

Chapter 4

Nostalgic Nationalism, Welfare Chauvinism, and Migration Anxieties in Central and Eastern Europe



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4.1 Introduction

Right-wing populist parties across Europe made significant inroads into main stream politics in the past couple of decades, to the point that they are actively involved in setting the political agenda in several countries (the Brexit vote in the UK, and the election of Donald Trump in the US are but two such surprising examples in this respect). Within this context, increased attention is given to the economic dimension. This is not a new aspect in the study of right-wing populism, the role played by uneven socio-economic development being highlighted by scholars conceptualizing the effects of modernization on the rise of right-wing populism (Minkenberg 2000). Nonetheless, what recent research has evidenced is a clearer understanding that a new phenomenon labelled “welfare chauvinism” has entered the language and practice of right-wing populist parties. Thus, nationalist values are promoted to derive a preferential distribution of welfare s provision, which is exclusionary on ethnic and racial grounds (see Derks 2006; Mudde 2007; Norocel 2016). In North and Western Europe, this phenomenon manifests through an ethno-centric protectionist discursive framework that highlights the need to differentiate between the “more deserving” people, which are conceived as belonging to the ethnic majority, and the undeserving “others”, those who exploit the welfare system, the “scroungers”, etc. – particularly immigrants who do not belong to the national group. (This is not to say that more nuanced differentiations do not exist within the

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in-group; an analysis of these distinctions, however, is beyond the scope of this study, see Keskinen et al. 2016).

Central and Eastern Europe is to a certain extent different in the way right-wing populist discourses approach the issue of welfare chauvinism, inasmuch as it displays an idiosyncratic pattern. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which symbolically marked the Soviet Union losing its grip onto the region, opened the opportunity for the accession process into the European Union (EU). This demanded of countries in the region to move past their “communist legacy” (and the welfare principles it engendered), embrace economic “shock therapy” as an expedient means to adapt to market economy, and unquestionably follow neoliberal dogma. These steps were presented as part of a symbolic “return to Europe” from a previously exterior position to the European construction, thereby confirming and consolidating these countries’ national identities as European. This notwithstanding, the countries in the region are primarily countries of emigration, not in small part due to the aforesaid economic upheavals, whose citizens that emigrated westwards have consistently been subjected to right-wing populist abuse in relation to welfare (among other things) in the countries they immigrated. Instead of seeing the emergence of some sense of empathy for those forced to rely on the safety net of welfare provision, a similarly welfare chauvinistic discourse as in North and Western Europe has developed in Central and Eastern Europe, operating largely on the same basis of ethno-cultural distinctions between the in-group and out-group. The main difference lies in the fact that oftentimes the out-group is formed of ethnic minorities who, due to their membership in a particular community (e.g. the Roma), were traditionally deemed to have a lesser status in relation to the ethnic majority in the respective national context. A recent addition are discriminatory discursive practices targeting immigrants (including based on welfare) that started to appear since 2015 in the context of the refugee (reception) crisis stemming out of the Syrian conflict (Mavelli and Wilson 2016).

It is on this basis, of difference and of alignment of right-wing populist discourse in Central and Eastern Europe with phenomena in North and Western Europe that our attention is focused on the previously underexplored phenomena of welfare chauvinism and emerging politics of migration in Central and Eastern Europe. Put simply, this chapter is set to examine the interplay between ideas of national culture, as cues for national specificity, and welfare chauvinist proposals, aimed at restricting welfare provision to a narrowly defined ethnic group, in the context of emerging restrictive migration policies in right-wing populist discourses in Central and Eastern Europe. For this purpose, we suggest a comparative framework to account for the various positions that such parties occupy in national politics in the region. Our analysis deals with the case of a right-wing populist party as the main governing force, such as the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, hereinafter PiS) in Poland; the case of a right-wing populist party as a key opposition force, such as the Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, Jobbik) in Hungary; and thirdly, the case of an unsuccessful right-wing populist party, such as the United Romania Party (*Partidul România Unită*, PRU) in Romania. Our qualitative analysis draws on official discourses, reflective of the various

political strategies to acquiring power, as articulated by these parties. We chose 2015 as a starting point for data collection because it marks the beginning of what has come to be referred to as the “European refugee crisis” by politicians, media, and researchers alike. As such, we aim to map out the various party strategies employed, which juxtapose appeals to protecting the cultural specificity of the ethnic majorities in each country and welfare chauvinist proposals, and consequently shed light onto the culture, welfare, and migration nexus in the Central and Eastern European context.

This chapter is structured in five sections. After some methodological clarifications of our approach to the empirical material, the following section provides a theoretical discussion that situates the concept of welfare chauvinism in the context of the economic concerns exacerbated by the ongoing global economic crisis, which started in 2008. These concerns were incorporated in a particular way by radical-right populist parties, drawing on claims about a racially and ethnationally homogenous “people”, pitted against un-deserving “others” (be them ethnic minorities or migrants). The chapter discusses then the three cases in the context of historically embedded nationalist discourses, which facilitate this incorporation of welfare chauvinist appeals. The following section examines the political discourses of each of the three parties (PiS, Jobbik, and PRU). It focuses primarily on the portrayal of minorities as racially and culturally different groups that fail to share the values and work ethics of the “authentic people” represented by the ethnic majorities in each country, and to advance proposals that restrict access to welfare provision on such basis. In the final part, the study draws together these findings and concludes by suggesting that welfare chauvinism provides right-wing populist parties with an additional dimension for exclusion. It also highlights the fact that in Central and Eastern Europe, besides the exclusion of migrants on these grounds which is an aspect of more recent date (primarily emerged in the context of the recent refugee reception crisis), there exists another level of exclusions, unlike in North and Western Europe, directed at those who constitute the internal “others”.

4.1.1 Methodological Notes

We argue that the post-communist context provides a solid basis for construct equivalence in this cross-national comparison (on construct equivalence, see van de Vijver and Leung 1997; Moors 2004). In fact, it is precisely the difference between the parties listed above in terms of their relevance in their respective political systems that determined their selection. When judged according to the now classic differentiation of parties according to their relevance in determining a party system (Sartori 2005), we argue, PiS and Jobbik fit into the category of *relevant parties*. In turn, at least for the time being, PRU rather fits within the *irrelevant party* category.

Keeping with this classification of parties in terms of their size, and more importantly political strength, PiS can arguably be considered an appropriate illustration of a right-wing populist party whose relevance is granted and enforced by its

governing or *coalition potential* (Sartori 2005, pp. 107–108). PiS has consolidated its position in Polish politics in the aftermath of 2005 parliamentary elections that positioned the party in the first place (26.99% of the votes) and crafted a governing coalition with other right of center and conservative political forces that appealed to “the anxieties of transition” (Stanley 2016, p. 110). These parties were the agrarian-populist and nationalist Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (*Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, SO) (11.41%) and traditionalist and right-wing nationalist League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) (7.97%). The coalition agreement addressed four key areas: reforming the state; designing a firmer foreign policy; pursuing a moral and cultural rejuvenation; and enforcing a more socially sensitive economic policy (Stanley 2016, p. 119). After a setback in the 2011 elections, PiS returned to power following the 2015 elections (37.58%), securing a majority in the Polish parliament. It secured its position as the largest party in the 2019 elections (43.59%), but lost control of the chambers.

In turn, Jobbik fits another criterion that positions the party as a relevant political force in Hungarian politics, namely its *blackmail potential*. This refers to the party’s potential to change the tactics or direction of party competition within a given polity (Sartori 2005, p. 108). Founded in early 2000s, Jobbik contested the first national elections in 2006 as part of the MIÉP-Jobbik Third Way Alliance of Parties (*MIÉP–Jobbik a Harmadik Út*). The results were disappointing (2.2%), and Jobbik left the alliance. The following election cycles witnessed the significant improvement of Jobbik’s electoral fortunes. The party became the third political force in the aftermath of 2010 elections (14.47%) and consolidated further its position after the 2014 elections (20.22%). After these elections, Jobbik became the main opposition force in part because of the center left’s political implosion (Ádám and Bozóki 2016, pp. 130–135). This position was confirmed in the aftermath of 2018 elections, the party becoming the second largest parliamentary party (19.06%). This notwithstanding, the size itself was not the most important aspect for selecting Jobbik as a case of relevance. Rather, it is the party’s ability to influence the ideological positioning, strategies, and direction of the main governing force, namely the Alliance of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Alliance (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége–Magyar Polgári Szövetség*, Fidesz). Indeed, there seems to be a rather ambivalent relationship between the two parties, both in terms of how Fidesz is presenting itself as the only political actor capable to prevent the right-wing populists to accede to power, but also in the manner in which Fidesz attempts to hamper Jobbik’s electoral growth by adopting growingly radical and conservative stances. At the same time, Jobbik claims to move towards “modern conservatism,” and a more centrist position (*néppártosodás*) (Bustikova and Guasti 2017; Norocel et al. 2017; Norocel and Szabó 2019; Pirro 2015; Pytlas and Kossack 2015).

Finally, the PRU falls into the category of *irrelevant parties*, having failed to secure representation in the Romanian parliament in the 2016 elections and in the European Parliament in the 2019 elections. Based on these performances, the party is unlikely to enhance its position any time soon. It is, nonetheless, reflective of the “phoenix populist” tendencies visible in Romania, whereby right-wing populist parties tend to reemerge periodically in a partially renewed form (Soare and Tufiş 2019).

The inclusion of the three parties in the analysis aims to offer broad spectrum examination of the potential welfare-chauvinist narratives have in exploiting fertile right-wing populist grounds in different political contexts, and function as a platform for consolidation in the case of successful political parties (PiS and Jobbik), and for entering the political arena in the case of smaller newly-formed parties (PRU).

This contribution draws on data drawn from party programs and manifestos, and from public statements made in electoral contexts by prominent members of the parties by means of a qualitative approach embedded in Political Discourse Theory (PDT) (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth 2000; Howarth et al. 2016). The main focus is on the construction of the minorities as ethno-nationally and racially different as a basis for justifying the need for restrictive welfare policies targeting these groups. The analysis identifies the similar patterns of exclusion that characterize the strategies and discourses employed by the three parties in order to articulate successfully the nationalist and welfare nexus.

4.2 Conceptual Discussion: Nationalism and Welfare Chauvinism

This chapter is concerned with the modern articulation of right-wing populist ideology, which employs nationalism as the central tenet for group membership, highlighting the congruence between demos and nation. The latter is presented as ethnically and culturally homogenous, and the idea of belonging is expressed through “radicalizing criteria of inclusion and exclusion”, which pit the in-group against the out-group (Minkenberg 2017, p. 14). Concerning the basis for nationalist mobilization, we draw upon modernization theory, which highlights in its explanatory framework for social change the role of transition from agrarian to industrial societies, from dynastic to popular rule, and the growing importance of individual autonomy and of rational thought. These prompted significant transformations with regards to social organization and made it possible for people to “imagine” themselves as part of larger, national communities (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983). In this context, right-wing populist ideology is associated with “the right turn”. Already an intrinsic part of nationalist ideology (derived from its inherently exclusionary articulation of the nation), the “radicalized notion of national homogeneity” informs the right-wing populist drive towards a nostalgic and romanticized notion of regained national grandeur, traditional family values, intertwined with propensity to rigidly hierarchical and authoritarian charismatic male leadership (Minkenberg 2017, pp. 13–16; Norocel 2013, pp. 164–178).

While these elements are useful in explaining the emergence of right-wing populist ideology within the context of contemporary rejuvenation of nationalist fervor, to understand its mobilizing power it is necessary to add another aspect: that of economic cleavages generated by late modernity. Rapid and uneven social

transformations, accompanied by the cyclicity of crises, all constitutive elements of unleashed globalization, lead to large groups being left out as social and economic losers out of these processes. It is these people that are likely to be mobilized by the radicalizing criteria of inclusion and exclusion highlighted above (Loch and Norocel 2015; Minkenberg 2000, 2015).

The growing importance of these economic elements in the right-wing populist ideology has increasingly attracted scholarly attention more recently. Earlier research on public opinion toward immigration reform in the US (Citrin et al. 1997), for instance, had already evidenced high level of support for policies that conditioned welfare provision for immigrants upon criteria to do with length of residency in the country. In the European context, then, research pointed out the nexus between the integration of European Union (EU) social security system, and national welfare policies (Martinsen 2005). The prohibition on discriminating against EU member states citizens in national welfare policy has become a bone of contention for those political forces conceiving of welfare provision as the proprietary right of the nation, whereby ethno-cultural and racializing criteria determine in-group membership. This enabled framing increasingly aggressive anti-immigration stances in economic terms, militating for preferential if not exclusive access to welfare provision for the in-group, which is conceptually labelled welfare chauvinism.

Welfare chauvinism, as a specific tenet of right-wing populist ideology in Europe (though it has permeated the vocabulary of mainstream parties as well), has gained saliency in the context of 2008 global financial crisis, and became exacerbated by the 2015 “refugee (reception) crisis” (Keskinen 2016; Loch and Norocel 2015; Norocel 2016). This notwithstanding, the use of welfare chauvinist appeals by right-wing populist parties has so far been mainly researched in North and Western European countries. This is partly understandable for two reasons. First, these countries have higher immigration levels, and the exclusionary rhetoric focusing on welfare matters becomes politically expedient, as racialized out-groups are easier to scapegoat. Second, as it is the case particularly in Northern Europe, the welfare system is an important marker of national identity, which makes it a preferred target of right-wing populist parties (Hellström 2016; Keskinen 2016; Norocel 2016; see also Hellström and Tawat Chap. 2, and Pettersson Chap. 3, in this volume).

4.3 Markers of National Identity and Belonging in Poland, Hungary and Romania

This section provides an overview of the central themes in the wider nationalist discourses, which facilitate right-wing populist mobilization. What characterizes all three cases, we argue, is the master frame of nostalgia underpinned by fantasmatic restorative nationalism, which demands a return to an alleged state of moral purity of nationhood that can only be attained by means of safeguarding the ethnic and cultural purity of the nation.

In Poland, the basis of nationalist discourse is formed by a nostalgic reinterpretation of Polish identity, which adds a mythological layer to historical events. This is not necessarily expressed through overt references to a homeland with clearly definable boundaries. Instead, the homeland is invested a symbolic value, which enabled the Polish nation to survive through periods of statelessness during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and later the WWII devastations. The emphasis is thus put on the link between Polish ethnic identity and Catholicism, distilled in the figure of “Pole-Catholic” (*Polak-katolik*), for long perceived as a means to overcome “the absence of ‘national’ territorial boundaries and political sovereignty” (Zubrzycki 2014, p. 204).

The Pole-Catholic served to confirm the ethnic superiority of Poles in interwar Poland, particularly in relation to the Jewish population, and to justify state-sanctioned anti-Semitism. In the aftermath of WWII, which witnessed genocide and ethnic cleansing, the borders of Poland shifted once more, though the country was then characterized by a much greater ethnic homogeneity than before. In the new context, the Pole-Catholic came to epitomize the authenticity and legitimacy of ethnic Poles as opposed to the illegitimate Soviet-groomed elites. The role played by the Catholic Church in opposing the Soviet-backed regime entrenched its position as a key component of the ethno-cultural landscape that defines Polish national identity (Stanley 2016, p. 112).

In the post-1989 context, the initially jubilant rediscovery of the European aspect of Polish identity, and the pursuit of EU membership have been gradually replaced in recent years by a critical and outright reactionary stance towards “Brussels”, a shorthand for the complex EU institutional architecture. The Pole-Catholic came to play a key role in the right-wing populist discourse of PiS, opposing a highly moral and ethnically pure popular majority to a Western-oriented liberal elite that enforced Brussels “corrosive influence” onto the Polish nation.

In Hungary, nostalgic nationalism pertains to both territorial contours, and membership in the Hungarian nation. With regards to the former, the territorial losses Hungary sustained following the Treaty of Trianon (1920) remain a recurring theme in everyday manifestations of nationalism (Korkut 2012). The contours of “Greater Hungary”, marking the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Austrian-Hungary Monarchy before WWI, are now a rather ubiquitous occurrence on car stickers, something that just a few years ago would have been frowned upon (Molnár 2016, p. 174). The Hungarian irredentism linked to the territorial losses in the aftermath of WWI is also reading and reinterpreting historical episodes in a mythological key. This aims to provide a sense of historical continuity and greatness despite Hungarian defeat. This is reinforced though such symbols as the mythological bird of prey omnipresent on coats of arms and monuments (*turul*), and the red and white stripes of the House of Árpád, the first dynastic rulers of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Closely linked to the territorial issue, the second aspect of the restorative dimension of Hungarian nationalism concerns the notion of kin-state responsibility towards the recognition and protection of the cultural identity of Hungarian minorities that in the post-Trianon context found themselves outside Hungarian borders. Indeed, significant Hungarian minorities are present in the neighboring countries,

particularly in Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia (Ádám and Bozóki 2016; Korkut 2012; Loch and Norocel 2015; Udrea 2014).

The nostalgic revisionist-revivalist issue, which incorporates both the physical territorial aspect, and membership into the ethno-cultural nation irrespective of the borders, is accompanied by a religious grounding for belonging in the traditional Christian Churches, namely the Catholic Church and the Hungarian Calvinist Church. This combination brings about another central marker of the articulation of Hungarian national identity: fantasmatic anti-modernism. This manifests specifically in anti-EU feelings and more broadly in the belief that Hungary needs to turn its back on Europe's decadence, and instead recover its former glory, a view which is shared by both Fidesz and Jobbik (Ádám and Bozóki 2016; Krekó and Mayer 2015; see also Kondor and Littler Chap. 8, in this volume).

Finally, in Romania, nostalgic nationalism appears to be highly resilient, although the right-wing populist forces have been on retreat the past decade (Cinpoș 2010, 2015; Norocel 2013; Norocel et al. 2017; Szabó et al. 2019). The history is read in a mythological key with regard to Romanian language, origins and ancestry, continuity over the territory, and Christian Orthodox tradition. These, in turn, articulate the sense of cultural specificity along which the Romanian ethnic majority is structured and position against "other" ethnic communities (particularly the Roma, the Jews, and the Hungarian minority). The strength of the nationalist discourse is enhanced by its successful use, rehearsal, and transmission over time by very different political actors: from early nationalists of the nineteenth century, interwar fascists, Ceaușescu dictatorial regime, through the post-1989 context (Cinpoș 2010, 2015).

Much like in the case of Hungary, the ethnic and cultural continuity, which draws its strength from religious tradition, and the promise of territorial aggrandizement constitute key elements in the Romanian nationalist discourse. Unlike Hungary, however, Romania emerged as a net beneficiary from the WWI, with its territory nearly doubled in size compared to the start of the war. The short-lived existence of Greater Romania, incorporating besides the Old Kingdom the historical regions inhabited by Romanians (Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina) remains the zenith of Romanian nationalism (Cinpoș 2010). The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and the subsequent annexation of several territories by Soviet Union represent the equivalent of the Treaty of Trianon for the Romanian nationalist discourse, and its key argument for modern irredentist claims towards the Republic of Moldova. Similar to Hungary, Romania has a kin-state approach towards ethnic Romanians in the neighboring states.

Within the post-1989 context, EU membership was presented as the country's "rightful return to Europe". It built on a selective reading of the nationalist project, which emphasized Romanian representing "an island of Latinity in the East", and Romanians being "steadfast defenders of the European borders". This notwithstanding, in the aftermath of 2007 EU accession, and particularly with the onset of 2008 financial crisis, Euroscepticism was fueled by growing unease regarding what was perceived as subordination to, and economic dependency on "Brussels", and other international institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund). Like in

Poland and Hungary, in Romania too the appeals to rediscover national pride, underpinned by history, tradition, and Christianity, and restore “traditional Romanian moral values” (focused on the traditional heterosexual family) constitute the core elements of anti-EU mobilization.

4.4 Right-Wing Populist Parties, National Identity, Welfare Chauvinism, and Migration Anxieties

This section examines the discourses of selected right-wing populist parties to flesh out in what manner they exploit the interplay between ethno-cultural articulations of the national community, and appeals for preferential, if not exclusive access to welfare provision based on national belonging. There are two main issues at stake here. First, while welfare chauvinism is not a new phenomenon, it is less clear whether there is some degree of alignment of Central and Eastern European right-wing populist discourses, and those in North and Western Europe, given the diverging migration contexts of these regions. Second, looking closer at the level of consistency between the three cases, this reflects the varying party strategies for including welfare chauvinism in their discourses for acquiring power.

Among the most successful right-wing populist parties in the region, PiS polled 37.58% of the votes the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections, becoming the governing party. A significant part of PiS electoral success appears to be due to its social and economic program, which envisioned several welfare policies that appealed both to its working-class support base and more widely. It included among others, a VAT rate cut, a pro-natalist tax rebate based on the number of children in the family, and a general opposition to cuts on public spending.

Internally-focused welfare chauvinism is not articulated, since the country’s ethnic homogeneity, with nearly 95% ethnic Poles and no other ethnic group exceeding 1% of the population, makes scapegoating an internal group on ethnic grounds rather difficult. As a result, the right-wing populist exclusionary discourse is directed against an exterior “other”, which is somewhat paradoxical given that Poland took in thousands of Chechen refugees of Islamic faith in the past two decades (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, p. 171). In the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, PiS positioned itself in the starkest opposition to the EU resettlement quota proposal, both in the run-up to the 2016 elections and subsequently. Used as an electoral asset in its campaign, PiS channelized the anger at the outgoing liberal government, which had agreed to the refugee quotas, increasing its support among center-right voters who feared the social and economic costs of taking in refugees (Bustikova and Guasti 2017, p. 172; see also Stanley 2016, p. 123).

A quasi-apocalyptic fantasmatic logic (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth et al. 2016) was employed by high ranked PiS politicians in addressing the refugee matter. Displaying overtly racist tones it positioned people fleeing violence and conflict in a position of fundamental difference to the Polish, and Europeans more

broadly. PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński, for example, warned against the health threat that refugees represent, carrying “very dangerous diseases long absent from Europe” besides “all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which [...] while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here” (Cienski 2015). Consequently, upon winning elections, PiS reneged on the previous government’s promise to take in refugees. The justifications officially provided conflated, as in Hungary, security concerns with emerging expressions of welfare chauvinism.

Articulating the new political line, then-Prime Minister Beata Szydło stated in an unequivocal manner that the Polish government’s main responsibility is “to ensure the security of our fellow citizens” from the apparent threat posed by “thousands of migrants who come here only to improve their living conditions”, and amongst whom allegedly “there are also terrorists” (DW 2016). Referring to people seeking refuge as “migrants” signals a suspicious skepticism towards their “true” intentions: either freeloading onto or bringing terror to their unaware hosts. In this context, we argue, PiS makes use of welfare chauvinism to consolidate Pole-Catholic nationalist discourse and add new layers to the metaphorical depiction of Poland as “Christ of Nations” (*Polska Chrystusem Narodów*), which emphasizes “Poland’s suffering at the hands of other countries and its redemptive rebirth.” (Stanley 2016, p. 119).

Jobbik, in turn, polled 19.06% of the votes in the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections and secured its position as the largest opposition party. Besides its outspoken anti-Semitism, Jobbik has a well-documented anti-Roma rhetoric (Ádám and Bozóki 2016; Korkut 2012; Loch and Norocel 2015; Montgomery 2015). Jobbik’s policy section concerning the status of ethnic minorities in Hungary deals almost exclusively with the Roma, solely referred to by their derogative appellation Gypsies (*cigány*). Moreover, the “jobs instead of benefits” welfare policy is expressly tied to the Roma. Despite the positive framing, which argues that “the real interest of the Gypsy community lies in a rapid social integration rather than affirmative action, the benefits of which the Gypsy community cannot really utilize in its current situation”, the policy is clear in its discriminatory interpretation to access to welfare provision, specifically targeting Roma and identifying them as criminals leading lives “incompatible with the law” (Jobbik n.d.). This attitude is echoed in the party’s electoral program, which allocated a whole section to the issue of “Hungarian-Gypsy coexistence” (Jobbik 2014, pp. 30–31). Even more so, the same electoral program reveals an anxious fantasmatic logic (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth et al. 2016) pertaining to the failing birth rate of ethnic Hungarians, juxtaposed to the “explosive increase of Gypsy population”, which is intensely discussed in the section addressing Jobbik’s demographic policy (Jobbik 2014, p. 28).

If Jobbik had previously employed pro-Islam rhetoric to make its anti-Semitism more palatable, with the onset of the refugee (reception) crisis in 2015 the party turned on its heels. While Islam as a state religion was praised in the Middle Eastern context as a counterforce to Israel, it became problematic as the religious affiliation of people seeking to cross the Hungarian borders (Thorleifsson 2017, p. 324). Consequently, Islamophobia gained a prominent role in Jobbik’s discourse, often justified by the alleged security threat the refugees pose, either in terms of terrorist

activity, criminal behavior, or harassment of the Hungarian population. As the refugee crisis unfolded, Jobbik articulated a distinctive welfare chauvinist perspective, exploiting social anxieties in deprived working-class towns and poor rural areas. It argued about the potentially negative impact that the costs of integrating the refugees could have onto access to welfare provision by disadvantaged ethnic Hungarians, reminding that “also Hungarians are poor”. In this regard, Jobbik replicated Fidezs’ anti-immigration discourse by juxtaposing cultural nationalist and economic arguments “thus catering to multiple audiences, from those fearing labor competition to those fearing cultural contamination” (Thorleifsson 2017, p. 326).

By far the weakest in terms of electoral performance, in the 2016 Romanian parliamentary elections PRU polled 2.79% for the Lower Chamber, and 2.95% for the Senate. These results were well under the electoral threshold. In turn, the established right-wing populist party emphatically named Greater Romania Party (*Partidul România Mare*, PRM) had just lost its long-serving leader in 2015. Without him, PRM polled even less than PRU (1.04%, respectively 1.18%), so entering a right-wing populist alliance under PRU leadership seems a final attempt at maintaining political relevance. Ideologically, PRU defines itself as a nationalist party, whose aim is to “regain Romania for Romanians”.

Its egalitarian economic policy is somewhat reminiscent of that of PRM, particularly regarding its selective egalitarianism (Norocel 2013). The envisaged welfare reform seems to be based on an exclusionary approach to the national community. Indeed, despite this apparent concern with inequality and poverty, the PRU leader Cristian Diaconu expressed derogative views about people receiving unemployment benefits. His stance echoes strongly with the wider negative connotations that large segments of the right-leaning younger, urban population associate to welfare provision. Particularly the term referring to a recipient welfare provision as a (socially) assisted (person) (*asistat*) is used as a slur, with the implicit suggestion that such people are lazy, unwilling to work, and generally a burden onto the hardworking taxpayers.

In Diaconu’s use of “the assisted (people)”, it pertains the Roma, solely referred to as Gypsies (*tigani*). Employing the fantasmatic logic in a negative key (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth et al. 2016), Diaconu argued their fundamental difference from the ethnic majority: “Perhaps Romanians have had enough of these assisted [people], whose only illness is not wanting to work, of these minorities who want to rule the country, to have a state within a state”. Making reference to a period of oppression that ethnic Romanians experienced under the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy as a lower status populace, Diaconu then added “now we are heading to a similar situation, but this time we have the Gypsies [to oppress us]” (Tudor 2015).

In preparation for the 2016 elections, PRU launched a 10-point electoral manifesto that began by promising to increase the minimum wage, and among others, included protectionist economic promises (such as subsidies restricted to “Romanian companies”, and defense of “Romanian capital” against excessive state control) (Tudor 2016). This reflected the wider cleavage in Romanian politics. This pitted the center-left, which promised fiscal and welfare reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and reducing inequality, against the conservative center-right and neoliberal

newcomers, which maintained the line of fiscal restraint and stimulation of capital that was agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the aftermath of 2008 economic crisis. As such, while formally proclaiming a preoccupation for welfare issues, PRU positioned itself against those socially most vulnerable, adding a racializing aspect to their depiction, and embraced welfare chauvinism.

In a similar manner, although Romania was not on the European migratory route, PRU denounced the EU solidarity agreement arguing against “colonizing Romania with refugees” (Tudor 2016). The fantasmatic logic of Romania being “colonized” by refugees was taken to an extreme by Diaconu who argued that “being an EU Member State [...] does not entail an obligation for us to become either an Asian state, or an African state, and most definitely not a Muslim state.” (BZI 2015) Welfare chauvinist arguments were added to this, as “Romania cannot afford waves of immigrants from Africa and Asia”, and warned that “no one has the right to push these dangerous immigrants down our throats, because we lack both the resources and capacity to integrate them, particularly as they are themselves against it” (BZI 2015).

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter explored the interplay between claims of national culture and ethnic specificity, and welfare chauvinist appeals in the right-wing populist discourses in Central and Eastern Europe. It analyzed three right-wing populist parties, considering their relevance in their respective party system (PiS, Jobbik, and PRU). The similarities in the discursive articulations of national identity and belonging in the three countries, which appeal to such aspects as history, tradition, territorial continuity, and religion, and are positioned against such globalizing forces as the EU (a trend that, by and large, characterize the entire region) (Ádám and Bozóki 2016; Bustikova and Guasti 2017; Stanley 2016) were matched to a large extent by similarities in the way welfare chauvinism is integrated in the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties.

Despite being countries of emigration, which have not experienced directly a substantial immigrant presence (with the recent exception of the sudden surge of the migrant population in Hungary), all three cases display incipient patterns of welfare chauvinism directed at external “others” understood in an apocalyptic fantasmatic logic: the immigrant communities are depicted as “soon to be flooding,” “deceitful parasites” that pose a threat to, and require the protection of the national/religious specificity of the “people”. In this sense, the cases show an alignment with patterns of exclusion that characterize North and Western Europe (Keskinen 2016; Hellström 2016; Norocel 2016). These similarities notwithstanding, the case of Jobbik and PRU also reveals what can potentially constitute a Central and Eastern European specificity. While welfare chauvinism targeting external “others” appears to be a recent phenomenon, the one directed at the “other within”, at the ethnic minorities (predominantly the Roma), constitutes a historical aspect that has much salience in

the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties. Welfare chauvinism adds a new dimension to the thinly-veiled xenophobia, and widespread demographic anxieties concerning the relationship between national ethnic majorities and historical ethnic minorities in these countries. On this matter, PiS can be considered an exception to this regional pattern, largely due to Poland's much more homogenous population, which precludes the clear identification of an internal scapegoat.

Finally, despite the different degrees of electoral success the three parties in terms display two interrelated points emerge. In terms of the snapshot picture, it may appear that the culture-welfare nexus provides a stronger mobilizing ground for right-wing populism in Poland and Hungary than in Romania. In terms of the broader picture, however, the fact that a newly established party such as the PRU was able to immediately latch onto this type of discourse shows its potential to be employed more successfully by newly emerging populist parties, or by established parties positioned closer to the mainstream. Together, these dimensions show the potential strength these issues have to be exploited effectively in the region (despite the current uneven electoral success).

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