteristics of economic nationalism in its theoretical part, contributing to a wider literature concerned with how ideas helped in the development and diffusion of economic liberalism or neoliberalism and now increasingly also of economic nationalism. Introducing a study of 16 leading right-wing intellectuals' writings and careers in Poland and Hungary, it then moves to analysing in its empirical part why a perceived “existential threat” to the nation emerged in Poland and Hungary and how it currently translates into policies of economic nationalism. The article ends with a discussion of how the origins of economic nationalism are in these cases to be found not in economic readings of national problems but in the pursuit of such political goals as “national unity,” “sovereignty” and marginalisation of opponents considered illegitimate.

2 | THE RESURGENCE OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Pointing to the historical and geographical diversity of economic nationalisms, studies of economic nationalism have generally warned against attempts to construct general theories of the phenomenon (Abdelal, 2001; Helleiner, 2002; Pickel, 2003; Shulman, 2000; Woll & Clift, 2013). Most scholars agree that "economic nationalism is not so much about the economy as it is about the nation" (Pickel, 2003), and the forms it takes differ depending on the concrete situations in which nationalisms arise. Some have nevertheless argued in favour of more general theories. Their starting point was the "holistic" (Szlajfer, 2012) or "organic" perspective of most economic nationalisms. Unlike (neo) liberalism, the "organic" perspective does not understand the economy as an "aggregate of individual behaviours" (Nakano, 2007) but as part and parcel of national "organisms." Goals such as the "survival of the nation" require a re-orientation of the relationship between economic and other policies. This means that economic policy will be judged not just by reference to economic goals of individual wellbeing but primarily by reference to the goal of "national survival." In particular, a rich literature on East Asian economic nationalism has shown how economic nationalism emerges out of political concerns over saving the nation by containing the influence of communists or, to take the case of Japan, ensuring "national power" on the international scene (Hall, 2004; Johnson, 1989; Leftwich, 1995; Stubbs, 2009).

Similarly, Poland and Hungary's newly rediscovered enthusiasm for state interventionism addresses woes concerning the "survival of the nation" and that involve politics, culture and demography. "National-conservatives," as present-day power-holders in Poland and Hungary refer to themselves, have proven to have developed such a holistic perspective. They have changed to the "national interest" not just economic policy, but also social policy, constitutional and media laws, the status of private universities and research institutes, or immigration and foreign policy (Blokker, 2019; Krzyżanowski, 2018; Varga & Buzogány, 2020).

The insistence on "national survival" explains why economic nationalism, even in the forms that come closest to neoliberalism and its insistence on welfare retrenchment, often promises at least to rescue a rudimentary sphere of welfare for the members of the nation, as captured in the notion of "welfare chauvinism" in analyses of West European nationalist parties (Faist, 1994). In analyses of East Asian economic nationalism, welfare or social spending serves goals of making titular nations internationally more competitive by targeting expenditures at those groups employed in export-oriented industries or other "productive" branches, but also in the state administration (Kwon, 2005).

Similar "productivist" perspectives also drive social spending in Hungary, while Poland's economic nationalists went beyond such approaches to introduce universalist welfare programs. Because of its "workfarist" approach, the socio-economic agenda of Viktor Orbán's government initially appeared unabashedly "neoliberal," continuing or even deepening the trend of welfare retrenchment to have preceded it. It replaced modest but unconditional welfare provision to the long-term unemployed with a model offering benefits only to those individuals accepting underpaid community service work (Bohle & Greskovits, 2018; Scharle & Szikra, 2015; Szikra, 2014; Vidra, 2018).

Yet the socio-economic agenda of the "national-conservative" PiS and Fidesz[1] displays several elements that part ways with the social retrenchment and insistence on the necessity to keep wages low for attracting foreign investments, characterising the previous decades since the fall of communism. In Hungary, the government introduced tax breaks for families with several children more recently, ranging from lifetime tax exemptions to paying for cars and mortgages (Walker, 2019) and minimum wage increases, doubling in 2019 the 2010 figure (OECD, 2018; Patricolo, 2019). The government achieved a 10% reduction in household energy bills (Byrne, 2015a) and successfully defended mortgage owners that had acquired Swiss francs-denominated loans from an increase in interest rates (Byrne, 2015b). The leading economist of the government-close conservative think tank Századvég claimed that since 2011 his government's "economic policy yearly channels 3% of GDP away from capital owners towards wage-earners and families" (György, 2017).

While it is important not to take such assessments as statements of facts, they are important for showing how Fidesz-close analysts frame the wider goals of their policies: not as universal support, but as purposively tailored schemes to support "productive" citizens, as in the case of the East-Asian developmental welfare state (Kwon, 2009). Poland's national-conservative PiS went further than Fidesz and in 2015 introduced a universalist welfare programme in the form of nationwide children allowances. It thus raised household incomes directly by introducing the universalist 500+ children allowance programme (Goraus-Tańska, 2017), the largest addition to the country's social safety net since 1989 (Orenstein, 2018). Additionally, and next to lowering the pension age, the government increased the minimum wage to relative levels above those in any neighbouring country, including Germany and Hungary (relative to national average wages, CEE Market Watch, 2018).

Equally rooted in the organic perspective inherent in economic nationalism, the nation-state is of special importance for "national survival" as its proponents claim that it gives coherence to the various "organs" of the nation. Economic nationalism therefore demands control over and promises protection to the "nation-state"; nation-states represent values in themselves, "higher" goods that deserve protection as the guarantee for turning the agendas of economic nationalists into reality. In the words of Yoram Hazony, a proponent of "national-conservatism" in the United States and Israel to visit Orbán in 2019 in Budapest, states are the "souls" of nations (Hazony, 2009). Nationalists tend to resist liberal policies as existential threats if they curtail "sovereignty" and the powers of the state in areas perceived as vital for "national survival." Here, too, there is an evident parallel to the literature on East-Asian cases: economic nationalism in South Korea or Japan is indistinguishable from the notion of the developmental state (Amsden, 1989; Hall, 2004; Johnson, 1989; Johnson, 1999), a state seen as the guarantee and also the main instrument for securing national survival.

The re-emergence of economic nationalism, together with its fondness of the nation-state in Poland and Hungary, is not a straightforward phenomenon. After all, both countries were among the best performers of market and European integration reforms. Other countries seemed to be muddling through the transition spanning the years between the fall of communism in 1989 and the EU's Eastern Enlargement; they experimented with a mix of liberalism and social protection measures and earned criticism for their lack of resolution in pursuing "reforms." In contrast, Poland seemingly represented the success story of sustained growth thanks to liberalising and welfare retrenchment measures. Its "successful" path continued unabated even by the crisis years of the late 2000s (Milanovic, 2015). Economic and political liberalism seemed in both countries to be the dominant paradigm for policy, with right-wing alternatives hardly standing a chance to compete with it (Morlang, 2003; Tavits & Letki, 2009). How could then economic nationalism replace liberalism precisely in the countries that seemed to have best internalised liberal principles?

Economic nationalism in Poland and Hungary is usually explained in terms of these countries' disappointment with liberalism following the financial crisis of 2007–2008 (Appel & Orenstein, 2018) or as a reaction to "neoliberal globalisation" (for a review, see Toplišek, 2020). This article adds to these explanations an analysis of how "neoliberal globalisation" came to be perceived as a threat in Poland and Hungary, two countries most closely associated with its successful pursuit. In doing so, it builds on the wider literature on the importance of ideas for capturing (Hall, 1993) and explaining institutional and policy change (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Blyth, 2002; for applications to the emergence of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe, see Ban, 2016; Bockman & Eyal, 2002).

This article points to the strengthening of a right-wing milieu around the turn of the century, supported by intellectuals engaged in "ideology production" (Bourdieu, 1979). This milieu was increasingly mobilising against the perceived threat of continuous influence of former communists over politics and economy and against the former communists' support for liberal economic reforms. I illustrate this argument by focusing on one particular element of the right-wing: the intellectuals defending PiS and Fidesz in public, advising these parties or writing their position papers and programmes. I argue that these intellectuals propagated the idea of an alleged alliance or continuity between former communists and liberalism, helping cast these ideologies as similarly "dangerous" and "foreign." This alleged continuity between communism and liberalism became an "existential threat for the nation" for those segments of the right-wing that would take the power in the 2010s.

The data for this article come from surveying a group of self-termed "right-wing" or "conservative" intellectuals in terms of writings, publications, programmatic statements and publicly accessible interviews. A list of these intellectuals is available in Appendix A; it consists of the intellectuals that have joined Fidesz and PiS and helped formulate these parties' programmatic positions. They count as key intellectual figures or intellectual supporters of these parties, and most have also been listed in other studies, most notably in the literature on intellectual histories of East Central Europe (Mándi, 2015; Rae, 2008; Trencsényi, Kopeček, Gabrijelčič, Falina, & Baár, 2018). The data collection also relies on volumes documenting debates between these intellectuals and usually liberal opponents (Kosiewski, 2008; Smolar, 2006).

The analysis of conservative publications uses "adaptive coding" (Layder, 1998; Stevens, 2011); that is, it identified an initial set of codes from secondary literature. It then revised or expanded these codes while going through the body publications in order to identify "key themes," two of which structure the next section: the alleged continuity between communists and liberals and the theme of nations requiring strong states to serve them.

While in both countries right-wing intellectuals of self-professed "conservative" convictions were vocal throughout the 1990s, their statements and writings in both countries reach a far more radical critique of liberalism throughout the 2000s. Former communists returned to power for the second time in the early 2000s, and soon became embroiled in both countries in large political scandals, such as the Lew Rywin corruption scandal in Poland (2002) or the leaked 2006 speech of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány in Hungary, in which Gyurcsány admitted lying "day and night" about the country's finances (Körösényi, Ondré, & Hajdú, 2017; Zarycki, 2009). Table 1 below offers an overview of these key developments and associated dates.

Conservative intellectuals in both countries reacted to the return of former communists to power and political scandals by publishing manifestos and joining or advising Fidesz and PiS. From the moment that these parties returned to power, conservative intellectuals received public offices in ministries and state institutions (see Appendix A for an overview of these intellectuals' careers). It is to this conservative discourse of the 2000s and the "wider goals behind policies" (Hall, 1993) that they heralded—structured around two key themes—that the article turns to in its following section.

TABLE 1 Overview of post-1989 key dates regarding the return to power of former communists

	Poland	Hungary
First noncommunist-led government	1989–1991: The Solidarity government of T. Mazowiecki	Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), 1990–1994
First return to power of former communists	Democratic Left Alliance 1993–1997; coalition with the Polish People's Party	Hungarian Socialist Party, 1994–1998; coalition with the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats
Second return to power of former communists	Democratic Left Alliance 2001–2005, coalition with the Polish People's Party	Hungarian Socialist Party, 2002–2010; coalition with the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats 2002–2008
	First wave of the EU's Eastern Enlargement: May 2004	
	Major political scandals affecting former communists	
	The Lew Rywin-Affair (starts 2002)	Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány 2006 "Őszöd speech"
National-conservatives in power	Law and Justice, 2005–2007 coalition government with two other parties; Lech Kaczyński, President of Poland, 2005–2010; Law and Justice governments 2015–present; Andrzej Duda, President of Poland, 2015–present	Fidesz, 1998–2002, coalition with two other parties, including MDF Fidesz, 2010–present (political alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party since 2006)

3 | A CONSERVATIVE EMBRACE OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM

Initial anti-liberal criticisms in Poland and Hungary took shape in the early 1990s when former communists returned to power (1993–1994). The criticism concerned the "*nomenklatura's* return," claiming that the electoral success of former communists proves the communist elite's continuous—and illegitimate—influence across society (Podgórecki, 1995) and that it proves the existence of a "*nomenklatura* bourgeoisie," allied with international financial investors (Tellér, 1999). This narrative specifically blamed the liberals for tolerating this development, without yet claiming that there is a fundamental affinity between liberalism and communism. In Hungary, a group of more explicitly right-wing intellectuals joined Fidesz in the 1990s, including such central figures as Gyula Tellér (longest serving advisor of Viktor Orbán) and György Matolcsy, an economist with numerous ministerial appointments and head of Hungary's Central Bank since 2013. Although the criticism of liberalism expressed by Tellér (2009) would later on culminate with an article reducing liberals to an allegedly "Jewish" lineage of anti-Hungarian politicians, the writings of this group lack the substantial anti-liberal content of the 2000s. In contrast, Polish conservatives made greater efforts to combine academic activities with political initiatives, launching already throughout the 1990s numerous political parties. Some of their first representatives—such as Aleksander Hall—clashed with liberals as early as the 1980s, for instance, by protecting the image of Roman Dmowski's National Democracy (the 1886–1947 *Endecja* party) from liberal criticism of *Endecja's* anti-semitism (Matyja, 2015).

3.1 | Continuity and affinity between former communists and liberals in constituting a threat to the nation

The 2000s brought an intensifying critique of liberalism. Conservatives increasingly went beyond only arguing that liberals have an agenda that disrupts political institutions by weakening the state. In addition, they started accusing liberals of resembling the communists, as liberals also deepen societal divisions by questioning traditional forms of authority (Fodor, 2009; Legutko, 2006; Molnár, 2010), praising entrepreneurship while "devaluating work" and by insisting—in an economistic vein—on "contractual relationships" that strike at such natural bonds as the [traditional] family (Krasnodębski, 2012; Legutko, 2005). In the words of Dariusz Gawin and Dariusz Karłowicz, liberalism stands accused of "economism," a narrow and disruptive societal vision that needs to be opposed (Karłowicz, 2005).

As in the case of "populist conservatives" in the United States and their discourse about the liberals' "treason" of their country's interests (Lowi, 1995), in Poland and Hungary, too, the alleged alliance or ideological affinity between the left and the liberals became a dominant conservative narrative. To the extent that both left and liberals promoted the accession to the EU in 2004 and shaped the negotiations preparing their countries for joining the EU, this led conservatives to a heightened perception of their political environment as threatening and populated by "globalist" "enemies" of the nation.[2] The "nation" and, by extension, the "nation-state" become expressions of freedom, leading to the radical conception that any ideology claiming to transcend nationalism is inimical to freedom and, therefore, totalitarian (Legutko, 2016). In the words of András Lánczi, author of a "Conservative Manifesto" (2002) and long-standing key intellectual figure associated with Fidesz:

> The nation is not a political concept in Eastern Europe as it is, say, in the United States. [In Eastern Europe] [t]he nation is the highest expression of the sense of belonging, a sense of freedom, defending the roots of a culture [...]. (Lánczi, 2007)

Conservatives increasingly operated with a double extension of what the existential threat to the nation is about: from communism to liberalism and from liberalism to the project of European (market) integration. Post-communist parties in Poland and Hungary were most closely associated with the liberal reforms required by transition, European integration and Euro-area conditionality, leading these countries during the final stage of EU

accession. Accordingly, national-conservatives increasingly perceived as suspect not only the postcommunist political formations but also the reforms enacted in the name of liberalism. These include market liberalisation, "Europeanisation" and the "high social costs" incurred by the "victims" of transition, such as "permanent fear from losing their jobs, being paid meagre salaries, [and] suffering from both material and moral needs." (Lánczi, 2007). Conservative intellectuals hailed the electoral victories of the parties they supported as victories of the transition's "victims" (Krasnodębski, 2005; Tellér, 2014). It is to these "victims" that policies of national-conservatives need to do justice.

This wording contrasts strongly with the label of "transition losers," widely applied across postcommunist countries to describe the social strata harmed by the transition away from communism (Brainerd, 1998; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002). However, there is a difference between the two countries in how to define the transition "victims." Hungarian intellectuals called for justice to the "middle class," even though understood so broadly as to encompass two thirds of the population (Molnár, 2010; Tellér, 2009, 2014). In contrast, major conservative Polish intellectuals understood the lowest social strata as the "true victims" of liberal reforms (Gawin, 2006; Krasnodębski, 2006) and claimed to follow in this understanding the Polish tradition of interwar "solidarism."[3]

3.2 | Strong states pursuing social policies that serve "the nation"

The identification of liberalism as communism's successor and as the main threat to their countries' "sovereignty" made conservatives increasingly reluctant vis-à-vis key liberal concepts such as rule-of-law, competition, self-interest, or markets. First, "corrupt" states cannot realise principled actions, with "corrupt" meaning a state still "infiltrated" by communist legacies, for instance, Hungary's communist-era Constitution, replaced by Fidesz with a new Constitution in 2012 (Fodor & Stumpf, 2007). Second, as outgrowths of self-interest, markets are intrinsically suspect (Gawin, 2006; Molnár, 2010), and policies require an "active" and "strong" state. In the words of Gábor G. Fodor, a leader of Szazádvég, Fidesz' political foundation:

> Today it is clear that both the diagnosis of market logic and the therapy it offered have failed. They have failed on the level of *principles*, because if market logic is made absolute, it is not capable of providing the conditions of welfare, solidarity, fairness and cooperation for everyone. And they have failed on the level of *practice*, because the global economic crisis has shown the flaws of neo-liberal principles on the basis of facts. [...] there is a need for an active, intelligent and strong state that [...] adjust[s] the market's mechanisms [...] But instead of an active, strong and intelligent state we are witnessing an impotent, over-stretched and corrupt state that makes its citizens distrustful. (Fodor, 2009)

This critique of liberalism varies in virulence: some simply accused liberalism of ignoring the importance of the state (Skiba, 2010; Stumpf, 2009), while others invoked criticisms of liberalism based on the writings of conservative "revolutionary" Carl Schmitt or German-American post-war conservatives Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin. This latter group of intellectuals (Cichocki, 1999; Fodor, 2004; Lánczi, 2002; Legutko, 1994, 2006) expanded the initial criticism of liberalism by claiming that rule-of-law, checks and balances and individualism all undermine state sovereignty and restrict the state's capacity to define and pursue state interests (for a more comprehensive discussion of these positions, see Balázs, 2014; Rae, 2008; Trencsényi et al., 2018). They also sensed and equivocally thematised the West's "marginalisation" of East Central Europe, reminding them of the centre–periphery relations that paved the way to Russia's (and later to the Soviet Union's) domination of Europe's Eastern half (for reviews of these arguments, see Gagyi, 2016; Zarycki, 2014).[4]

3.3 | From key themes to policies

The two key themes discussed above have given PiS and Fidesz an imprint of economic nationalism that has permeated their discourse and policies. By the second half of the 2000s, most of the intellectuals mentioned above held important advisory or leading positions in public institutions or think tanks and participated in drafting the political programmes of PiS and Fidesz. In Poland, important venues bringing these intellectuals together were the Cracow-based think tank Centre for Political Thought (*Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej*—OMP) and the presidential chancellery of the late Lech Kaczyński. Marek Cichocki and Dariusz Gawin served as advisors of the late president and Zdzisław Krasnodębski as a member of the Honorary Committee supporting Kaczyński's presidential candidature. Another venue was the first PiS-dominated government of 2005–2007, in which Ryszard Legutko became the minister for education.

In Hungary, it was the prime ministerial office during 1998–2002 and the Fidesz-close Századvég think tank that advanced the careers of intellectuals outside of academia, including István Stumpf, András Lánczi, Gábor G. Fodor and László György; after Fidesz' victory in the 2010 elections, Századvég became the main recipient of government policy consultancy contracts (Erdélyi, 2016).

These career advancements were also reflected in the programmatic documents issued by the two parties. In Hungary, the 2010 "National cooperation program," the founding document of the new regime, repeatedly stresses its "revolutionary" mission of redressing the "bad government" of its predecessors (a key concept for conservative criticisms of liberals, see Fodor, 2009) and the deepening social divisions caused by "the pursuit of narrow interests" during the "left-liberals'" time in power. Similarly, the PiS 2014 political programme (drafted with the assistance of some of the intellectuals surveyed in this study) quotes from Popes John Paul II and Francis and calls to "stigmatise the existence of economic mechanisms [that …] strengthen the wealth of one and poverty of the other […] The same way as the commandment 'Do not kill' sets clear limits for safeguarding the value of human life, today we must say 'no' to the economy of exclusion and social inequality. This economy kills."[5]

Restoring state functions for promoting socio-economic development is an issue that has long left the academic publications of conservative intellectuals to become commonplace statements of Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki or of Hungary's Head of the Central Bank and former Economy Minister Matolcsy. Matolcsy insisted on turning the Central Bank into an arm of the government while presenting his approach as part and parcel of a "conservative revolution" (Matolcsy, 2010). Morawiecki, a banker with international experience, underlined the importance of a state-controlled banking sector, triggering accusations in the *Financial Times* of wanting to return his country to socialism (Miszerak & Rohac, 2017).

While considerable international attention goes to party leaders Kaczyński and Orbán, it has been policy experts like Morawiecki and Matolcsy that have designed the budgets for realising the wider nationalist agenda. Both justify socio-economic measures not in terms of increasing their countries' attractiveness vis-à-vis foreign investors but as serving wider goals of national survival. Despite the analyses depicting the national-conservatives' socio-economic model as "neoliberal," what these politicians introduce is hardly a neoliberal "Schumpeterian workfare state" (Jessop, 1999). That is, it is not anymore what Bob Jessop called a "post-national" "competition state" looking to attract foreign direct investment through tax breaks and lean social policies, and that, throughout much of transition from communism, best described the approach followed by the countries of the Visegrád group (Drahokoupil, 2008).

Instead, Matolcsy underlines that the key "mistake" of liberals was allowing foreigners to "take control" over his country in the 1990s. Consequently, economic policies should follow political goals to reduce or eliminate this control (Matolcsy, 2019). Abandoning the "competition-state" approach and the social retrenchment it entails, Hungary combines punitive measures against the unemployed with numerous measures to assist those that the government qualifies as needy. These include "families" and "wage-earners," to use the wording of László György, the former leading economist of Századvég and currently state secretary for economic strategy. "Wage-earners" is an important notion in this context since it implies that policies assist citizens not universally but in their "productive" capacity. Similarly, the socio-economic agenda of the PiS government is said to serve goals of "national survival" and

development; to take the official justification for Poland's most generous reform, the 500+ child allowance programme, the goal of family policy is “avoiding civilizational collapse through the de-population of our country” (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość , 2014).

4 | DISCUSSION: THE POLITICAL ORIGINS OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM IN POLAND AND HUNGARY

A socio-economic model combining workfare elements with support schemes targeted at wage-earners and families resembles the developmental welfare state and its explicit focus on national survival (Johnson, 1999; Kwon, 2005, 2009), a model that policy makers such as Morawiecki and Matolcsy are well aware of.[6] This latter type of state subordinates social policies to *national* development, spending or intervening as to help “wage-earners” meet consumption needs, but otherwise subordinating them to their employers and limiting or ignoring their collective organisation (see the Hungarian government's recent [2018] “slave law,” allowing employers to ask staff to work up to 400 hours per year of overtime; Bohle, 2019). Yet a similar model or intellectual current failed to gain elsewhere the influence and power that national-conservatives hold in Poland and Hungary (Korkut, 2012; Trencsényi, 2014): instead of a fully-fledged “illiberal turn” as in the case of Poland and Hungary's “national-conservatives,” the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and the Baltic states feature less severe “illiberal swerve[s]” (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019; Havlík, 2019; Kim, 2020; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2018).

The approach followed in this article suggests that what facilitated this difference was the right-wing's varying capacity to draw parallels between liberals and former communists and portray these two together as a threat to the nation. Wanting to downplay their association with the communist regime, the Polish and Hungarian postcommunist left embraced *more* fiscal reforms while in power, and more market liberalisation and welfare cuts than right-wing parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Tavits & Letki, 2009). Strongly anti-communist, important segments of the right-wing—including those to form PiS and Fidesz—regarded the left as illegitimate in its embrace of liberalising market reforms, even though at that time PiS and Fidesz still supported the market reforms they would later on attack as economic nationalists. Equally important, Polish and Hungarian liberals accepted early on the postcommunist left-wing as a legitimate presence, as captured in Tadeusz Mazowiecki's “policy of the thick line” to be drawn “between [communist] past and present” (Michnik & Havel, 1993). However, this acceptance made important segments of the right-wing grow increasingly suspicious both of the “thick line” and of the liberals.

To take a contrasting case, Czechia differs strongly from Poland and Hungary on this account. Czech social democrats led the country in the run-up to EU accession and implemented a restrictive fiscal reform in preparation for adopting the Euro (Bohle & Greskovits, 2012; Císař, 2017; Drahokoupil, 2008), even though they were arguably less supportive of welfare retrenchment than similar formations in Poland and Hungary (Orenstein, 2001; Potucek, 2004; Sil, 2017). However, they were a new creation with a precommunist tradition, not a communist successor party. Coupled with Czechia's early and resolute lustration law, this fact suggests why right-wing allegations over continuing communist influences under a liberal guise hardly had the base they did in Poland and Hungary and why allegations about an “existential threat” to the nation that would call for economic nationalism hardly materialised.[7]

Similar to the emergence of free-market liberalism in Eastern Europe, right-wing intellectuals and their broader milieus hardly turned to economic nationalism out of economic considerations. Back in the 1980s, liberalism was winning the support of intellectuals in the region not because of its economic agenda but because it promised intellectuals a rationale for resisting intrusive state bureaucracies in universities (Bockman & Eyal, 2002). The key source of dissatisfaction of right-wing political and intellectual milieus with economic liberalism was that its economic policies of liberalisation and privatisation missed their political goals of limiting the influence of former communists in politics and economy and were dismissive of the role of the nation-state in “preserving the nation.” Former communists even took control over liberal and EU integration reforms and won parliamentary elections just as the two countries were preparing to join the EU.

This helps explain the particular virulence of nationalism characterising the Hungarian and Polish right-wing. While in most other countries anti-communist elites held to the belief that liberalism is the best way to curtail the influence of former communists, in Poland and Hungary, parts of the political and economic elite came to believe that it is precisely liberalism that helps secure that influence and therefore translates into a major existential threat to national survival.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Drawing parallels between the ways that economic nationalisms in Central Europe and East Asia are articulated around political goals, this article has focused on Poland and Hungary to explain the emergence of economic nationalism. It traced the turn to economic nationalism in these two countries to ideational foundations developed by right-wing intellectuals over the last two decades. These right-wing intellectuals believed that liberalism has failed what they conceived of its most important (political) purpose, the need of a radical break with the communist past. The article draws attention to the nature of the perceived "existential threat" to the nation and contributes to studies of nationalism an analysis of how such a threat perception emerges and translates into a guiding idea of illiberal economic policies.

Perceptions of such "existential threats" are important in explaining how political and other actors might embrace economic nationalism, and this article linked economic nationalism to the development of such perceived threats. It also linked economic nationalism to ideational foundations that help understand economic nationalism as a broad conception subordinating economic to political goals of national survival. This invites broader research about the constitution of such perceived threats or more broadly about what other studies have called the "supply-side" of nationalism. While an increasing number of studies has focused on political parties as the main shapers of such supply (for reviews, see Rydgren, 2007, Bonikowski, 2017), we need to know more about how political parties themselves might build on or even appropriate ideational foundations developed in wider movements, in which intellectual "ideology producers" play an important part.[8]

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ENDNOTES

[1] The abbreviations stand for the parties Law and Justice (PiS—*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) and Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz—*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*), ruling since 2015 in Poland and 2010 in Hungary, respectively.

[2] The choice of words is grounded in an illiberal conservatism of European (German) extraction: see the wide-reaching appeal in both countries of Carl Schmitt's distinction between "friends" and "enemies" as the fundamental notion for approaching and understanding politics (Balázs, 2014; Bunikowski, 2018). In both Poland and Hungary, major conservative publications dedicate special issues to Carl Schmitt or pose their entire programmes under headings of Schmittian inspiration (such as Századvég's flagship publication *National Interests* being dedicated to the pursuit of "sovereignty" or the Polish conservative *Teologia Polityczna* even named after Carl Schmitt's famous *Political Theology*).

[3] Representative in this respect is the Polish intellectuals' ideological defence of solidarity against liberalism in the 2000s; see such essays by Ryszard Legutko, influential conservative thinker and philosophy professor, former PiS Minister of Education (2005), former State Secretary in the Presidential Chancellery under Lech Kaczyński and vice-president as PiS MEP of the European Parliament until July 2019, as "Why I do not like liberalism" and "The Open Society and the idea of solidarity" (in his 2005 volume "Paradise restored") and of the other PiS MEP of academic extraction, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, "One of the most Polish words [Solidarity]" (2012).

[4] Important to note, the lineage that these intellectuals attempt to construct is one that differs from the right-wing illiberal political currents of the prewar and interwar periods, such as Poland's *Endecja* or Hungary's *népi* "national-populists." This does not mean that PiS and Fidesz do not take interest in that lineage, and it also does not mean that conservative intellectuals repudiate it; see the Polish conservatives' defence of *Endecja* against liberal critiques mentioned above (Matyja, 2015; Palonen, 2009). Yet despite exceptions such as Tellér's outspoken national-populist position or the Polish intellectuals' interest in interwar "solidarism," the present-day generation of conservative intellectuals in Poland and Hungary is quite strongly influenced by Western US or German conservatives, such as Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Russell Kirk, Thomas Molnar and Carl Schmitt (Buzogány & Varga, 2019; Dąbrowska, 2019).

[5] Hungary's "National cooperation program," a document passed by Parliament on May 22, 2010, is online at http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/00047/00047.pdf (accessed 19/03/2019); the PiS political program of 2014 is available at http://pis.org.pl/dokumenty (accessed 19/03/2019).

[6] Morawiecki often refers to the writings of such heterodox or neo-structuralist economists as Justin Yifu Lin and Maria Mazzucato (Jasiecki, 2019). Matolcsy has long been a self-termed "heterodox" economist opposed to Western liberal precepts (Dąbrowska, Buzogány, & Varga, 2018; Sebők, 2018).

[7] Even though Vaclav Klaus defended ideas favouring a "national" form of capitalism, Czechia became the regional leader in attracting FDI (Bohle & Greskovits, 2012). Slovenia actually is a case in which former communists entered political alliances with liberals but, in contrast to the Visegrád countries, failed to shape such crucial areas as privatisation laws or welfare reforms. In fact, the noncommunist centre-left alliance in power throughout much of transition has largely refrained from liberalising the country's welfare state. Furthermore, Slovenia's version of communism can hardly be portrayed as "alien" to the country (Crowley & Stanojevic, 2011; Feldmann, 2014), a key trope in the discourse of Polish and Hungarian "national-conservatives."

[8] For such broader analyses, focusing not on intellectuals, but on civil society and popular culture, see for instance Berezin (2017) or Molnár (2016).

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APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF SURVEYED CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS AND THEIR MAIN POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION IN POLAND AND HUNGARY 2002/2003–2018

TABLE A1 List of surveyed intellectuals

	Profession	Positions and affiliations
POLAND		
Cichocki, Marek A. (b. 1966)	Philosopher, political scientist	Lecturer at Warsaw U.; Social Affairs advisor to President L. Kaczyński; EU Affairs advisor to President A. Duda; Founder of Teologia Polityczna, head of the Natolin think tank
Gawin, Dariusz (b. 1964)	Historian	Lecturer at Warsaw U.; Director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum (appointed by L. Kaczyński); Member of President Duda's National Council for Development
vel Grajewski, Przemysław Żurawski (b. 1963)	Political scientist (international relations)	Professor at Łódz U.; Analyst for the Natolin think tank (2006–2012); coordinator of the Security section of the President Duda's National Development Council; advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2015–2017)
Krasnodębski, Zdzisław (b. 1953)	Sociologist	Lecturer/professor at Warsaw U, Bremen U, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński U.; PiS MEP since 2014; member of the Honorary Committee supporting Lech Kaczyński in the presidential elections in Poland; 2007–2009 member of the Public Service

TABLE A1 (Continued)

	Profession	Positions and affiliations
		Council to the Prime Minister; member of the Program Board of PiS (2014)
Legutko, Ryszard (b. 1949)	Philosopher	Professor at Cracow U.; President of the "Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej" think tank (1992–2005); PiS vice-president of the Senate (2005–2007); PiS Minister of Education (2007); State secretary in the Presidential Chancellery (2007–2009); MEP since 2009 and Vice-president of the European Parliament until July 2019
Skiba, Leszek (b. 1978)	Economist	2009 member and from 2013 Board member of the Sobieski Institute; several appointments to the National Bank (expert) and Ministry of Finance (since 2015: under-secretary and from 2017 chief ombudsman for public finance discipline)
Szałamacha, Paweł (b. 1969)	Jurist, economist	2003–2011: member and chair of the Sobieski Institute's Board; 2011–2015 PiS MP; numerous appointments, including as State Secretary in the Ministry of State Treasury (2006–2007), Minister of Finance (2015–2016), member of the National Bank's Board (2016–present)
Szczerski, Krzysztof (b. 1973)	Political scientist	Professor at Cracow U.; Foreign Affairs vice-minister (2007); advisor and head of President Duda's Chancellery since 2015
HUNGARY		
G. Fodor, Gábor (b. 1975)	Political scientist	Research director and then Strategy-director of the Fidesz-close Századvég foundation (mid-2000s until present)
György, László (b. 1980)	Economist	State secretary for economic strategy (2018–present) Lead economist of Századvég (2015–2018) Lecturer in economics, ELTE University (2017–present)
Lánczi, András (b. 1956)	Philosopher and political theorist	Professor at Corvinus U.; Founder (with R. Legutko) in 2008 of the Center for European Renewal, an international conservative organisation; co-director of Századvég since 2010; Rector of Corvinus University in Budapest since 2016
Matolcsy, György (b. 1955)	Economist	Financial Research Institute Budapest and EBRD (early 1990s); state secretary for privatisation in the József Antall-government (1990); authored the Fidesz economic programme in the late 1990s and late 2000s; Fidesz Minister of National Economy in 2000–2002; 2010–2013; Governor of the Hungarian National Bank from 2013 onward

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

	Profession	Positions and affiliations
Molnár, Attila Károly (b. 1961)	Sociologist and historian of ideas	Lecturer at Pázmány Péter Catholic University; director of the “Thomas Molnar Institute” at the “National Public Service University” established by Fidesz in 2012
Schmidt, Mária (b. 1953)	Historian	Professor at Pázmány Péter Catholic University; advisor to V. Orbán in 1998–2002; from 2004 until present—Head of the Terror House Museum in Budapest
Stumpf, István (b. 1957)	Jurist	Head of the Fidesz-close Századvég political foundation (2002–2010); Orbán's professor at the Bibó Kollégium (in the 1980s); head of the Prime Minister's office under the first Orbán cabinet (1998–2002); since 2010, the Fidesz-appointed member of the Hungarian Constitutional Court
Tellér, Gyula (b. 1934)	Sociologist, poetry translator	Longest-serving Orbán-advisor; head of the “internal affairs” political analysis unit of the prime ministerial office in 1998–2002; chief policy advisor to Viktor Orbán from 2010 onward