

GYÖNGYÖSPATA 2011.

THE LABORATORY OF THE HUNGARIAN FAR-RIGHT

A CASE STUDY OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION
AND INTERETHNIC CONFLICT



H-1065 Budapest
Felsőerdősor u. 12-14.
Tel: (00 36) 30 603 11 69
info@okopolisalapitvany.hu
www.okopolisalapitvany.hu

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■ THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This¹ study principally seeks to uncover the antecedents, causes and consequences of the interethnic conflict that was precipitated by an unprecedented far-right² mobilization campaign in the village of Gyöngyöspata in the spring of 2011. Although the conflict, which both expressed and reinforced animosity between Roma and non-Roma people, undeniably had a strong ethnic element, this study seeks to interpret the events of the ‘burning spring’ in relation to political and social processes on both the local and national level.

Relative to the political dimension, it strives to elucidate the role of ‘political entrepreneurs’ with divergent perspectives and interests, laying emphasis on uncovering the nexus between the politics of the far-right party (Jobbik) and its paramilitary allies on one side, and local elite groups on the other. This exercise not only serves the purpose of shedding light on the ineluctable question of responsibility, but also of placing the ‘invasion of Gyöngyöspata’ within Jobbik’s broader political strategy. It is also instrumental in helping explain the ethnic majority’s weak resistance to the far-right’s politics of intimidation and repression primarily targeting the local Roma community.

As to the social dimension, the study strives to explain the ethnic majority’s receptivity to radical political alternatives and, more specifically, the growing intolerance of Magyar groups towards ‘Gypsies’. It tackles this difficult, yet critical issue through a multifocal approach to minority and majority groups’ grievances, the analysis of the production and circulation of anti-Gypsy discourses, and the study of the recent history of interethnic relations in the village. These locally specific issues are, similarly to the first line of (political) analysis, situated within the broader socio-economic history of Hungary’s northeastern periphery in the two decades following the collapse of the state socialist system. Thanks to this, certain parallels are drawn with other rural areas as we edge towards an answer to the question of whether Gyöngyöspata is an exceptional case or not. Along this line of inquiry, which constitutes the bulk of the study, special emphasis is placed on clarifying the following, which are presented as crucial factors of political radicalization:

- Roma groups' reaction to multiple forms of exclusion
- the structurally rooted grievances of certain social groups which articulate themselves as the ethnic majority
- the cultural underpinnings of racism in rural Hungary.

The study's second aim is to shed light on the afterlife of the conflict and, more specifically, to draw a rough portrait of far-right rule in the ten months following Jobbik's victory at the by-election of 17 July 2011. However, the conflict's afterlife is also approached from the perspective of national politics with the aim of providing cues to an often posed, but difficult question: Can these events be repeated? The study ends with a coda highlighting the lessons presented by the Gyöngyöspata case: the risks involved in treating the 'Gypsy question' either as a political taboo or one that can be 'resolved' unilaterally.

■ BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The findings of the study have been produced by two social researchers working in the village since May 2011. The pair initially framed its project as action research aimed at supporting the efforts of an organization seeking to persuade Gyöngyöspata's local councilors to address ethnic tensions through a process of dialogue and negotiation involving opinion leaders from both the Roma and non-Roma sides. The researchers' job was to put together a 'problem map' of the grievances of both sides of the conflict in order to offer a point of departure for interethnic dialogue. This was intended to lead to the drafting of common solutions to the obstacles to peaceful co-existence between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants.

The project of alternative conflict management, however, never got off the ground. By the time the proposal was placed on the councilors' table, the situation was no longer ripe: members of the local elite who may have supported a conciliatory approach had already retreated into the background. Faced with the failure of reconciliation, the researchers decided to continue their work with the aim of deepening their understanding of the conflict and documenting the, by then, palpable surge of the far-right in Gyöngyöspata.

By publishing the results of the research, the foundation hopes to raise awareness of the processes underpinning interethnic tensions and the radicalization of certain segments of Hungarian society and to foster reflection on the possibilities of overcoming these challenges, which also clearly resonate with audiences outside Hungary.

The research was based on two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviewing and document analysis. In the first phase, the researchers sought to elucidate the opinions of members of the local elite, who played a significant role during the conflict. They conducted interviews with the mayor (who later resigned); local councilors and members of the Gypsy Minority Self-government; the heads of local public institutions (kindergarten, school, cultural center); leaders of local NGOs ('Together for Gyöngyöspata Friends' Circle', 'The Association of Gyöngyöspata's Entrepreneurs', 'The Association of Vári Wine Cellars'). These interviews contained five question blocks: life history and social position, feelings induced and opinions formed on the conflict, views on ethnic co-existence in the past, views on the possibility for peaceful co-existence in the future, views on the possibility of dialogue between Roma and non-Roma. Their duration was on average 120 minutes.

Interviews conducted with members of the elite were complemented by a second phase of unstructured interviews with local citizens. These interviews focused geographically on the main conflict zone and followed the themes of the interview guide used during the first phase of research. It was not possible to record the interviews on tape due to the tense situation and distrust towards outsiders. However, notes were taken by the researchers during and after the interview; these were then revised and reworked into summaries. The 38 written summaries form the core of the material on which the researchers' interpretations were based. This material was complemented by and contrasted with information gleaned from media reports, with the websites of political organizations and actors involved in the conflict, as well as with interpretations formulated by political analysts.

■ THE SURGE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN HUNGARY

■ **The far-right in Eastern Europe**

Far-right politics is first and foremost characterized by an exclusionary ethnocentric ideology. With rivalry between neighboring nations declining all over Europe, far-right movements and parties (in both the continent's center and periphery) increasingly claim to defend the autochthonous population from the alleged threat posed by foreigners and minorities. The 'enemy within', however, has different faces in the West and the East. While Western European movements mobilize predominantly against Muslim immigrants from the global South, their Eastern European allies – in the absence of sizeable immigrant communities – target indigenous ethnic minorities, especially those whose class position also strongly differs from that of the ethnic majority. The political program of Eastern European far-right parties (such as Bulgaria's Ataka, the Greater Romania Party, Hungary's Jobbik, the League of Polish Families, and the Slovak National Party) is nonetheless substantially similar to those of their well-established Western European counterparts – partly due to the fact that some of these (France's National Front, Austria's Freedom Party and the Danish People's Party) have provided models for party-building in the post-socialist region. The most important shared elements of the European far-right's topical repertoire are: a call for law and order policies to deal with high levels of criminality among immigrants and minorities, the condemnation of political elites (portrayed as lenient towards immigrants and minorities), and a commitment to defending nations' right to self-determination against those who call for stronger European integration.

However, below the surface of a common new nationalistic and chauvinistic political platform, we find important differences, notably concerning the social mechanisms fuelling demand for far-right ideals³:

- Whereas demand for the far-right in Western Europe stems mainly from a growing aversion to further immigration among members of the ethnic majority, in Eastern Europe it has been a growing discontent with the political establishment, which (in the wake of 'failed transitions') has created a demand for law and order policies and strong-

- handed politicians. Resentment against members of the establishment is, significantly, not coupled with a more tolerant attitude towards disadvantaged minority groups in Eastern Europe. On the contrary, Eastern European societies exhibit higher degrees of prejudice and welfare chauvinism than Western European ones.
- The room for maneuver of far-right movements is increased in Eastern Europe by the tendency of citizens to blame certain social groups rather than socio-economic structures for the extreme difficulties encountered during the long period of 'transition'. The weakness of structural critique has been paralleled by a reemergence of historically grounded prejudice against Roma and Jews (not independently of far-right groups' hate campaigns).
- The rise of the far-right in the region has also been linked to the radical retrenchment of the welfare state. The demise of post-communist parties, who implemented neoliberal reforms, has opened the way for far-right parties, which have tended to be more critical towards market forces than their Western European allies.

Because of these tendencies, large segments of Eastern European societies⁴ have exhibited receptivity towards the xenophobic anti-establishment politics of far-right movements⁵.

■ Jobbik and the return to the issue of 'Gypsy crime'

According to a study published by Political Capital in 2010,

"Social demand has played an important role in the institutionalization of far-right politics in Hungary. In the age group over 15, between 2002 and 2009 the rate of those sympathizing with far-right ideas increased from 10 to 21% in Hungarian society, representing an all but unprecedented increase by international standards. The collapse of confidence in democratic institutions has been a major contributing factor in this process, which also led to a significant rise in prejudices. Looking at specific social categories, people living in rural communities and those with less education are more susceptible to far-right ideology. The index' aggregate score is particularly high in the northern-Hungary region, which provides fertile breeding ground for a political rhetoric built on 'Gypsy crime'"⁶.

At the same time, support for the far-right party Jobbik (founded in 2003 by university students of the Jobboldali Ifjúsági Közösség – Right-wing Youth Community) rose from 2.20 to 14.77 percent⁷. The key to the party's success has to do with its ability to mobilize around a topic its mainstream political rivals had been unable to deal with. According to the authors

of a recently published volume on radical right-wing politics, **“it is the appropriation of the Gypsy question, which has proven to be the main cause of Jobbik’s stunningly rapid success in 2009, as well as the ideological cement of its constituency”⁸**.

Jobbik’s attempt to appropriate the ‘Gypsy question’ was made possible by the creation of the Hungarian Guard. Founded on the initiative of the party’s president, Gábor Vona in June 2007 as an association, the organization aimed to take part (in addition to charitable missions and disaster prevention) in ‘the strengthening of national self-defence’, as well as in activities aimed at maintaining the social order. It is under this pretext that members of the organization, wearing a uniform reminiscent of the Arrow Cross Party⁹, marched through a number of villages inhabited by Roma, demanding the prosecution of ‘Gypsy criminals’ and the restoration of public order and security in the countryside.

The first of these demonstrative marches was held in December 2007 in Tatárszentgyörgy. In February 2009, it was in this village that a 28-year-old father and his 5 year-old-son were murdered. The 4 men charged with this and 8 other attacks against Roma are currently standing trial. According to the state prosecution’s charges, the murderers were in contact with far-right groups. A poll conducted shortly after the Hungarian Guard’s first marches showed that 38 percent of respondents thought that the organization was dangerous and 21 percent found it outright frightening, while 23 percent saw it as insignificant, and another 13 percent characterized the organization’s goals as appealing¹⁰.

Although paramilitarism is not a phenomenon particular to Hungary¹¹, of the Eastern European far-right parties it is clearly Jobbik that has managed to exploit most fully the potential of bringing ethno-social tensions to the surface by collaborating with paramilitaries. The Hungarian Guard’s demonstrative marches in the countryside were either preceded by party communiqués or followed by far-right politicians’ public speeches on the need to combat the phenomenon they coined ‘Gypsy crime’. The key reason behind the Guard’s success is that it managed to portray itself as a force calling attention to a problem ignored by the political establishment, rather than one playing on xenophobia to boost its support. It is important to mention that neither the left-wing government in power

until 2010, nor the right-wing government currently in office was capable of putting an end to the Guard's activities. Despite the Budapest Tribunal's decision on 2 July 2009 to dissolve the organization¹², its members – thanks to diligent legal advice provided by lawyers linked to the far-right party – have managed to find loopholes that allow them to continue some of their activities (as demonstrated by the Gyöngyöspata case).

Most empirical analyses focusing on the social embeddedness of far-right ideals and politics have underlined that it is rural and less-educated citizens in Hungary who are most likely to exhibit extremist right-wing attitudes and vote for Jobbik. (This corroborates international comparative research, which shows that the far-right receives its strongest support from the mid-school stratum.) However, the latest data published by the Tárki Social Research Institute strongly suggest that urban and more educated constituencies are becoming more chauvinistic, receptive to anti-establishment and anti-system views and, significantly, ready to support the far-right¹³.

Of the four parties holding seats in the Hungarian parliament, only Jobbik managed to broaden its base in 2011. In December 2010, only 10% of likely voters with a party preference said they would vote for Jobbik. In December 2011, the same percentage was close to 21%¹⁴. Whereas at the end of 2010 Jobbik appeared as a deeply divided party on the decline, twelve months later it had not only won back most of its former supporters, but attracted new sympathizers with a distinctly different social profile: better educated urban voters with a higher-than-average income. This means that, by the end of 2011, the party had managed to, at least temporarily, organize the kind of heterogeneous coalition (of disenfranchised middle strata and dispossessed manual workers) that had made its most prominent Western allies successful¹⁵.

If we look at the reasons behind this dynamic, we find at least three driving factors:

- Disillusionment with the right-wing government had translated into stronger receptivity to the messages of opposition parties.
- The fact that this opportunity was best exploited by Jobbik, which sought to grasp

the attention of economically insecure lower and middle-class citizens by using the language of social populism (couched in the rhetoric of national self-determination) and intensifying its anti-Gypsy rhetoric (blaming ‘social parasites’ for the difficulties of the ethnic majority).

- The party’s success in legitimizing this rhetoric through demonstrative political performances designed to not only highlight, but also to escalate ethno-social tensions in the countryside, which the Hungarian Guard had previously politicized.

In what follows, we focus on this last factor, and more particularly the Gyöngyöspata campaign. Before embarking on the analysis of this case – which we consider a milestone in Hungary’s post-1989 history – we briefly consider why the Hungarian far-right needed this mobilization campaign and why its choice fell on the village of Gyöngyöspata.

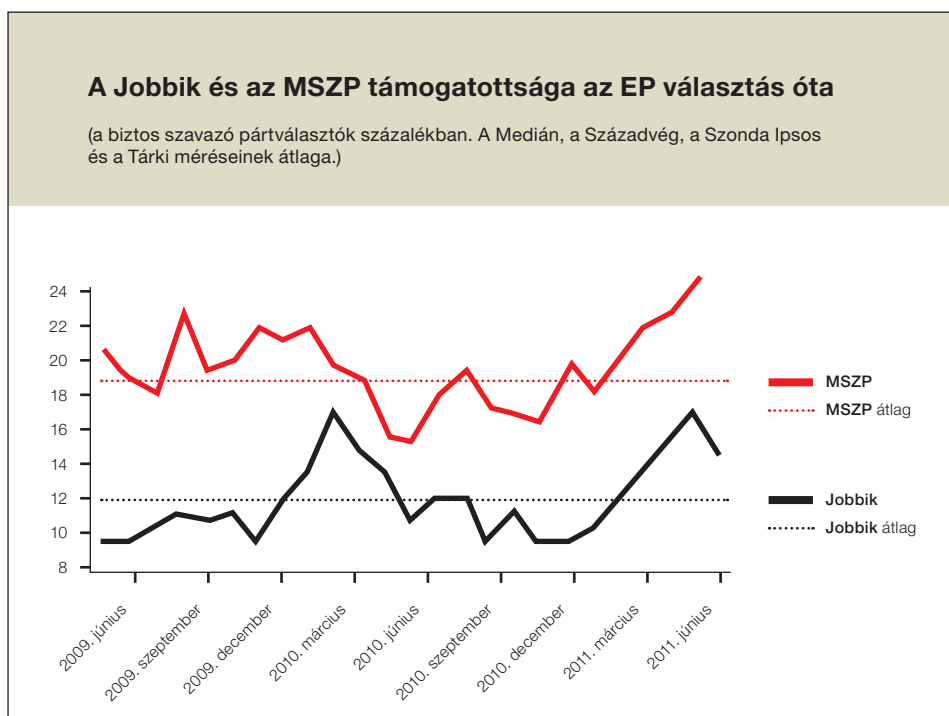
First of all, we would like to emphasize the severe problems faced by Jobbik at the end of 2010:

“After its entry into parliament, Jobbik, an extremist antisystem party that had on occasion called into question the democratic institutional framework and was now a part of the political establishment, faced problems of self-definition. What is more, Fidesz had taken symbolic steps (such as the law on dual citizenship and the introduction of Trianon memorial day) to restrict the party’s room for maneuver. The governmental party’s ‘revolutionary’ rhetoric and sweeping reforms undermined Jobbik’s pledge to implement radical changes. In addition, the Socialist Party’s decline and the Liberals’ ejection from parliament had robbed Jobbik of its main political opponents (against whom it had vehemently campaigned). As a result, the party showed signs of crisis in the second half of 2010: a decline in popularity, weak performance at the municipal elections, as well as internal conflicts, such as the opposition to the Hungarian Guard’s successor organizations and the party leadership, or the expulsion of Lajos Pösze (a representative of the party’s ‘moderate’ platform) from the parliamentary group.” (Source: Political Capital, own translation).

The parliamentary framework undermined the party’s image of a political force claiming to follow the maxim ‘actions speak louder than words’ and whose core supporters had been attracted to Jobbik’s grass-roots characteristics. It is in the light of this that the party leadership’s decision to return to the kind of ‘street politics’ that had catapulted it onto the political podium in the first place, should be understood. The return to more radical

politics was founded on the issue that (as noted earlier) had been responsible for Jobbik's breakthrough in 2009: the 'Gypsy question'.

The opportunity to highlight this issue was offered by the death of an 81-year-old woman in the village of Lak (Borsod County) on 23 January 2011. Building on rumors that the old lady was murdered by four adolescents of Roma origin, Jobbik organized a march against 'Gypsy crime' in the village. In his speech at the event, Gábor Vona stressed his conviction that the hand-out of social welfare benefits should be restricted to those willing to work, while also declaring that Roma children born into helpless families should be placed in boarding schools. The party leader also announced that he would be attending the opening day of parliament's spring session in the uniform of the Hungarian Guard. This symbolic gesture allowed Jobbik to focus the political debate on its favorite theme (law and order), and to criticize the governing coalition, from which the party was striving to demarcate itself.



Jobbik's support since the European Parliamentary elections (2009) among likely voters with a party preference. Average of data collected by Medián, Századvég, Szonda Ipsos and Tárki.

Polls conducted in February 2011 (see Figure 1 below) showed that the party's popularity had stopped declining. This encouraging sign may have led Jobbik's leaders to conclude that mobilization around the 'Gypsy issue' was the best means for stabilizing their voter base and regaining the lost momentum. The party's attempt to rally ethnic Magyars living in Lak can be interpreted as an experiment: Jobbik probably wanted to test the reactions of adversaries, the press and the local community to its divisive, xenophobic rhetoric. Although the media proved receptive to the decoy, the local elite did not respond favorably to the framing of the murder as an ethnic problem. The hostility of the mayor and local councilors prompted Jobbik to look for another location.

Why did Jobbik choose to continue its campaign in Gyöngyöspata? We will only be able to answer this question in depth in the second part of the analysis, which highlights the 'social dimension' of the conflict. What we wish to emphasize at this point is that **the deep-rooted tensions pitting members of the ethnic majority against those of the minority in Gyöngyöspata played a significant role in both far-right strategists' decision to 'invade' the village and the outcome of the 'burning spring'** (the name given to events between 1 March and 17 July 2011 by the press). Jobbik's leadership – and Gábor Vona¹⁶ himself – was informed of the flaring of anti-Roma sentiment amongst a group of local inhabitants a few weeks before the launch of the campaign. Jobbik's local leader, Oszkár Juhász, was not only aware of this particular group's receptivity to the demand to step up against 'Gypsy crime', but also of irreconcilable tensions within the local elite. We believe that the decision to intervene in Gyöngyöspata was based on the assessment that these factors made strong resistance on behalf of the local community unlikely.

■ THE 'BURNING SPRING'

■ The conflict's immediate antecedent

In the autumn of 2010, the houses of a handful of Roma families were damaged by the flooding Zám creek in Gyöngyöspata. A representative of the Red Cross offered to clean the creek bed and

asked the head of the organization's Roma division to find new homes for affected families in the village. By the end of December, a verbal agreement had been reached with the owners of two properties located on the symbolic border separating the 'Gypsy settlement' from 'the village'. A family of 8 was supposed to move to a house in Rákóczi Street and another family composed of 14 members to a house on Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street. Although (according to information provided by the Gypsy Minority Self-government) the larger family did not wish to accept the property offered by the Red Cross, news quickly spread among ethnic Magyars that one of the most 'unruly' families would resettle on 'Bajcsi' (the local name of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky street). This compelled residents (who later appeared in media reports as the victims of theft and 'atrocities' committed by Gypsies) to intensely lobby their elected representatives. At the meeting of the local council on 31 January, outraged residents demanded that councilors find a way to prevent the sales from taking place. It is most probably as a result of this meeting that the village's mayor decided to persuade the Red Cross to change its strategy. The organization, bowing to pressure, decided to withdraw its offer to buy the houses in the second half of February.

Jobbik's national leadership was informed of the tense situation by early February at the latest. Oszkár Juhász, the party's local leader, who had developed a good relationship with residents of 'Bajcsi', had access to up-to-date information on the situation related to the property sales. Moreover, we know from multiple sources that Gábor Vona had personally been approached by a local resident, who asked for help in solving the situation. Although Jobbik's delegates to the parliamentary committee (charged with the task of investigating the background of events in May 2012) denied that the party had prepared the way for the Guard's 'invasion', they acknowledged in their verbal testimonials that there had been instances of cooperation between the two organizations on both the local and national level. This leads us to believe that leaders of Jobbik and the For a Better Future Civic Guard Association jointly planned their organizations' mobilization campaign in Gyöngyöspata.

■ Events and actors

Members of the For a Better Future Civic Guard Association began patrolling the streets of Gyöngyöspata exactly a week after a resident of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street committed suicide

on 22 February 2011. Two days following the incident, Barikád TV (an online news portal maintaining close ties with Jobbik) published a video report entitled “Gypsy terror – Heves County on the brink of civil war”. The report contained segments of an interview with Oszkár Juhász, who declared that the old man had committed suicide because he could not stomach the “relocation of Gypsies into the village”, while also claiming that the old man had been assaulted on the day of his death. (The respondents of this study all linked the suicide to the man’s health condition.) On 6 March 2011, Jobbik organized a mass rally on the village’s main square, calling on residents to “demonstrate against Gypsy terror”. The rally’s key speaker, Gábor Vona, spoke of rampant crime and the government’s inability to bring ‘Gypsy criminals’ to justice. Between 1500 and 2000 people attended the event, approximately one third to one half of whom were local residents. (This stands in stark contrast to Lak, where the majority of demonstrators had been brought in by bus.) At the end of the rally, the crowd (which also included demonstrators wearing military style uniforms) marched through the ‘Gypsy settlement’, where Oszkár Juhász handed a text entitled ‘Code of co-existence’ over to the leaders of the Gypsy Minority Self-government. (Police forces, which were present in large numbers in the village, did not intervene.) Both the scale of the demonstration and its key message show that Gyöngyöspata had been assigned a prominent role in the script of Jobbik’s mobilization campaign.

The events that followed 6 March 2011 were closely followed by the Hungarian press. For 10 days members of the Civic Guard (under the command of Attila László, the former captain of the Hungarian Guard in Békés County) patrolled the streets day and night, following the few Roma residents who left their homes. (The police force, which maintained a continuous presence, did not intervene.) Roma children in particular were intimidated by men clad in black boots and uniform, but adults also felt unsafe and anxious. Most of those carrying out patrols were not from Gyöngyöspata and were provided accommodation by local residents who supported the campaign. Members of the For a Better Future Civic Guard Association were, however, not only warmly welcomed by the ethnic Magyar residents of the streets surrounding the ‘Gypsy settlement’. The campaign’s wider appeal was made apparent at the village meeting organized by the association on 16 March 2011. In the presence of 300 - 400 residents, the leaders of the association handed over a petition to the mayor and members of

the local council, which contained the signatures of over 1000 local residents requesting that members of the association stay in the village. Attila László used the occasion to announce the departure of the civic guard, while also proclaiming the creation of the association's local chapter.

The civic guard's departure did not mark the end of the intimidation campaign. Members of two other extremist paramilitary organizations, the Outlaw Army¹⁷ and the Defence Force¹⁸, also made sporadic appearances in the village. While significant factions of the local population (especially those living in the proximity of the 'Gypsy settlement') welcomed the patrols of the civic guard, these other groups were viewed with suspicion by local Magyars. Needless to say, the appearance of these groups – especially the Outlaw Army, whose members carried axes and whips – gravely intimidated the Roma population.

The tension grew day by day, but the government remained silent, despite the fact that both the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister had previously vowed that provocation under the aegis of paramilitary organizations would not be tolerated. As noted earlier, the sizeable police force dispatched to Gyöngyöspata also remained largely passive. While a large number of identity checks were conducted, the paramilitaries were not prevented from conducting patrols on the grounds that neither their uniform nor actions reflected wholly those of the banned Hungarian Guard.

Human rights organizations, frustrated by the authorities' unwillingness to step up against hate groups, decided to intervene on 13 March 2011. In a joint letter, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, the Helsinki Committee and the Legal Defence Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities declared that the patrols constituted a deliberate attempt to escalate ethnic tensions and warned the Interior Minister that the police should have broken up Jobbik's 6 March rally, which violated local Roma citizens' basic rights¹⁹. (The same human rights groups later claimed that the police's passivity was one of the factors responsible for the subsequent escalation of tensions.) The Civil Liberties Union filed complaints in three cases where it believed that the harm inflicted on Roma individuals and hate motives could be verified²⁰. (The cases were first transferred by the Heves County Police to the Gyöngyös Police, and then

qualified as ‘minor offences’ not requiring investigation by a criminal court.) The concerns formulated by human rights groups were confirmed in the report released on 19 April 2011 by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights.

Although the authorities mentioned in the report (Interior Minister, National Chief of Police, Justice Minister, State prosecutor’s Office, and Secretary of State Responsible for Social Inclusion) did not officially react to the commissioner’s allegations, their responses incorporated some of the recommendations put forward by the commissioner. Among these we find: a proposal to create a task force responsible for preventing and mitigating local ethnic conflicts; and an amendment (introduced on 22 April 2011) to the governmental decree on minor offences permitting authorities to fine civic guards acting without previously signing an agreement with local councils and chiefs of police. These measures show that the government was mainly concerned with preventing the appearance of civic guards linked to the far-right in other localities. (This fear was underpinned by the For a Better Future Civic Guard Association’s statement, according to which the organization wished to continue its patrols of the town of Hajdúhadház, situated approximately 150 kilometers east of Gyöngyöspata).

The government’s strategy (based on the use of ‘soft-power’) was inhibited by the sudden reappearance of the Defence Force in the village on 16 April 2011. The organization’s leader announced that it planned to organize a military training camp on a property adjacent to the houses of the ‘Gypsy settlement’. Although the majority of the local population (and even those who had supported earlier patrols) clearly condemned this novel intimidation campaign, Gyöngyöspata’s mayor – who had been severely weakened by the petition mentioned previously – resigned three days after the announcement.

It is at this point that the local Roma population’s fear reached its peak. In the face of panicked reactions, an American businessman and philanthrope who had arrived in the village to discuss the possibility of launching a community gardening and after-school program, decided to allow Roma women and children to leave the village for a few days. The sight of 200 Roma leaving on buses (captured on camera) created a political sensation and caused a row between the government and the parties of the democratic opposition. On the left and

in the international media, the action was interpreted as an ‘evacuation’. On the right, it was presented as an ‘Easter vacation’ and simultaneously condemned as a political ploy to undermine the government’s reputation.

Of the political parties, the greens (LMP) – who had earlier campaigned on the theme of Roma integration – were the only ones to formulate a clear stance on the events in Gyöngyöspata. The party called on the police as early as 11 March 2011 to act without hesitation and with due force against actions of self-arbitration and firmly condemned the Defence Force’s plan of setting up its training camp. (The plan was derailed by the arrest of the Defence Force’s captain on 22 April 2011.) On 26 April, the LMP’s parliamentary group leader proposed to offer citizens protection against group violence by introducing an amendment to the Penal Code. The parliamentary majority chose instead to pass another bill, which introduced new sanctions (up to two years of imprisonment) against those seeking to defend the public order through acts of intimidation. Left-wing opposition parties chose to support the government’s proposal, which was also welcomed by human rights organizations.

The last actors to influence events were Budapest-based pro-Roma intellectuals mobilized by the Civil Rights Movement and the Dignity for Everybody Movement. The group staged its first demonstration on 15 March 2011, the anniversary of the revolution of 1848 (which they celebrated together with Gyöngyöspata’s Roma community). Following this event, the One Hundred Thousand for Gyöngyöspata Facebook group was formed whose members organized two successive demonstrations in front of the Interior Ministry, demanding that the authorities act against paramilitaries. The Roma rights activists present at these events developed close ties with Gyöngyöspata’s Gypsy Minority Self-government, whose leader they helped regularly with advice. Another group of young activists organized vigils in the village in the period when paramilitaries were the most active. Besides them, it is worth mentioning an organization (the Partners Hungary Foundation) with a background in alternative conflict management, which attempted to initiate a process of dialogue between Roma and non-Roma actors in the developing conflict. (The dialogue, whose goal was to find non-violent means of dealing with the structural problems underpinning ethnic tensions and to foster co-operation between belligerent parties, failed to get off the ground,

mainly due to majority support for the For a Better Future Civic Guard Association's patrolling activity.)

Both the government and the state apparatus under its control totally neglected the calls of human rights and citizens' groups. The main reason behind this was the government's unwillingness to take the political risk of publically expressing solidarity with the local Roma community. However, the unprecedented failure of civil society groups to significantly influence events was also caused by a lack of communication and co-ordination (which also undermined the effectiveness of the Gypsy Minority Self-government's actions).

The last important event of the 'burning spring' occurred on the night of 26 April 2011, when a handful of paramilitaries who had been released from custody (on the decision of the regional court) returned to Gyöngyöspata and provoked a violent confrontation with members of the Roma community. It was after this incident that the Prime Minister declared: "our patience is exhausted". (In the interview he granted to a commercial television channel, Viktor Orbán acknowledged the police's sluggish response but argued that the authorities had to wait for public opinion to catch up with events before intervening²¹.)

Although this was the only violent incident that occurred during the period of the conflict, the relationship between members of the minority and the majority did not improve ulteriorly. **While the fear and terror gripping the Roma community gradually subsided after the departure of paramilitaries, its members could not come to terms with the support manifested by a great number of Magyar families for the groups that terrorized their children. On the other side, the majority's frustration and anger was further fuelled by the way the media portrayed both the village and the events of the 'burning spring'.** Those living in or near the conflict zone were outraged by what they considered biased reporting, in particular the media's unwillingness to refer to the antecedents of the conflict directly relevant to their experience: the devastation of the Goat's Stone (a hill replete with abandoned orchards and vineyards overlooking the 'Gypsy settlement'), the bullying of old people by unruly Roma youth and other factors undermining peaceful co-existence between members of the minority and the majority.

The ‘cold peace’ descending on the village fell into line with the interests of the groups who had pushed the mayor to resign. Instead of further escalating of the conflict, they sought to meet the new demands of the majority, which, satisfied with the results of the intimidation campaign against ‘disobedient Gypsies’, was looking to restore the social order and rehabilitate the village’s battered reputation. Jobbik’s local representative launched a campaign centered on a proposal to emulate the ‘model of Érpatak’²², which he presented as a proven method for handling the ‘Gypsy problem’. He also sought to position himself as a moderate candidate by distancing himself from extremist groups to his right – namely the Defence Force whose captain also announced his candidacy for the vacated mayor’s seat. His main rival, the vice-mayor, who enjoyed the tacit backing of Fidesz and was widely seen as the likely winner of the electoral contest scheduled for 17 July 2011, attempted to present herself as the candidate of reconciliation. However, her position was weakened by the government’s largely passive response to the unfolding crisis, which focused on the preservation of the state monopoly of power. (This stance was not significantly altered by the government’s decision to designate Gyöngyöspata and four neighboring villages as a ‘priority micro-region’ in early June. The only palpable outcome of this decision was the launch in August of the government’s public works program providing temporary employment for 40 jobless individuals.)

However, the Fidesz-led government did launch a political offensive in the national political arena. In early May, the creation of an ad hoc parliamentary committee was announced with the intent of “investigating the events in Gyöngyöspata and the background of uniform-related crime, and facilitating the elimination of uniform-related crime”. The committee was not only charged with elucidating the role of the paramilitary organizations, but also with investigating the organization of the Roma community’s ‘Easter vacation’ and answering the question: “Did the parties in opposition contribute to the unsettling of public safety and peace in the country, and if so, with what intent?” The obvious bias in the committee’s mandate signals that the government’s aim was to make the far-right and left wing groups and parties jointly responsible for the outburst of ethnic tensions and the damage caused to the country’s reputation. Needless to say, it was able to count on the media channels under government control to propagate this message.

In summary, the government's inaction allowed far-right groups to maintain the initiative on the local level. This indirectly contributed to the Jobbik candidate's surprise victory at the by-election held on 17 July 2011. Oszkár Juhász, running on a ticket of 'zero tolerance against destructive behavior', obtained 33.8% of votes. Despite his high share of the vote, the Jobbik candidate could have been beaten had local elite groups united around a common candidate. Since this was not the case, one can also say that the vice-mayor (who received 26.0%) was in fact prevented from winning not by Jobbik, but by a local entrepreneur who ran on a similar ticket to her (21.4%). Nonetheless, it is also worth mentioning that a candidate even more extremist than Jobbik's received 10.5% of votes. **This means that close to half of Gyöngyöspata's politically active citizens supported the far-right in 2011.**

■ THE ANTECEDENTS AND CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Gyöngyöspata's 'occupation' in the spring of 2011 and the ensuing conflict could be interpreted as an instance of a community falling prey to foreign ideals and interests. However, the outcome of the democratic election undermines the credibility of this reading, which provided no answer as to why local inhabitants embarked on the road to political radicalization. The fact is that the 'victimhood thesis' appearing on left-liberal Hungarian blogs and news portals is difficult to reconcile with the local Magyar population's tacit approval of paramilitary presence in their village (manifested in the petition signed by more than one thousand local inhabitants). This, of course, does not mean that the strategy adopted by far-right groups was not manipulative. What it does mean, though, is that the grievances expressed by the majority (which shaped the attitudes and reactions of local inhabitants to the arrival and activities of paramilitary groups) have been probed more deeply and seriously than before.

In what follows, we call attention to the role of structural factors that underpin and shape the relations between the Roma minority and the non-Roma majority all around the country, also highlighting their locally specific manifestations. These are: long-term unemployment disproportionately affecting members of the minority, local mechanisms of segregation in the domains of education and housing and the crisis of small-scale viticulture. We then look at

socio-political factors specific to the locality, which strongly influenced the outcome of events: precedents of collective confrontation along ethnic lines, and a local elite group's attempt to strengthen its own position through the strategic use of the 'Gypsy card'.

■ **About the locality**

Gyöngyöspata is situated in Heves County, approximately 10 kilometers northwest of the city of Gyöngyös. Its population was 2,761 at the time of the last census (conducted in 2001), of which 324 (11 percent) identified themselves as members of the Roma/Gypsy ethnic minority. The village is part of a historic grape growing and winemaking region that played a significant role in the socialist period's export-oriented wine production. After the economic and political transition of 1989, (which seriously affected export markets) the viticulture sector witnessed a severe crisis, which was also heavily felt in this region. The state-owned cooperative was privatized and properties were handed back to the families who owned them before collectivization. Today, there are 10 medium-sized family businesses active in the sector. Their owners, who started out with high hopes in the early 90s, are largely frustrated with the economic climate, which has important social and political repercussions on the local level.

Agricultural production has always played a minor role in this part of Hungary. There is only one significant company involved in cereal production, which farms on approximately 200 hectares of land and employs 20 people. Industrial production played an important role during the socialist period: a significant portion of the local population was employed by the electric company, the furniture factory and the slaughterhouse in Gyöngyös, or by the numerous coal and metal mines opened in the area. Others commuted to factories in Budapest. Members of the local Roma community were also employed in these workplaces, but almost all of them lost their jobs after these businesses were closed in the 90s.

The unemployment rate has remained largely stable in the last decade. Of every 100 unemployed, 80 are considered to be Roma. In the Roma community, only 3 men have stable jobs; further 4-5 men are employed by local peasants on a regular part-time basis. The discrepancy between their employment situation (which is worse than the national average

for Roma²³) and that of the majority has been characterized by one of the former mayors as “having to do with the Roma population’s inability to step onto the path of independence”.

While Magyar men (and some women) laid off from factories managed to create micro-sized companies in the construction, viticulture and services sector, members of the Roma community did not have the economic, social and cultural capital to deploy such a reconversion strategy.

■ Multiple exclusion: the grievances of the minority

Some analysts, including the former Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights, argued that there was no significant tension between the village’s Roma and non-Roma inhabitants before the civil guard arrived. At the other end of the interpretative spectrum, we find the far-right media, which portrayed the conflict as the moment of justice of a majority whose members had suffered long-term harassment by deviant members of the Roma community. From our own perspective, **we regard the conflict as mainly fuelled by social problems, which accumulated during the two decades following the collapse of the state socialist system and have progressively (and largely invisibly) strained the relations of Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of Gyöngyöspata.**

Of these problems, it is primarily the exclusion of Roma (who, as mentioned before, had been employed in the industrial sector) from the labor market that should be highlighted. Whereas non-Roma members of the post-socialist workforce either successfully managed the reconversion to self-employment or retained their jobs in the remaining industrial plants (or found one in the newly implanted services), Roma members, who tended to have lower education levels and were also often discriminated against, were far less successful in this regard. We also believe it is important to mention that Roma citizens, who were historically excluded from land ownership, did not benefit from the Compensation Act of 1991, which reinstated the ownership rights of peasants whose lands had been confiscated during the period of forced collectivization.

The exclusion from labor, which in most cases has become a permanent feature of Roma lives, destroyed prospects for social mobility, which the socialist regime had offered

Roma in exchange for their cultural assimilation into the majority. **This sudden and irremediable loss, together with the ensuing hopelessness, constitutes the most painful grievance of Roma citizens in Gyöngyöspata (and elsewhere).** Although the material and psychological damage caused by capitalist structural transformation cannot be attributed to any concrete individuals, Roma citizens live with the suspicion that members of the majority have deliberately chosen to exclude them from the ‘new post-socialist deal’. Their suspicion finds confirmation in discriminatory acts of ethnically biased employers. In the case of Gyöngyöspata, we have found that the few peasants who hired Roma menial workers on a regular part-time basis stopped employing them due to fear of scorn on behalf of – increasingly powerful – racist members of the majority (an issue to which we will later return).

The second form of exclusion affecting members of the Roma community relates to severe restrictions on housing imposed by the local council. In 2007, local representatives enacted a new building regulation, which prohibited any modification of the built environment in streets of the village exclusively inhabited by Roma. The regulation hindered the building of new homes (which was at that time actively supported by government policy), as well as renovations and improvements to built property. This discriminatory measure, together with the activities of an increasingly active local NGO (sponsored by members of the local council), which bought up empty properties in the village, effectively prevented the buying and selling of ‘Roma property’ and prevented Roma families from resettling in ‘the village’. The measure was defended by local representatives on the grounds that it was the only way to defuse the threat posed by the clearance of Gyöngyös’s ‘Gypsy settlement’. Since Gyöngyöspata’s Magyar population feared a wave of Roma immigration from the nearby city, the measure – proposed by one faction of the local elite – received the backing of a majority of inhabitants. The importance of this precedent lies in the fact that it established the ‘control’ of the ‘Gypsy threat’ as a theme of local politics and offered the possibility to ground political ambitions precisely in this issue. On the other hand, **the unlawful measure – which was later declared anti-constitutional by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights – blocked the already choked channels of social mobility, thereby further fuelling the Roma community’s frustration with the majority.**

As mentioned previously, the exclusion of Roma workers from the labour market partly resulted from their lower level of education. The latter is itself the result of a school system that fails to provide quality education to pupils of lower class background, especially if they are Roma. The elementary school in Gyöngyöspata is a 'model case' exhibiting most of the tendencies underlying the Hungarian school system's inability to reduce the social disadvantages hindering educational progress.

The majority of Roma children are taught in separate special classes or mixed with children requiring special care. This separation involves spatial division as well: the special 'B' classes are confined to the ground floor, whereas the 'normal' classes occupy the first floor of the school building. Gypsy and non-Gypsy children use separate bathrooms; and children attending special classes do not take part in sporting activities organized at the school's swimming pool. More importantly, after-school activities are restricted to children whose mothers are employed. Since no Roma woman has a stable job in the village, this means that Roma kids are excluded from this vital service.

The aim of this segregated system is twofold. It is designed to prevent conflict situations that teachers are unable to handle. In addition, it satisfies the social need to reduce interaction between Roma and non-Roma children to a minimum. The management believes that segregation offers the only possibility of preventing 'white flight', the withdrawal of non-Roma children from the school (and their re-enrollment in one of Gyöngyös's schools). The headmaster sees his role as one of shielding this system (which he regards as beneficial to both Roma and non-Roma children) from attacks by human rights and Roma interest organizations.

The three forms of institutionalized exclusion described above make it virtually impossible for individuals to break out from the shackles of the 'Gypsy' status (characterized by unemployment, detrimental housing conditions and inadequate education) in Gyöngyöspata. Of course, attempts are made, but few people succeed and even they get bogged down somewhere half-way. "They lose their faith, they don't have the will," says the coach of the national 'Gypsy soccer team' who was himself born in the village. His example

provides no motivation to local Roma youth, mainly because the channels of social mobility have been silently blocked by local decision-makers.

The local Roma community did not play an active role in either the conflict or the electoral contest following the mayor's resignation. (However, as we will see, they did play a role in the series of confrontations we see as the conflict's antecedent.) Their passive predicament was characterized from the moment the paramilitaries entered the village by vulnerability and fear. They dreaded members of the civil guard who patrolled their streets in groups, and were terrorized by the Outlaw Army, and perhaps even more so by the Defence Force whose members sought to organize a training camp in their backyards.

The question of why local Roma restrained themselves from answering these provocations with violence will be addressed in the conclusions of this study. At this point, we do wish to state that members of the Gypsy Minority Self-government played a crucial preventive role, which significantly contributed to the avoidance of major bloodshed. Moreover, the Self-government's freshly elected young leaders clearly lacked the experience necessary to construct a workable counter-strategy. Moreover, and importantly, Roma collective action was also hampered by a partial lack of ethnic solidarity within the Roma community. Although the community tends to be homogenized by outside observers (including members of the Magyar majority), members of the culturally assimilated community continue to differentiate between 'worker' and 'musician' families (based on the grandparents' dominant occupation). More importantly, a social gulf has progressively emerged in the last two decades between Roma families who live in 'the village' (in the proximity of Magyar families with whom they interact and exchange regularly) and have access to more-or-less regular work and income, and the inhabitants of the 'Gypsy settlement', who tend to live on meager welfare benefits and lack functional cooperation strategies. This spatially manifested class divide has acquired a political dimension in the period of the conflict: Roma living in 'the village' have expressed disgust with the behavior of 'settlement dwellers', whom they regard as partially responsible for the 'invasion' of the civil guard. (As we briefly noted earlier, these 'hard-working' families have been particularly badly hit by the conflict, which has deprived them of working opportunities previously offered by peasants.)

■ The ‘unruly underclass’: the grievances of the majority

It is not only the Roma that harbor grievances in Gyöngyöspata. It is especially the more vulnerable, exposed segments of local society – predominantly old people – who lament the impossibility to live together with ‘those elements’. However, the discourse surrounding these real, yet always specific experiences, tends to be generalizing in nature and shared by a wider group of people than the number of victims would justify. It is a discourse that serves – here, as elsewhere – the function of creating the image of the Gypsy who disregards social norms and the social order built upon them, and therefore represents a threat to the Magyar majority. The stereotypes used to clarify this image and render it credible are those that are most salient in Hungary (and also tend to resemble those used in Western European countries to characterize immigrants). What makes them ‘real’ and persuasive are the stories in which they come alive (featuring perpetrators and victims whose personality is known to both the speaker and the audience). Importantly, the grievances related through these stories have gone through a process of canonization: In 2006, the leader of the already mentioned local NGO compiled a 70-page list of complaints, containing information on misdemeanors and other crimes, which the authorities had left unaddressed. **The fact that this ‘petition’ (sent to the local police chief, MP and representatives of the local council) was never answered contributed largely to the erosion of the mentioned institutions’ legitimacy, and also fuelled victims’ frustration with the Roma.**

“What fuels tensions is the fact the Roma do not work. This is what irritates people,” declared a man living in the village before going on to describe the thefts (whose number in his view²⁴ is on the rise). Like many other land owners, he also cited the example of the **Goat’s Stone**, stating that it is on this hill that the finest grapes could be harvested. Until 1995, the vineyards of the Goat’s Stone benefited from the protection of a military camp situated on the top of the hill. (According to our respondents, warning shots were sometimes fired by soldiers in case thieves attempted to approach the grapevines.) The departure of the military coincided with the introduction of a lenient criminal policy by the socialist-liberal government, which left petty theft (under the value of 70 Euros) unsanctioned. This, as reported by the same respondents, led to the spread of ‘livelihood crime’, a concept used to describe petty thieving

as a profession. In 2004, approximately half of the vineyards and cellars were intact, but in the following winters these were allegedly plundered by local Roma. **The sight of decaying holiday houses ‘raided’ by the Roma and the memory of once resplendent vineyards does not only haunt their owners. They remind every inhabitant of the difficulties brought by regime change** (the dissipation of the material security provided in the late socialist era), and some others of the shattering of peasant traditions (the unproductive toil on the land returned by the state, the vain hope that it would earn the family a decent living). What makes the feelings of hurt and loss unbearable for these proud people is the sight of roof tiles of former wine cellars somehow ending up on the rooftops of Roma houses (built with the help of state subsidies) on ‘Bajcsi’ street.

According to another informant, “petty theft did not use to be a problem because 20 kilos of fruit is not such a great deal; but the situation of peasants has changed for the worst and this also means that the people from here are not as tolerant as they used to be”. We must also note that the decay of the Goat’s Stone has an alternative reading, one put forward by local Roma, but shared by a handful of Magyars too. According to this interpretation, the vineyards and orchards located here lost much of their appeal after their owners were handed back land in more accessible areas. Be that as it may, one thing is certain, the Goat’s Stone only became a contentious issue for local society after the conflict started (and especially, after the media picked up on this symbolic topic). Before that, people saw its demise as a ‘natural’ manifestation of a more general process: the disintegration of the stability that characterized the late socialist period.

The generalization of the majority’s grievances is stoked by exchanges of swearwords, accusations and curses between certain members of local society. It is especially older members of the majority – old ladies and men who tend to spend a lot of time on the street – who take these instances of verbal aggression to heart. Although they are aware that the irreverence exhibited by a few Roma lads is shunned by other members of the Roma minority (especially those living in ‘the village’), they describe it as characteristic of Roma in general. On our reading, this kind of behavior can be interpreted as an instance of everyday resistance – more specifically an attempt at taking symbolic revenge on the most vulnerable members

of the majority whom, as argued above, Roma tend to see as responsible for their dire social predicament.

One of the most important elements of this majoritarian discourse is a painful feeling of being unjustly treated and neglected. Many Magyars – especially those who live on low salaries but nonetheless enjoy a minimum of material security – firmly believe that “Gypsies out of work with six children” receive as much money as they do after decades of laborious effort. As mentioned previously, local authorities (the notary, mayor, police chief and judges) have tended to neglect ‘Magyar grievances’. The resulting distrust of the state has heavily weighed on the local majority population’s processing of the conflict: “Neither the Interior Minister nor the media paid attention to the Magyar village”, as opposed to the Gypsy settlement whose inhabitants are perceived by some as partly responsible for the escalation of the conflict. (Their anger is exacerbated by the fact that most of the aid and support that flowed into Gyöngyöspata after March 2011 went to the Gypsies who “stole, cheated and were even rewarded with a holiday trip”.) The most consequential element of this discourse is that it is exclusionary in character: ‘our’ pain is real because we know the perpetrators responsible for them; and these perpetrators cannot possibly have injuries of their own. In sum, the dominant discourse of grievance created by different people who articulate themselves as the ethnic majority not only magnifies the injuries of Magyars, but also cloaks Roma’s painful experiences of multiple exclusion and, more recently, oppression.

The ‘carriers’ of the discourse bent on naming wrongs and wrongdoers are the senior inhabitants of the ‘frontline’. Amongst its ‘multipliers’, however, as mentioned in relation to the Goat’s Stone, we find Magyar inhabitants who use the idiom of the ‘Gypsy question’ to reflect upon and express injuries related to their social situation. **When looking for answers to economic decline, social disintegration and the lack of solidarity they – as most Hungarians – do not scrutinize social, economic and political structures. Instead, they divert attention away from these by blaming a social group, which (quite paradoxically) is the main victim of the structural transformation that we have identified as the root cause of grievances on *both* sides.**

Finally, we must also mention a third group of ‘legitimizers’ who saw in the politicization of prevalent anti-Gypsy attitudes an opportunity to weaken the local political elite (which had chosen a course of non-action vis-à-vis the problems grouped under the label of the ‘Gypsy problem’). The rightist political turn of this opposition elite faction formed by ‘local patriots’ is – as we explain below – also rooted in their specific experiences linked to the ‘frontline’, which many of them inhabit. Not only is this the geographic area where most of the events described above took place, it was also the zone where symbolic battles over the control of space were fought in the last couple of years between Roma and non-Roma groups and individuals (including members of the oppositional faction we alluded to).

■ Fear and violence in the recent past

The combination of structural problems (worsened by overt segregation), emergent forms of resistance and deviance (rooted in structurally induced grievances) and the latter’s politicization as the ‘Gypsy problem’ led to the **emergence of an ethnic frontline on the border of the ‘Gypsy settlement’ and ‘the village’**. This border zone (delineated by the ‘Bajcsi’ and Bem Streets) was once inhabited by poor peasants. Today, it is a mixed area inhabited by the descendants of peasants and the few Roma families who managed to buy houses here. The relationship between the two sides was characterized by a fragile equilibrium – maintained at the cost of constant friction and self-restraint – until the arrival of the paramilitaries. (Today, Roma and Magyar neighbors do not greet each other here.) It was the gardens of houses lining the ‘Bajcsi’ (flanked on the back by the creek bordering the ‘Gypsy settlement’), which became the targets for the few families involved in petty theft. Although this went largely unnoticed for some time, the emergence of other points of tension, coupled with the increasing strain on peasant livelihoods, led to growing frustration with not only these families but with the Roma community as a whole.

The border zone was, significantly, also the location of sporadic acts of collective violence, which we see as antecedents of the conflict of 2011. The first fight broke out in 2006 after Roma children deflated tires of the car belonging to the head of the

local winemakers' association (who lives on Bem Street). The owner startled the child who fell and hit himself. Seeing the blood on the child's face, his grandmother cried for revenge. In minutes, an angry crowd of Roma men had gathered outside the car owner's house, calling on him to come out. Fearing the reactions of the crowd, the latter called on his friends for help. As soon as they arrived, a fight broke out, which was halted by the forceful intervention of police who arrived promptly at the scene. In addition to the physical injuries sustained by both sides, the most important consequence of the incident was political. A village meeting was held at which anti-Roma emotions flared and were immediately picked up by councilors from the ranks of the group we identified as 'local patriots' (who called on the mayor to put an end to Roma violence).

One year later, another violent incident occurred, sparked by an event remembered by Magyar respondents as a 'Magyar boy' being narrowly hit by a 'Gypsy car'. The Magyar men, who recognized the driver and went to 'Bajcsi' to ask for an explanation, were beaten up by Roma. The incident was reported to the police but the charges were quickly dropped, provoking another village meeting and a demonstration in front of the 'voivod's house'²⁵.

A third incident, which occurred in 2009, took place in the school (the 'second frontline'): A teacher was physically assaulted by an angry grandmother (the same person who had played a key role in the provocation of the fight in 2006) after her grandson was allegedly beaten in class. It is at this point that the local school – a target of verbal attacks since the introduction of its contentious segregation policy – became implicated in ethnic skirmishes as a 'second frontline'. (We also note that the teacher lived on 'Bajcsi' street and was married to a prominent member of the 'local patriots'.) In 2010, a violent confrontation between a policeman and inhabitants of the 'Gypsy settlement' celebrating their children's graduation was narrowly evaded (thanks to the intervention of a police dog). Finally, in December 2010, Roma children beat up the son of Jobbik's local representative (the village's current mayor) at the local school.

■ The conjunction of the ambitions of the local elite and far-right political actors

Many of Gyöngyöspata's inhabitants come from families who have lived in the village for centuries. The sparsity of immigration forged the local population into a close-knit community kept together by an allegiance to peasant traditions and the Catholic faith. This traditionalism is most manifestly expressed to the outside world through the wearing of traditional costume during festivities and the active practicing of religion.

Highly educated members of the local community and entrepreneurs involved in traditional economic activities (mostly wine-making) have committed themselves to the revival of local traditions, of which some (for instance the wearing of costume) were on the verge of disappearing. They have created two NGOs dedicated to the development of viticulture and tourism, as well as the promotion of the arts and artistic activities. **For members of this elite group, the presence of Gypsies is problematic because the occupation of public spaces by 'renitent' youth presents an obstacle to the project of reinstating the patterns of traditional village life in the 21st century.** It is no wonder then that one of these organizations, as noted above, played a key role in the institutionalization of spatial segregation – the enforcement of the 'color bar'.

The current schoolmaster, under whose supervision the segregation policy was instituted, is also closely linked to this 'Friends' Circle'. Members of the NGO, most of whom are zealous people ready to invest their own resources for the benefit of the community, had initially only played a minor role in local political life. However, both their project of development and their radical anti-Gypsy stance – robed in the guise of a growingly aggressive paternalistic ethnocentrism – found resonance among the local population. On the one hand, older people were supportive of the group's attempt to revive economic and social life. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the forming 'frontline' reacted positively to the group's intransigent stance towards Roma (and also shared its hostility towards a state they perceived to be insensitive to their needs and demands). As a result, members of the NGO found themselves in the position of a 'shadow council' endowed with the ability to influence political decisions on the local level. This power was progressively institutionalized when members of the group were elected as representatives sitting on the local council.

Measures aimed at institutionalizing the Roma community's segregation, increasingly frequent outbursts of anti-Gypsy sentiment, the everyday acts of resistance linked to Roma youth, the incidents on the ethnic frontline separating the two communities, and the demographic dynamism²⁶ of the Roma community created a tense atmosphere, which rendered entrenched patterns of interethnic co-existence fragile. This fragility was worsened by the crisis of political leadership that gripped the village after the sudden passing away of the popular mayor (whose death was linked to personal attacks authored by the 'local patriots'). Although members of the 'Friends' Circle' were elected to the council, the faction did not hold the majority of seats.

The newly elected mayor, who enjoyed the backing of entrepreneurs, chose to pursue a policy of non-action on the 'Gypsy question', which had by then become an omnipresent theme in public life. This was based on the calculation that, as a structurally determined issue (driven in his view by unemployment), it could not be solved on the local level, and was therefore better left unaddressed. This led him to neglect not only petty thefts, but also other problems such as rampant child poverty, the school's renouncement of its duty to provide a decent education to Roma children, and the spread of intolerant attitudes among the majority. The only action he did take – because he was forced to – was the lifting of the practice (the channeling of local councilors' fees to the 'Friends' Circle' in the form of donations), which had enforced spatial segregation and was declared unconstitutional. The move was met with strong disapproval by the 'local patriots' and hardened the group's political stance.

This political taboo was broken by the young man who stepped on the turf of public life as the candidate of the far-right party in 2010, running for the post of mayor. He was a lonely wolf, scorned by both elite factions for the role he had played in the unsuccessful privatization of the state-owned viticulture company (and looked down upon because of his lower class status). This was the main reason why, in October 2010, he only managed to collect 68 votes (6%) at the mayoral contest. However, growing tensions between the 'local patriots' and the more moderate elite group supporting the new mayor soon positioned him as a potential sidekick who could be instrumentalized to put pressure on the group in power. The fact that, instead of becoming the henchman of the 'local patriots', he took the seat they

sought themselves to occupy, was contingent on the Jobbik leaders' decision to use both him and his village as a weapon in the battle they were waging against the government in the national political arena.

The appearance of far-right paramilitary and political organizations in the village in March 2011 undermined the already shaky foundations of political power, as well as the social networks that had underpinned the fragile social order. The remainder of social trust and solidarity evaporated – not only in relations between Roma and non-Roma groups, but also within the Roma and non-Roma in-group. This led to the resignation of the newly elected mayor, which provided the far-right with the opportunity to ascend to a position of power. **It was thus a deep social rift, coupled with an emergent political divide, which proved to be the key to Jobbik's unanticipated electoral success. Although the 'local patriots' had gained leverage and momentum from this same dynamic, they were not strong enough to beat both the ruling elite faction and the far-right.** This had partly to do with the fact that the anti-Gypsy program, which had boosted the faction, was successfully hijacked and monopolized by Jobbik. In addition, Jobbik's candidate managed to position himself as a man who, once in power, could count on substantial support from his political hinterland. The 'local patriots', who could not count on the governing party's support, were in no position to counterbalance the weight of the far-right party.

In summary, we can say that Gyöngyöspata is in some respects particular, but in others very similar to many other villages situated on the country's Northeastern periphery. As in most other places, the collapse of state-owned industry undermined the local economy, which, however, in Gyöngyöspata, recovered more quickly than elsewhere and allowed the local population to successfully manage the process of professional reconversion. This statement is nonetheless invalid for one part of the local population: the local Roma community, which was brought to its knees by a wave of unemployment much higher than the national average (pertaining to Roma). As we argued above, their fate was overly determined by structural problems: Roma workers had been relegated to a secondary labor market, which was only kept alive through state subsidies in the socialist period. Having been deprived of the opportunity to integrate into the system of higher education and hit by discrimination on

the new capitalist labour market, this section of the workforce found itself cut off from legal employment opportunities in the post-socialist period.

The collapse of not only social mobility channels but the ‘invisible social contract’ binding Roma to the socialist state (requiring them to leave their undercaste community in exchange for material benefits and the hope of integrating into wider society as ‘new Magyars’) spawned shock, resentment and, later, anger that resulted in the development of an identity built on victimhood. This prevalent sense of victimhood has spawned divergent – and, as we have seen, often antagonistic – cultural practices within Roma communities. **Those who have barely anything left to lose have developed a largely individualized culture of resistance rooted in the need to vent frustration and obtain at least some kind of symbolic compensation through ‘small victories’ over the weakest, most vulnerable members of the ethnic majority:** elderly people.

In the last two decades, there were a few examples of such individualized antagonism spawning collective conflicts in Hungary. Our analysis reveals, however, that in Gyöngyöspata it has been interpersonal confrontations that have evolved into group conflicts, immediately acquiring an ethnic interpretation. These events did not immediately lead to grave consequences, but progressively undermined those informal mechanisms of conflict management that could have prevented expressions of violence. In places where violence is let loose, the relationship between the minority and the majority becomes overly determined by mutual fear and hatred. The ties binding individuals from different sides are cut, the community becomes defenceless against ‘atrocities’ committed by deviant elements, as well as against political interests seeking to gain leverage by escalating animosity and tensions. The norms responsible for maintaining the fragile order are suspended, previously bridled passions burst to the surface, and the members of different groups enter into direct confrontation. This negative spiral was subverted by the (delayed) intervention of the police force in Gyöngyöspata. However, the dangers inherent in this dynamic are revealed by the admonition of a leading member of local society (inscribed in collective memory on both sides of the divide): “one thing must be prevented: shooting the Gypsies”.

■ THE AFTERLIFE OF THE CONFLICT: THE STABILIZATION OF FAR-RIGHT RULE

At the official ceremony of investiture, the new mayor, elected with 34% of votes, pledged to bring an end to ‘Gypsy crime’ and to restore the values of work and respect of the law to their rightful place. In practice, this meant an increased presence of police in public spaces, more controls and the immediate and severe sanctioning of offenses. The mayor’s main source of inspiration and point of reference was the so-called ‘model program’ (see separate box) implemented in the village of Érpatak, situated approximately 200 kilometers East of Gyöngyöspata. Érpatak’s mayor (the author of the system of repressive measures subsumed under the label ‘model of Érpatak’) paid a number of visits to Gyöngyöspata, notably during the campaign period stretching from April to July 2011. This provided him with an opportunity to elucidate in detail a political methodology bent on harassing ‘destructive’ and rewarding ‘constructive’ elements of local society. It was this philosophy that Gyöngyöspata’s mayor sought to put into practice after his victory on 17 July. A newly created law enforcement unit (called the ‘field patrol’) was charged with the task of preventing petty theft.

According to the local newspaper, the unit had by January 2012 “successfully pushed out crime-prone individuals from the outskirts of Gyöngyöspata and taken an important step in the creation of the promised complex defence net”. A second element of this ‘defence net’ in both villages was the ‘disciplining’ of unemployed people involved in the state-financed public works program (whose modified variant was first tested in Gyöngyöspata). The mayor and notary deployed superintendents supplied with video cameras to control the work of the 40 individuals employed between August and November 2011 (of whom 35 were Roma according to our respondents). 3 individuals were charged with ‘disorderly conduct’ and expelled for 3 years from the program (also resulting in the suspension of their right to receive welfare benefits for the same period of time).

Those who were not sanctioned at work were harassed by the police who, as noted, conducted a high number of controls and fined Roma individuals for minor offenses (such as throwing cigarette stubs on the pavement, burning leaves on days disallowed by the local council or

using bicycles that had no lights). In its endeavors to discipline the poor, Gyöngyöspata's new leadership could count on the backing of the local police force, which was seeking to restore its tarnished legitimacy by redressing its earlier policy of non-action and severely sanctioning offenses. (The price of this was paid by the unemployed involved in the public works program: the fines imposed on them were deducted from their salaries as a result of which they – at least in some months – did not earn more for 8 hours of work a day than the amount they would have received for being on the 'dole': 100 Euros.)

ON THE 'ÉRPATAK MODEL'

Under the broad definition of the 'Érpatak model', we understand an approach to and method of dealing with severe social problems prevalent in regions in crisis that goes directly against the fundamentals of social work and, moreover:

- neglects the social institutions and processes that determine collective living conditions and thereby play a significant role in the reproduction of social problems.
- seeks to prevent individuals (presented as the primary source of social problems) from engaging in 'destructive' behavior by imposing strict – and at times unattainable – conditionalities and severe sanctions.

The first municipality to introduce a system of rules and measures built on this approach – which shares a number of features with far-right ideologies – was the administration of Érpatak. Therefore, the 'Érpatak model' narrowly defined, corresponds to decree No. 2/2011. (II. 14.) adopted by the local council, which made the receipt of welfare benefits dependent on recipients' willingness to keep their environment (sidewalk, garden and house) clean and orderly. The specific provisions defining cleanliness and orderliness contain not only the prescription of removing weeds from the sidewalk lining welfare recipients' homes, but also the obligation to produce vegetables and fruit for their own consumption on 25% of their garden's surface (if they have one). In case of non-compliance with regulations, the local council has the right to withhold welfare payments.

While Gyöngyöspata's far-right leadership prides itself, with the help of certain mainstream media, in the successes of its 'model initiatives', a new type of order – one "built on the foundation of fear" in the words of one local respondent – is taking shape behind the scenes. It is clear that the repressive measures introduced by the new leadership²⁷ primarily target the 'renitent inhabitants' of the 'Gypsy settlement'. However, the cold war the village's new leaders are waging has other targets as well. The heads of institutions providing services for both Roma and non-Roma (e.g. the local kindergarten and cultural

center), and that could therefore act as bridges between the two groups, are kept under strong pressure. ‘Outsiders’ providing counsel and support to the besieged Roma community are named and shamed, while the local inhabitants who stay in touch with them are placed under surveillance. (In this respect the situation is even worse in Érpatak, where anyone who voices the slightest criticism is harassed and – allegedly – even blackmailed by the mayor.)

Although there are a number of people on the ‘Magyar side’ (even among the mayor’s supporters) who criticize the newly adopted measures, there is a significant group of people who express satisfaction with the new order. Many inhabitants have voiced the opinion that “the number of thefts has fallen since the patrols were initiated”. Inhabitants of the ‘frontline’ feel more secure and place trust in the mayor, hoping that he will “keep his promises”. Another argument cited in support of his leadership does not have to do with the ‘Gypsy question’, but reflects a more general anti-establishment attitude stemming from disillusionment with corrupt leaders. The people who express disgust with earlier leaders and their dubious practices see the young man elected mayor as a proponent of ‘clean-handed politics’. For them, the large number of fines imposed by the notary and the police carry another message: that the new leaders are “doing their job”.

Despite the success of Jobbik’s political communications strategy (determined to establish Gyöngyöspata as a ‘model village’), the process of social disintegration we described earlier has gathered pace. The local council, despite the far-right party’s efforts (in line with its eurosceptic rhetoric) to draw investment from Iran, has in fact lost some of its tax revenues. The village’s largest entrepreneur, who had been paying between 70,000 and 100,000 Euros (amounting to more than 5% of Gyöngyöspata’s total revenue) in local business tax, decided to move his transportation company’s headquarters to another locality. The smaller entrepreneurs involved in tourism complain about the lack of guests and visitors.

In the meantime, the peasants whose livelihood depends on grapes or wine have been negatively affected by the departure of the Roma community’s most hard-working members. Between

70 and 80 members of the Roma community have requested asylum in Canada since the events of the ‘burning spring’ (and a few other families moved elsewhere in the country). The local leadership and its supporters have framed this as a success, claiming that “families prone to criminality have moved their seat to Canada”. These processes support the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights, according to which “the situation only appears to have been resolved on the surface; in reality, the fears and mutual distrust have not subsided, but have become a normal part of everyday life”.

We see the growing tension between Roma families residing in ‘the village’ and the inhabitants of the ‘Gypsy settlement’ as a sign of this same process. As we mentioned before, this is driven by the former group’s claim that the depravity and villainy of the settlement’s inhabitants is to be blamed for the majority’s impatience and enmity, which far-right groups were able to harness and exploit. This tension has also undermined the legitimacy of the Roma Minority Self-government, negatively affecting its ability to act against the repressive policies adopted by the local council. The latter has also not been left unaffected. In September 2011, two councilors stepped down, followed by another two in April 2012, including the deputy mayor who previously ran against Jobbik. Their departure marks the end of a process in the course of which the more moderate members of the ethnic majority have progressively left public life.

The conflict of 2011 also had repercussions on the national level. Of these, we will only mention those affecting the far-right. The success of the For a Better Future Civic Guard’s campaign encouraged far-right leaders to initiate patrols in the city of Hajdúhadház, situated some 150 kilometers east of Gyöngyöspata. Although the legal ambiguities that emerged during the conflict in Gyöngyöspata also hindered the work of the police force here, the concerted actions of the mayor, local MP and the Interior Minister thwarted the repetition of the scenario described previously. (It is worth noting that the Interior Minister’s reaction to the guard’s appearance in Hajdúhadház – according to which men clad in uniform intimidated and infringed on the rights of the local Roma population – marked a U-turn compared to the police’s passive response to the appearance of the same organization on the streets of Gyöngyöspata.) The amendments to the Penal Code and Governmental Decree on minor offenses previously referred to were manifestations of a newly born political will to act more firmly against paramilitaries.

This was galvanized by fear of a wave of ethnic mobilizations on the northeastern periphery of the country. The government figured that – both for its own and the country’s sake – it had to drastically limit the room for maneuver of far-right paramilitary groups.

The authorities’ joint intervention was followed by the State Prosecutor’s decision to ban For a Better Future Civic Guard. (The lawsuit filed on 2 September in the court of Békés County – where the seat of the organization is located – is still pending.) Based on this, we believe that the legal guarantees are today in place to prevent the materialization of the negative scenario described in the report filed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights:

“The ‘invasion of Gyöngyöspata’ may reoccur anytime, since there are a number of townships in the country from which the state has essentially retreated. This situation can be seized upon at any given time by a political party with rhetoric designed to boost its popularity that is built on the simplified separation of good and evil, a stigmatized interpretation of merit and worthiness, the identification of the Gypsy minority with criminality, and the principal of collective responsibility.”

■ CONCLUSIONS

Our research shows that the ethnic conflict that erupted in Gyöngyöspata in the spring of 2011 stemmed from the need for the self-legitimization of far-right political forces. **The events that took place in the village between March and July were dictated by Jobbik and its paramilitary allies, who used their mobilizational power to escalate existing tensions between the Roma minority and the Magyar majority.** Our analysis also reveals that far-right forces were able to count on the support of a significant segment of the local population, both during their intimidation campaign and in the implementation of their political program following Jobbik’s electoral victory in the by-election of 17 July 2011.

As suggested in the introduction to this study, the ‘invasion of Gyöngyöspata’ constituted a key element in Jobbik’s strategy of returning to the radical ‘street politics’ on which its

electoral success had been founded. The far-right party, facing problems of self-definition after its entry into parliament, was looking to consolidate its voter base by playing the ‘Gypsy card’ and demonstrating the need for tough politics of law and order. Patrols conducted on the streets of the village, followed by the democratic takeover of the mayor’s seat, allowed the party to communicate two crucial messages to Hungarian society: that Jobbik will do everything to defend rural citizens (abandoned by the government) against ‘Gypsy criminals’; and that it had the determination and power to not only criticize, but also implement its political program. This successful campaign resulted in a surge in Jobbik’s popularity (which had been in decline).

Physical violence – with the exception of the fight provoked by paramilitaries on 26 April – was thwarted by the presence of the police. However, the forces of order did not prevent paramilitary groups from carrying out their intimidation campaign – founded on ritual demonstrations of power – directed at the local Roma community.

The authorities’ passive approach was partly conditioned by serious flaws in the legal framework regulating paramilitary organizations – especially the so-called ‘civic guards’ – and judges’ concomitant ‘liberal’ approach to their activities, which these groups used to their advantage. However, we have also cited declarations by human rights organizations, which affirmed that existing laws would have allowed the police to halt paramilitary activities, as well as the fact that, during the far-right mobilization campaign in Hajdúhadház (organized in parallel with the Gyöngyöspata campaign), authorities adopted a much more confrontational – and successful – strategy vis-à-vis the same groups.

We have also called attention to the hitherto overlooked role of the local elite group, which had unknowingly paved the way for Jobbik’s successful mobilization campaign by raising the issue of ‘Gypsy crime’ and strategically using it to weaken its adversaries in positions of power. The success of far-right groups appearing in the village in 2011 has partly to do with the fact that they were able to deploy symbols with which local society was already familiar and build on social needs and demands that had been formulated by others before them.

The political entrepreneurs working under the umbrella of NGOs, who, in the second half of the last decade, decided to break with their moderate predecessors' efforts to keep the 'Gypsy question' a political taboo, were experimenting with the same strategy that Jobbik used years later on the level of national politics. The interpellation of fears related to a homogenized Gypsy community, the elevation of personal grievances into the domain of public life, and the symbolic compensation of victimized Magyars proved to be a highly efficient instrument for the accumulation of political capital. We claim that without this groundbreaking ideological work, the far-right's mobilization campaign could not have been successful in Gyöngyöspata. In our analysis, we highlighted the fact that this work was not only accomplished on a discursive level. **By institutionalizing spatial and educational segregation, local leaders conceived a social order that ignored the laws of the country. They had thereby gone much further in imposing the 'color bar' than most other municipalities on the country's northeastern periphery.**

As a side note, we must at this point mention that Gyöngyöspata's elected leaders were not the first to attempt to defuse ethno-social conflicts by adopting 'unorthodox' measures in Hungary. In a number of known cases, human rights organizations and Roma interest groups have forced state authorities to take action to prevent representatives of the local ethnic majority from imposing unilateral measures undermining the rights and interests of the minority. A sociologist and an activist (who had played an important role in a number of these conflicts) conveyed an optimistic reading of prospects in 1998 after a much debated case of housing segregation:

"In our opinion, the most important consequence of the Székesfehérvár ghetto case is that it put an end to an unhealthy process highlighted by the towns of Kétegyháza, Sátoraljaújhely and Tiszavasvári. These cases were silently pushing the country towards a situation in which the most blatant form of discrimination would appear natural and remain unsanctioned. The Székesfehérvár case broke that silence, and there is a chance that social and ethnic problems will no longer be swept under the carpet."²⁸

The cases mentioned and the Gyöngyöspata case share an important common feature. Namely, that the actors capable of significantly influencing situations of local conflict are not local, but supra-local organizations who have the ability to transform local issues into national ones and push the state to take action. Significantly, however, whereas the Anti-ghetto Committee managed in this way to force the Székesfehérvár Council to change its decision, the non-governmental organizations taking action in Gyöngyöspata were ignored by the state and therefore remained largely powerless in the face of the local council's discriminatory measures.

Up until now, we argued that it was far-right political mobilization that played the most important role in the outbreak of the Gyöngyöspata conflict. More concretely, we argued that the state's largely passive role provided space for the alignment of the far-right party (Jobbik) and 'local patriots', and that this conjunction of national and local interests determined the course of the events that took place in the village.

However, we also claim that the far-right campaign's success did not only hinge on an oppositional elite group's political will and action. **One of the main reasons why this group's ideological work met with the local population's sympathy is that it was able to build on 'real' tensions and experiences. In our study, we made considerable effort to demonstrate how certain structural (socio-economic and cultural) determinants brought Roma and non-Roma lifeworlds into a state of friction, providing fuel for the political radicalization of the ethnic majority.** Of these determinants, we would like to single out two in particular:

The first is that most members of the Roma community were progressively pushed back into the 'ghetto' by the wave of unemployment and poverty that hit low-skilled workers in the years preceding and following the 'transition' of 1989 – a situation made significantly worse by the local council's segregationist policies. The sudden collapse of the 'invisible social contract' binding Roma to the state spawned, as we argued, reactions which we subsumed under the label 'culture of resistance'.

The second is that even members of the ethnic majority who are not among the victims of theft or harassment found some degree of consolation in an ideology that allowed them to

symbolically redress their 'peasant pride'. As we clarified, the local peasant population also felt the effects of the structural transformation that destroyed Roma livelihoods. The ideology many Magyars cling to, however, diverts attention from structural factors by blaming the minority for the problems of the majority.

Researchers who study ethnic conflicts usually tend to think of their causes in one of two ways. They either highlight the role of cultural differences and the way these become sources of political antagonism, or they lay emphasis on the existence of inequalities in terms of social status or socio-economic class and the ensuing struggle for symbolic and material resources. We have sought to highlight the role of both 'class' and 'culture'.

On the one hand, we demonstrated that the conflict of 2011 effected not only members of the 'minority' and the 'majority', but (at another level of analysis) also the poor pushed back into the 'ghetto' and the rural middle class threatened by *déclassement*. We have also revealed the importance of certain structural crises – Roma workers' exclusion from the labor market and the crisis of small-scale viticulture in particular – in preparing the ground on which the struggle could take place. We see the neoliberal economic policies underpinning these crises as at least partially responsible for the increasing competition between the Roma inhabitants of the 'ghetto' and the Magyar inhabitants of 'the village' for increasingly scarce resources controlled by local entrepreneurs and politicians.

On the other hand, we have also highlighted the role that certain cultural practices and ideological work played in the ethnicization of social inequalities and tensions. We would like to remind our readers that the inhabitants of 'the village' – who proudly celebrate their peasant traditions – sought to maintain their dominant role in both political and economic life by developing a new type of discourse. This discourse used the relationship to work and property as the main building block to construct an unbridgeable divide between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' inhabitants. If this divide took on an ethnic cloak, it is firstly because people describing themselves or being identified by others as Gypsy/Roma are largely overrepresented, for primarily historic reasons, amongst the poor. And secondly, because the rehabilitation of Magyar, peasant or (in some cases) white identity could only be achieved in opposition to

an inferior ‘other’, in this case, the ‘Gypsy’. It is this ‘everyday racism’ that proved to be the cultural foundation for extremist political forces to build on to ascend to a position of power in Gyöngyöspata and to make the village a symbolic center of their activities.

■ **Coda: The lesson from Gyöngyöspata**

We ended our description of the conflict’s afterlife by stating that the legal guarantees necessary to prevent paramilitary groups from carrying out intimidation campaigns are today certainly in place. This, however, is not equal to saying that the possibility of ethnic confrontations taking place in Hungary after Gyöngyöspata can be ruled out. In fact, **our findings warrant the assumption that in places where local authorities deploy oppressive measures to uphold the ‘color bar’, there is a non-negligible risk of confrontation.** The anger and resentment caused by such measures on the side of the Roma can spawn radical reactions that transgress previously observed patterns and norms. This is most likely to occur in places where the Roma community is larger, more cohesive and politically better organized than in Gyöngyöspata. Researchers dealing with ethnic conflicts have also observed that the risk of violent confrontation is higher in places where precedents provide a blueprint for action.

Local authorities’ commitment to imposing the ‘color bar’ is likely to be strengthened if the anti-Gypsy discourse (that portrays the minority as responsible for the economic losses and moral injuries of the majority) **achieves a hegemonic position in a specific locality.** The Gyöngyöspata case confirms that this is most likely to occur in settings where the institutions supposed to bridge the ethnic divide (e.g. the local school) are dysfunctional and where moderate opinion leaders are pushed aside. The elimination of these checks is likely to strengthen voices calling for radical ‘solutions’.

Finally, **the Gyöngyöspata case also warns us against the tabooization of grievances formulated in ethnic terms.** The denial of problems and injustices related to interethnic co-existence tends to reinforce right-wing radicals because it allows them to legitimize their politics by claiming to speak the language of truth. It is therefore a matter of urgency to create opportunities for the public expression of grievances from both sides (even if these

are magnified or appear in a distorted guise). These public testimonials – which are often painful, not to say traumatic – may be used as a starting point for establishing a process of reconciliation between Roma and non-Roma groups on the local level. Such a process, aimed at re-working the social contract, may lead to the formulation of practical alternatives and the strengthening of moderate voices. On the level of national politics, the challenge is slightly different: moderate political actors must attempt to arrive at a minimal consensus on how to prevent the transformation of ethno-social tensions into ethnic frontlines. Our contention is that a lack of willingness to engage with poverty and the ethnicization of social problems will inevitably lead to the further erosion of citizens' trust in democratic politics.

■ NOTES

- ¹ The analysis underpinning this study was carried out by Kristóf Szombati and Margit Feischmidt.
- ² In this study, we employ the term ‘far-right’ in preference to ‘radical right’. While some academics use the former to designate political formations that reject parliamentary democracy and the latter to designate those that accept this political framework, we side with researchers who argue that the rejection of the core democratic values of equality between citizens and cultural pluralism can be qualified as extremist in its own right.
- The think tank Political Capital has created a Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index (DEREX), which is based on data gathered within the framework of the European Social Survey and measures the size of the group in a given country susceptible to far-right ideologies and political messages. (See: http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/hungary/attitude-radicals-in-hungary-in-international-context_734.html.) It is partly from their analyses and partly from the few social scientific studies comparing Eastern and Western European societies from the perspective of receptivity to ultra-nationalism and xenophobia that we derive these observations.
- ³ Poland, however, is a notable exception.
- ⁴ Of the 5 European countries where (according to the Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index) demand for far-right ideologies and political messages is highest, 4 are in Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania). See: http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/derex_2012/derex_ess5_english.pdf
- ⁵ Source: http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/bulgaria/the-second-season-of-patrolling-in-hungary_694.html
- The study in question can be downloaded here: http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/derex_study.pdf
- ⁶ In 2006, the alliance of Jobbik and MIÉP (an antisemitic far-right party, which had been in parliament between 1998 and 2002) obtained 2.20% of votes at the parliamentary elections. In 2009, Jobbik polled 14.77% at the European parliamentary elections (and obtained 3 seats in the EP).
- ⁷ Bíró, Nagy, András – Róna, Dániel (2011): ‘Tudatos radikalizmus. A Jobbik útja a parlamentbe (2003-2010)’ [Conscious radicalism. Jobbik’s path to parliament], in Láncki, András (ed.): *Nemzet és radikalizmus: Egy új pártcsalád felemelkedése*. Budapest: Századvég, p. 247.
- ⁸ The Arrow Cross Party-Hungarist Movement was a national socialist party founded in 1939 and which rose to power in October 1944 with the help of the Nazis. During its short rule, which lasted until the country’s liberation by Soviet forces, more than 10,000 Jews were murdered by Arrow Cross militia in Budapest and tens of thousands were sent on foot to the Austrian border in so-called death marches.
- ⁹ See (in Hungarian): <http://www.median.hu/object.33539287-946e-46d8-a0bc-869521b6e4a2.ivy>
- It is worth noting that the official banning of the Guard two years later was supported by 53% of respondents and opposed by 37%. Source (in Hungarian): <http://www.median.hu/object.12f8a53b-1583-49ec-8820-ef67a68c500f.ivy>
- ¹⁰ For a brief overview of Eastern European guards organizations see: http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/bulgaria/the-second-season-of-patrolling-in-hungary_694.html
- According to Political Capital, these organizations share the following features: (1) paramilitary-type organization evoking the militaristic traditions of the far-right; (2) an ideology built primarily on anti-Roma prejudice; (3) questioning of the state’s law-enforcement monopoly; (4) close ties to a political party.
- Some researchers have highlighted the fact that these organizations are in most cases created by parties and play a major role in party building in order to claim that they substantially differ from neo-Nazi paramilitary organizations, which have no party affiliation and reject the entire political system. However, other researchers have argued that strong links between guards and parties justify the claim that the Eastern European far-right is more militant and anti-democratic than its Western European allies.
- ¹¹ See: http://www.itelotabla.hu/fileadmin/fajlok/fovaros/2009/mg_itelet090716.doc
- ¹² Political Capital’s research findings are available here:

http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/dereX_2012/dereX_ess5_english.pdf

According to Tárki's data, it is Jobbik's (and the greens') supporters who have the highest income. Far-right supporters also tend to be better educated than previously: a fair number of far-right supporters possess a university degree today. Significantly, it is among Jobbik's supporters that we find the highest proportion of internet users. This has probably also to do with the fact that 40% of supporters are from the 18-35 age group.

- ¹⁴ Averages of data collected by Medián, Századvég, Szonda Ipsos and Tárki. See Figure 1 in the main text.
- ¹⁵ For an overview of the Western European far-right, see Chatham House's report on 'Populist Extremism in Europe': <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/178301>
- ¹⁶ Gábor Vona had contested a seat in the 2010 electoral contest in the district that Gyöngyöspata belonged to. He received 26.10% support in the first round and 20.37% in the second round of voting in the district. However, he realized a far better share of the vote in Gyöngyöspata itself where he obtained 34.82% of votes cast in the first round and 29.35% in the second round.
- ¹⁷ For a brief overview of the organization, see: <http://athenaintezet.eu/en/map/olvas/33#read/>
- ¹⁸ For a brief overview of the organization, see: <http://athenaintezet.eu/en/map/olvas/29#read>
- ¹⁹ Human rights organizations based their assessment on the Budapest Tribunal's verdict in the case of the Hungarian Guard, in which the judge claimed that Roma groups targeted by the Guard constituted "captured communities".
- ²⁰ See the Shadow Report compiled by the organization: <http://tasz.hu/en/news/shadow-report-about-events-gyongyospata>
- ²¹ In the interview broadcast on 28 April, the Prime Minister mentioned the following: "It was already evident what had to be done weeks ago. But, as you know, those who provoke the people who live there try to hide behind the right of assembly. And if you act too quickly, in a hasty manner, then people's reflex will be that you have violated the right of assembly... So you cannot take a number of decisions as fast as you would like. In Hungarian politics, the sense of rhythm is most important. A tough decision has to be taken at the moment when the whole country believes that that decision really needs to be taken. But if you take that decision a bit too early, then the whole country will say 'You should not really intervene'. So the moment has to be well chosen."
- ²² See the separate box for details.
- ²³ According to a representative survey conducted in 2003, 38% of Roma men aged between 15 and 49, and 20% of Roma women of the same age, were employed in Hungary. In the case of Gyöngyöspata, the corresponding numbers were 5% and 0%.
- ²⁴ Official statistics released by the police do not show an increase in crime rates. In 2010, 55 criminal acts were committed in Gyöngyöspata (of which 31 were related to violation of property rights). In 2011, until the conflict's eruption in March, 9 criminal acts were registered. This, according to Gyöngyös' police chief, means that the village's crime rate is not worse than average. (To what extent these numbers reflect reality is a hotly debated and highly politicized issue. Supporters of far-right groups' mobilization campaign contend that the situation is much worse because a significant number of criminal acts were not reported by Magyar victims.)
- ²⁵ Both Magyar inhabitants of Gyöngyöspata and the press used this term to designate the former leader of the Gypsy Minority Self-government (who is seen as the opinion leader of the Roma community). The term is misleading in that the term 'voivod' was initially used to designate the leaders of Vlach Gypsy communities. However, in the most recent period, self-appointed entrepreneurs in Romungro (Hungarian-speaking) communities have begun vindicating the title as a means of formalizing their power.
- ²⁶ As in most other places, there is a significant gap between Roma and non-Roma women's fertility rates in Gyöngyöspata. We have not calculated exact numbers, but do know from a local teacher that while in 1996 there were 46 Roma and 204 non-Roma children in the local school, today the number of Roma children is 110 (out of 200 pupils in total). This shift in demographic balance raises the fear that the Roma population will outnumber Magyars in the foreseeable future. The fear of being outnumbered has aggravated the concerns of the ethnic majority and also encouraged the 'local patriots' to find workable ways of containing the Roma threat.

In other words, the fear that 'time is running out' may be one of the reasons for the implementation of radical segregation measures (in some cases bordering illegality).

²⁷ Some elements of this 'defence net' were put in place by previous leaders. For instance, it was under the previous 'moderate' mayor that a local decree allowing the local council to withhold welfare payments in the event that a household does not pay for utilities was adopted.

²⁸ Ladányi, János – Horváth, Aladár (2000): 'Székesfehérvár üzenetei', [Székesfehérvár's messages] in Horváth, Ágota et al. (ed.): *Cigánynak születni: Tanulmányok, dokumentumok*. Budapest: Új mandátum, p. 112.



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