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**RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN POWER: THE IMPACT OF
POPULISM ON FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERSTATE
RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

Right-Wing Populism in Power: The Impact of Populism on Foreign Policy and Interstate Relations

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This thesis investigated the correlation between the accession of right-wing populist political parties to government, with the deterioration of the foreign relations of said government *vis-à-vis* its traditional partners. It is a qualitative study, having used the European states of Hungary and Poland as cases to help bring about greater understanding of the workings of right-wing populist parties in government, as well as of how these interact with, and are treated by, the foreign authorities with which they deal. The study found that a deterioration of the relationship between the case countries and their neighbors and traditional allies can indeed be observed, though in order to ascertain the extent to which these trends apply to similar parties elsewhere, it recommends that further research be conducted with larger samples.

Keywords: Right-Wing Populism, Foreign Policy, Interstate Relations, Hungary, Poland

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

İktidardaki Sağ Popülizm: Popülizmin Dış Politikaya ve Devletlerarası İlişkilere Etkisi

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Bu tezde sağ popülist siyasi partilerin iktidara gelişi ile o ülkelerdeki hükümetlerin geleneksel ortaklarıyla dış ilişkilerinin bozulması arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırılmaktadır. Avrupa'dan Macaristan ve Polonya örnekleri ele alınarak ve nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılarak, sağ popülist partilerin iktidara geldiklerinde nasıl bir yol izlediklerinin, dış hükümetlerle nasıl etkileşime girdiklerinin ve onlar tarafından nasıl ele alındıklarının anlaşılmasına katkı sağlamak amaçlanmaktadır. Çalışmada, ele alınan ülkelerin komşuları ve geleneksel müttefikleri ile aralarındaki ilişkilerde bir bozulmanın gözlemlenebileceğini sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bununla birlikte bu eğilimlerin başka yerlerdeki benzer partilerde ne ölçüde görüldüğünü tespit etmek için daha geniş örnekleme sahip kapsamlı araştırmalar yapılması gerektiği önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sağ Popülizm, Dış Politika, Devletlerarası İlişkiler, Macaristan, Polonya

RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN POWER: THE IMPACT OF POPULISM ON FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERSTATE RELATIONS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANO	<i>ANO 2011</i> ; YES 2011
AWS	<i>Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność</i> ; Solidarity Electoral Action
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CoE	Council of Europe
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DF	<i>Dansk Folkeparti</i> ; Danish People's Party
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> ; for example
EC	European Commission
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
EP	European Parliament
et al.	<i>et alia</i> ; and others
EU	European Union
EUAM Ukraine	European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine
EUCO	European Council
EUFOR BiH	European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina
EULEX Kosovo	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EUMAM Ukraine	European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine
EUR	euro
Fidesz	<i>Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége – Magyar Polgári Szövetség</i> ; Alliance of Young Democrats – Hungarian Civic Forum
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> ; Freedom Party of Austria
Frp	<i>Fremskrittspartiet</i> ; Progress Party
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GDP	gross domestic product
GOP	Grand Old Party; US Republican Party
H	<i>Høyre</i> ; Conservative Party, lit. The Right
IR	International Relations

Jobbik	<i>Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom</i> ; Movement for a Better Hungary
LEGA	<i>Lega</i> ; League
list-PR	party-list proportional representation
lit.	literally
MEP	member of the European Parliament
MP	member of parliament
MSZP	<i>Magyar Szocialista Párt</i> ; Hungarian Socialist Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
orgs.	organizations
PiS	<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i> ; Law and Justice
PO	<i>Platforma Obywatelska</i> ; Civic Platform
PVV	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> ; Party for Freedom
PZPR	<i>Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza</i> ; Polish United Workers' Party
RWPP	right-wing populist party
SLD	<i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i> ; Alliance of the Democratic Left
SMER–SD	<i>Smer – sociálna demokracia</i> ; Direction – Social Democracy
Syriza	<i>Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás</i> ; Coalition of the Radical Left
UN	United Nations
V	<i>Venstre</i> ; Liberal Party, lit. The Left
ZP	<i>Zjednoczona Prawica</i> ; United Right

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INTRODUCTION

The European political climate in the twenty-first century has been described as one characterized by increasing instability, volatility, and unpredictability. From a string of political, economic, and geopolitical crises to periods marred by civil unrest and widespread public discontent, the continent's various political systems have in recent years been forced to contend with a wide range of new and considerable challenges to the *status quo*. The visions of a more peaceful and cooperative world order harbored by many in the wake of the Cold War may at times seem to have all but faded, as the European continent now find itself steeped in myriad acute issues such as the climate crisis, large-scale migration, a rapidly rising cost of living, and outright military conflict in its easternmost reaches.

The tumult of the past two decades has left a stark imprint on the political landscapes of the European nations. The political conventions and electoral patterns that once defined the post-war and Cold War systems have been challenged and thoroughly shaken in recent years, as the repercussions of the aforementioned developments have set in. The European electorates, seemingly no longer content with the *modus operandi*, have been compelled to alter their electoral behavior, and shift their voting patterns, in response to the host of new challenges facing the region. Some of the most glaring examples of this electoral shift are seen in the rise of new political parties and movements, such as the greens and ecologists, the European pirate parties, and the increasingly prolific *ad hoc* personalist political parties (Krouwel, 2012: 83-85).

And yet more attention, and, in some cases, concern, has been directed towards the resurgence of another political tradition, namely that of the right-wing populists. This camp constitutes one of the rightmost ideological currents in contemporary European politics, and was until relatively recently largely confined to the fringes of the continent's political arena. Combining rightist political ideology and stances with populist tactics and narratives, Europe's right-wing populists once struggled to gain a foothold in the political mainstream. Right-wing populist ideas and methods alike were often dismissed and disparaged by the established European political groups as extreme, and their electoral support remained negligible in most of the continent's systems until sometime after the turn of the millennium (Hainsworth, 2016: 1-2).

But against the backdrop of globalization, the rise of multiculturalism, increased human migration, and the advance of identity politics on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum, Europe's right-wing populists have seen their popular and electoral support surge across the region throughout the last two to three decades. One of the earlier indicators of this trend could be observed in Austria, where the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) entered into a coalition government with the traditional center-right following legislative elections in 1999. This new coalition was rebuked by the leaderships of several other states in the region, and the European Union (EU) elected to impose diplomatic sanctions on the Central European nation in the year 2000 as a show of condemnation; these sanctions were hotly debated in several European states, however, and were ultimately lifted later the same year (Happold, 2000). Despite its repudiation by the other European states, the coalition government survived, before ultimately collapsing under the weight of a number of internal disputes in 2002, leading to early elections (Roraff and Krejci, 2011: 35).

And yet the EU response to the rise of the FPÖ did little to arrest the broader political shift on the continent, as similar parties soon made electoral inroads in other countries as well. In Poland, the Catholic-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party formed its first government only a few years later, in 2005, while the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) scored over 15 percent of the vote in the Netherlands' 2010 legislative elections (de Jonge, 2021: 7). The same year, the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) secured a landslide electoral victory, taking around 53 percent of the vote and garnering a two-thirds majority in the Hungarian parliament (Bánkuti et al., 2015: 38). The aforementioned political parties are among those who have been variously described by observers and scholars alike as right-wing populist, radical right, or far-right political parties, and they are but a small selection of the myriad groups that have been categorized as such. In this thesis, the parties belonging to this overarching classification will be referred to as right-wing populist parties (RWPPs). Despite their electoral successes, these groups were spared the EU sanctions that were once applied in reaction to the rise of the Austrian FPÖ, symbolizing, perhaps, a relaxation of the bloc's vigilance in the face of such political groups. Indeed, parties such as the aforementioned Dutch PVV, as well as similar outfits like the Danish People's Party (DF) and the Norwegian Progress Party (Frp) increased their political sway in tandem with their electoral growth throughout the early twenty-first century, notably without much reaction from the broader European community. In some ways, this is

emblematic of the transition of the RWPPs from the political fringes into Europe's political mainstream.

The increasing international and supranational passivity towards, or, arguably, passive acceptance of, the right-wing populist political forces and governments in Europe is a development that has seen much discussion in political circles, as well as among scholars and analysts who seek to understand the implications and potential repercussions of their growing influence and rise to power. Related discussions cover topics ranging from the effects of right-wing populist governance on domestic and foreign policy, to observable increases in political and ideological polarization, to concerns over the prospect of democratic backsliding and the erosion of established political conventions and, in some cases, institutions (Ausserladscheider, 2024: 44).

In the field of International Relations (IR), such discussion and research has often tied into the broader subject of interstate relations. A number of existing works cover the right-wing populist impact on foreign policy and interstate relations, both in Europe and beyond, and both within specific countries and as an international political force, having contributed over time to what has become a rich and widely studied field. However, in the case of many such contributions, great focus is placed on immediate, and, oftentimes, short-term repercussions of the rise of right-wing populism; further exploration of longer-term impacts on interstate relations, conducted by observing critical trends over multi-year timeframes within the spheres of diplomacy, trade, and other forms of interstate interaction, would constitute a valuable contribution to the already existing literature. Among the aims of this thesis are to further enrich the scholarly literature by assessing some of the most recent changes and developments in this area, and by delineating and monitoring the more long-term repercussions of these. It aims to build further on the existing literature by reviewing established theories and observations, and testing these against the events of recent years. The consolidation of the populist right is an ongoing development that remains highly relevant in today's political world, and it affects the continent's interstate interactions and relationships to a markedly high degree. Therefore, obtaining a thorough understanding of this stands to benefit all who wish to grasp the complex and dynamic political realities of the European continent in our time.

This thesis is an attempt to contribute to the broadening and deepening of that same understanding. It is a revisitation of the topic of right-wing populist impact and influence on national foreign policy, composed in the interest of elucidating the motivations, methods, and results of ruling right-wing populist political actors and

organizations in present-day Europe. It primarily aims to determine whether willed, and in some cases possibly inadvertent, changes made to the foreign-political course of European states under right-wing populist governments have left a significant and observable imprint on the foreign relations of the states they have governed in the medium to long term. Given the historically controversial status of the RWPPs in the European political order, and their occasional shunning by the various political establishments of the European nations, it is of further interest to examine whether these changes have improved, or impaired, the interstate relationships between the nations governed by RWPPs and other surrounding states, as well as their traditional allies.

In short, this thesis attempts to provide an answer to the following question: is there a correlation between the exercising of government foreign policy by right-wing populist political parties, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states?

Further, it represents an attempt to connect and contextualize a number of various previously observed trends and developments in a manner that might produce a fuller and more complete picture than what may be obtained by observing them in isolation. Foreign policy is an intrinsically large and wide-ranging dimension of modern politics, and it is tied in various ways to such issues as international treaties and agreements, international and supranational organizations and bodies, crime and justice, international trade, foreign aid, cross-border migration, and more. It is necessary to examine several of the abovementioned policy areas if one wishes to determine whether the relationships between two or more states have, in fact, improved or deteriorated. When examining the relations between states, it is not enough to review public statements, polemics, and comments made by political actors representing the governments or political factions of their countries; based on these alone, one could, for example, most likely quickly surmise that relations between European states governed by RWPPs and their neighbors and traditional allies have a tendency to deteriorate over time. It is important to distinguish between official, *de jure*, or stated, policy, and actual, implemented policy; the former is but one of the multiple policy areas that in combination comprise a state's overall foreign relations. For that reason, the research laid out in this thesis primarily bases itself on practically implemented policy.

A full and complete analysis of national foreign policy ought to include as many of the abovementioned variables as possible. For a thesis of this length and scope,

however, it is also necessary to delineate the most relevant policy areas and select for study those that are best suited to help us gauge a strengthening or weakening of interstate relationships, and to give weight to these. In this thesis, four overarching dimensions are examined with particular care: 1) the establishment and ending of international treaties and agreements, 2) international trade, 3) international coordination of foreign and defense policy, and 4) the imposition of international sanctions and other disciplinary measures. These policy areas cover some of the most current and relevant spheres of today's European politics, and the reasoning behind their inclusion and prioritization in this thesis, as well as exploration of what this entails, is elaborated on in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis. But in short, measuring developments in these areas throughout the terms in government of RWPPs aids the goal of determining whether an observable improvement or worsening of relations has taken place.

Just as there are many policy areas one might take into account, there are also a number of different European states in which one may observe right-wing populist power over, and impact on, foreign policy. In this thesis, the states of Hungary and Poland serve as case countries due to the presence of such conditions observed there. Both Hungary's ruling Fidesz party and Poland's ruling PiS have frequently been designated as exemplars of the right-wing populist tradition in their respective countries (Herkman, 2022: 2-3).

The intended goal of analyzing the Fidesz and PiS governments and their impact on the foreign policy strategies of Hungary and Poland, respectively, is to be able to establish whether governments of right-wing populist alignment have been able to significantly alter the course of their states' foreign relations in any meaningful way, and whether this has led to an improvement or a deterioration of these. And although these are but two of the many RWPPs active in Europe today, they are both distinguished by having secured majorities in their countries' legislatures and by having formed lasting governments, and thereby having gained definitive control over, and responsibility for, the foreign policies of these Central European states. Both parties have secured successive election victories – Fidesz in 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022, and PiS in 2015 and 2019. This provides a multi-year timeframe for each case country, suitable for the purposes of this thesis. Indeed, its focus is the exercise of power over the foreign relations of these states, and the timeframe of this study span the most recent terms of these political parties in power, which, at the time of writing, translates to 13 years in the case of Fidesz, and eight years in the case of PiS. This

thesis handles data from each party's first year in power, until 2023, or, in certain cases, 2022. This research is largely qualitative in nature, and aims to examine the nature and effects of these parties' terms in government closely and in-depth. A more thorough overview of the case countries and their ruling political parties is provided in Chapter One of this thesis; this chapter provides insight into existing literature on the topic, providing a rundown of the prevailing scholarly theories on this type of political grouping, as well as on the political and ideological currents that fuel them, so that we may better understand the context of the developments covered in this thesis. Chapter Two, meanwhile, discusses the intended merits and benefits of the selection of these case countries, as well as the general methodological approach taken in the research presented here and the reasoning behind it. Chapter Three consists of the presentation of the data collected in the research into each case, comprising both numerical and more qualitative data. Finally, Chapter Four discusses these findings more in-depth and connects them to the existing literature and to recent, relevant developments in the area. It further provides an answer to the research question and discusses the place of this research within the academic field.

The overall objective of this research is to cultivate a deeper and more rounded understanding of the realities and implications of right-wing populist governance, and of the impact that it might have on foreign policy and interstate relations. It is also to analyze the Hungarian and Polish governments and ruling parties in such a way that its findings may be extrapolated to the broader right-wing populist political current, and specifically to the right-wing populist governments on the European continent, and, perhaps, beyond. It ought to serve as a contribution to the literature covering the shifting political trends in contemporary Europe as well as the emerging political and ideological movements therein. Just as this thesis draws from, and expands on, earlier research on related subjects, its purpose is to serve as an additional building block on which further research may be based in the future.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving any deeper into the recent developments and political shifts within Hungary and Poland, an overview of existing research and literature covering the core topics discussed in this thesis must be established. This first chapter will account for a number of such works, and attempt to make clear how these, in conjunction, form the theoretical framework of the examination and research presented here. It is divided into several main sections, each covering a topic relevant to the subject of this thesis; section 1.1 provides an account of right-wing populism and its main characteristics, while section 1.2 covers literature on right-wing populism and foreign policy more specifically, linking the political current with interstate relations. Sections 1.3 and 1.4, meanwhile, look closer at the cases of Hungary and Poland, with the former exploring the specific strains of right-wing populism observed in these, and the latter looking at the impact of these on the foreign policy strategies of the two countries in question.

1.1. RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Given the proliferation of the right-wing populist movement in modern world politics, it should perhaps not come as a surprise that a great number of authors from a wide range of scholarly fields have contributed to the literature covering this, and related, topics over the past several decades. The subject is directly connected to an ongoing process, and the repository of knowledge on this phenomenon continues to grow as new discoveries are made, patterns are observed, and events transpire. The works that comprise the academic literature on right-wing populism have helped shape the general understanding of the concept, and as such they comprise the literary and theoretical fundament of this thesis. This section accounts for a number of such works to illustrate how research the relevant topic has been conducted thus far, and also to highlight how this thesis builds further on the established understanding of this.

The concept of right-wing populism constitutes one of the primary conceptual pillars of this thesis, and many scholars have authored in-depth analyses and accounts covering the breadth and width of the subject, including in connection with the subjects of foreign policy and interstate relations. Some, such as Riedel, explore

the origins of the concept of populism itself, evoking the *populares* of Ancient Rome and the demagoguery of the political classes of that civilization, in his article titled “Populism and Its Democratic, Non-Democratic, and Anti-Democratic Potential” (Riedel, 2017). Others, like Sagarzazu and Thies, emphasize the foreign policy rhetoric of populism in modern times; although his case study of Venezuelan populism falls somewhat outside the European bounds of this thesis, it is nevertheless a notable contribution to the same overall subject being discussed here, namely the impact of populist leaders, and leadership, on the foreign policy and interstate relations of nations (Sagarzazu and Thies, 2019).

1.1.1. Defining Populism

Among the most prominent contributors to the field is Mudde, who in a series of published works has explored populism in general, and right-wing populism in particular, as it can be observed in modern times. These help shed light on how the populist political current manifests, what drives it, and how it governs, all of which are areas that are relevant to the research presented in this thesis. For what is right-wing populism, in essence, and what are its main characteristics?

These questions may not be easy to answer, and they are debated by Mudde and others frequently, with some disagreement existing between various scholars. As for populism more broadly, Mudde defines it thusly: “Populism is an ideology that separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and that holds that politics should be an expression of ‘the general will’ of the people” (Mudde, 2016b: 25-26). As such, it is, under Mudde’s definition, an outlook defined by its opposition to established, powerful, or elite groups in society, and a purported championing of the interests of the common, virtuous masses. Mudde, in this definition, opts to define populism as an ideology, which, notably, is a stance on which some scholars have other opinions. Mudde is also known to have defined populism as “a thin-centered ideology” throughout several of his works (Mudde, 2004: 544). This, in turn, is borrowed from the phrasing of Freeden in his “Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach”, which, as the title implies, discusses this matter largely on a conceptual and theoretical level (Freeden, 1996).

Others argue that populism is in fact not a proper political ideology, but rather a style of politics or a political strategy employed by actors, who may or may not espouse a different political ideology regardless of their embrace of populism. In the

second chapter of “The Rise of Populist Sovereignism: What It Is, Where It Comes from, and What It Means for International Security and Defense,” by De Spiegeleire et al., the authors take the scholarly schism over the nature of populism into account, when they state that “populism is broadly defined in one of the following ways: as a truly believed ideology; as a political strategy for mobilizing support; as a rhetorical/discursive style that pits ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’; as a type of movement or mobilization; or as some combination of the above,” thus definitively acknowledging that different applications of the term exist, without necessarily weighing in on the still-ongoing debate in favor of any one view (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 26).

Riedel echoes scholar Paul Taggart in describing populism as “chameleonic” and even “empty-hearted” in nature, as he attempts to produce an appropriate definition for the concept, distinguishing it from other ideological doctrines defined by a more solid philosophical and moral-ideational basis (Riedel, 2017: 287). He is cautious of describing the concept as an ideology at all, citing the lasting disagreement among scholars on this question. But the core of populism, regardless of any other traits or quirks that may characterize it in specific or situational instances, is, according to Riedel, a narrative that holds that “‘the good people’ [...] are endangered by ‘the evil others’” (Riedel, 2017: 290). To put this phrasing into context, it may be said that a populist in modern politics is one who seeks to distinguish between two main groups in society, namely “the good people,” as Riedel terms them, and “the evil others,” and populists themselves will typically claim to represent the interests of the former of these two groups, and to challenge the latter. Commonly, the former will be comprised of “ordinary” members of society, the common person or the neglected or downtrodden, whereas the latter will be made out to be the social, economic, or political elite, or in some cases perhaps supranational interests and powers that, in the populist narrative, seek to undermine, destroy, or oppress “the good people”. Needless to say, it is these, the neglected common folk, who typically make up a populist actor’s target audience and, if electorally successful, core electorate.

As much as this style of political rhetoric may sound familiar in the present day, its tradition dates back millennia according to the same author. In fact, he connects the modern concept of populism to the Ancient Roman political faction known as the *populares*, who “were the politicians looking for public support” (Riedel, 2017: 289). In those times, the *populares* were rivaled by the faction known as the *optimates*, who

were largely made up of, and supported by, the wealthy and aristocratic classes of that civilization. As Riedel highlights, the usage of the term populism had shifted by the 19th century, to describe mainly American, French, and Russian political movements that sought to establish “a more egalitarian role for the masses in the context of elitist politics” (Riedel, 2017: 289). This falls in line with the general view of populism as a set of anti-elitist beliefs that remains to the present day. Interestingly, the author also notes that “the more liberal democracy was established, the more populism evolved towards more and more regressive positions,” implying that as Western political leaderships and systems themselves came to embrace increasingly liberal and progressive principles throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, populism, continued to appeal to the common person in opposition to these systems. He suggests that “framing populism historically helps us understand why its return to Europe actualizes this continent’s past xenophobic and anti-democratic characteristics,” and that “modern populists are surprisingly open to its pre-democratic foundations. At best they are ambivalent about democracy; at worst they want to destroy it” (Riedel, 2017: 289). Riedel’s contributions to this field may be particularly helpful in allowing us to understand the rise of populism in general, and right-wing populism in particular, in modern Europe, as the historical parallels and developments he accounts for helps us see the underlying role that the populist movements at various points in time on that continent, leading up to, and including, the rise of RWPPs in Hungary and Poland.

It is not the aim of this thesis to chime in to the debate on the true nature of populism, or to attempt to somehow settle the dispute between the various, aforementioned schools of thoughts once and for all. But for the purposes of its research, it operates with Mudde’s definition of the term, as this does not exclude the policy implications of populism by defining it as merely rhetorically or narratively based, or as purely a strategy for attaining political power. It is, after all, the aim of this thesis to examine how populists exercise power once they have gained it.

1.1.2. Populism on the Political Spectrum

Whereas all of the abovementioned works help elucidate the nature and history of populism, the scope of this thesis encompasses, first and foremost, right-wing populism, which is to say populism in the forms in which it manifests on the right-wing of the political spectrum as opposed to on the left or in the center. For populism

can, as a number of scholars may attest, appear on the opposite end of the spectrum as well, and, somewhat interestingly, in the center. And so in order to fully understand the nature of right-wing populism, it is important to know what sets it apart from its leftist and centrist counterparts. To this end, it is imperative to also have a clear conception of what the terms left, right, and center entail in the context of ideology and party politics.

Ideological and party politics have for many decades increasingly come to be simplified and adopted to the one-dimensional scale known as the left-right political axis. This axis, or spectrum, stems from the French Revolution towards the end of the 18th century. During the revolutionary period, supporters of the revolts were seated to the left of the speaker in the country's legislative body, the National Assembly, whereas its opponents, who largely supported the conservation of the country's established social order and form of government, were seated to his right; it is from this seating plan that the terms "left-wing" and "right-wing" in politics derive (Lewis and Lewis, 2023: 17). These terms have endured until the present day, and remain important designations in the politics of Europe. For instance, political parties will occasionally include these terms in their names, such as in the case of the Norwegian liberal party *Venstre* (V), lit. "The Left," and their conservative counterparts *Høyre* (H), lit. "The Right," and the terms are frequently applied to the various political parties on the continent. In France, the Ministry of the Interior applies electoral labels to most political parties and candidates running for office, designating their approximate placement on the left-right axis; minor electoral competitors, or competitors unaffiliated with any of the country's major political parties, are still designated with labels such as "miscellaneous left," "miscellaneous right," and "miscellaneous center" (Dolez and Laurent, 2022).

But while the terms left-wing and right-wing are widely applied in the European nations, these labels reveal little information about what leftism and rightism necessarily entail. And as with many concepts discussed within the realm of political science, disagreement exists over what defines these terms. But in general, scholars often attribute positions such as support for a comprehensive welfare state, wealth redistribution, gender equality, environmentalism, and the rights of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities to the political left; meanwhile, support for free-market economics, lower taxation, traditional gender roles, and a strong military and police force are traditionally associated with the political right (Lewis and Lewis, 2023: 3-16). It is crucial to note that not all left-wing political organizations and actors espouse all

the values that are often associated with the political left, and the same applies to right-wing political organizations and actors; these political factions are not monolithic, and may blend political stances from across the political spectrum while still identifying as left- or right-wing overall. Additionally, the political placement assigned to these by external sources, such as political commentators, analysts, and scholars, may differ, in some cases even starkly so, from the party's own self-identification; different observers may also assign different labels to the same political parties, based on different criteria, forms of analysis, and personal viewpoints.

Regardless, one could reasonably assume that right-wing populism is defined by adherence to the populist views and narratives regarding the dichotomy of the common people and the elite, in addition to support for other policies typically associated with the political right. Mudde considers the core tenets of what he terms the "populist radical right" to be nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2016a: 4). Nativism he deems to comprise such elements as nationalism and xenophobia, manifesting in practice as distinguishing clearly between in- and out-groups and between one's own people and perceived "aliens"; immigrants, and in some cases foreigners more broadly, will typically fall into this category (Mudde, 2016a: 4). Authoritarianism, meanwhile, he sees as the support for, and establishment of, "strictly ordered [societies]", which emphasize law and order and the punishment of dissent and non-conformity (Mudde, 2016a: 4). Populism itself comprises the third component of this model, and beyond being defined by its pitting of "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite", it often posits that rival political movements and parties constitute a "political class", removed from the common people and detrimental to their betterment (Mudde, 2016a: 4).

Like Mudde, Gandesha emphasizes positions such as nativism, which this author attributes to the political right, and argues that ideas such as this may be combined with a populist narrative or philosophy (Gandesha, 2018). If right-wing populism represents a synthesis of right-wing stances on political issues and a populist narrative, then the specific shape and form of this populism must necessarily be colored by the philosophy underpinning these right-wing political views. This is observable in European RWPPs, which often incorporate themes such as the nativism discussed by Gandesha, as well as traditionalism or social conservatism, emphatic patriotism or nationalism. Anti-globalism and anti-immigration sentiments are also typically associated with the RWPPs. Meanwhile, the nexus of the right-wing and populist philosophies is found in these parties' definitions of which groups make up

“the good people” and “the evil others”. Traditionally, RWPPs tend to make out the former group as made up of native-born, lower- or middle-class citizens, whereas the latter are made out to be foreign-born migrants or descendants of migrants, or other minority groups such as cultural or sexual minorities (Fennema, 2005: 1-3). Such groups cannot necessarily be portrayed as the societal elite, however, given their status and the oftentimes lower level of direct power over societies that these groups often wield. For this reason, RWPPs have been observed building a narrative according to which the aforementioned groups, along with other perceived “undesired” segments of the population, are in league with the groups that constitute the societal elite. In other words, members of, for instance, immigrant or sexual minority communities have in some notable instances been portrayed as having the support of society’s elites and political leadership, while simultaneously being painted as exercising great amounts of power over the elites in turn (Pajnik et al., 2016: 139). Elected and unelected leaders, the intelligentsia and academia, as well as powerful media and news corporations have indeed been accused by right-wing populists of professing policies or ideologies that favor the aforementioned groups, in some cases disproportionately and oftentimes willingly, to the detriment of “the good people”. This allows RWPPs to pursue a populist approach in their communication and narrative-building, while simultaneously targeting those groups commonly disparaged by proponents of right-wing political ideology.

In the United States, right-wing and right-wing populist political actors have been observed frequently targeting what they dub “gender ideology” and “LGBT ideology,” and suggesting that these supposed doctrines are deliberately being instilled in American schoolchildren (Kjaran, 2017: 39). This exemplifies the synthesis of right-wing politics and populism, in alleging that the ruling elites – in this case, those who wield power over the country’s education system – promote a political and ideological agenda that benefits these groups to the detriment of “the good people”. This narrative has proven contentious in that country, where popular perceptions have been described as undergoing rapid polarization, in this case between those who adhere to said narrative, and those who reject it. It mirrors similar discourse in other nations, where cultural issues have become increasingly sensitive, in what some analysts have described as a modern “culture war” (Smith and Tatalovich, 2008). If the right-wing populist strategy focuses on issues pertaining to this “culture war,” namely social and cultural issues first and foremost, while purporting that the societal elite is in league with groups that seek to harm or otherwise undermine the common

person, this exemplifies, in a sense, what Riedel discussed when he stated that “the more liberal democracy was established, the more populism evolved towards more and more regressive positions” (Riedel, 2017: 289).

It is notable, though, that the author here appears to describe populism in a way that seems to be mostly compatible with views on what constitutes right-wing populism specifically. But as Gandesha notes, not all variants of populism are necessarily right-wing in nature; he argues, in fact, that traditional views on populism understate the potential and influence of other populisms, such as left-wing populism, and he emphasizes that populism itself is “not necessarily characterized by authoritarianism and nativism” (Gandesha, 2018: 52). He further argues that left-wing populist strategy can be openly observed in the cases of such political parties as Spain’s Podemos and Greece’s Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza). Such left-wing populism, he argues, shifts the focus away from social and cultural in- and out-groups to socio-economic issues, with the traditional left-wing emphasis on class largely supplanting these in the broader left-wing populist narrative. The elites in this narrative may instead be defined as the economic and financial elite of a given society, as well as, in some cases, political and military leadership. And so while left-wing populism maintains the dichotomy of “the good people” versus “the evil other” fundamentally, these are defined differently among populists of the left and right.

The examples provided by Gandesha are also discussed by Mudde, who similarly labels both Syriza and Podemos as exemplars of left-wing populism (Mudde, 2016b: 28). He commends left-wing populists for pursuing a “less exclusionary” approach than their right-wing counterparts, but nevertheless stresses that Syriza, which governed Greece from 2015 to 2019, “proposed several laws that could limit the space for political opposition by increasing state control of education and the media” during its time in power, and laments an intensifying polarization observed under its rule. (Mudde, 2016b: 29). Both of these authors have thereby also emphasized a common streak for several populist groupings, in highlighting what is described in various terms as authoritarian tendencies. The findings of Oswald in “The Palgrave Handbook of Populism” suggest the same, namely that authoritarianism is a common feature of populist governments; he names, among others, Hungary’s Orbán, the Philippines’ Duterte, and the United States’ Trump as examples of authoritarian populist leaders, and discusses at length the concept and implications of authoritarian populism in modern politics (Oswald, 2021).

And yet Mudde, alongside Kaltwasser, also writes on populist movements that buck such trends seen elsewhere, such as in Europe in particular. Specifically, they draw a contrast between what they consider to be an exclusionary populism seen in Europe, and a more inclusionary populism found in Latin America, in the article “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). The pair argue that the left-wing populism of Venezuela’s late former leader Hugo Chavez, and the former leader of Bolivia, Evo Morales, adhered to a more inclusive populism that sought to “dignify the existence of an important number of the population that is not only poor, but also suffers different forms of cultural discrimination” (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013: 164). We may extrapolate from this work, as well as from the others referred to here, that left-wing and right-wing populism thereby differ significantly in terms of whom they define as “the good people”, and whom they see as “the evil others”, and this may, in fact, be one of the chief distinctions between leftist and rightist populist currents on the theoretical level, and has a significant impact on what policy prioritizations populist governments make. A political movement that considers bankers and stockbrokers the primary enemies of the people will almost certainly, implement different policies and employ different rhetoric, than one that considers, for instance, immigrants or religious minorities the primary enemies of the people. In short, different outlooks produce different prioritizations, which in turn create two quite different political currents in the left-wing populists and the right-wing populists.

But what then of centrist populism, which, in theory, ought to be positioned somewhere between these two contrasting strains on the political spectrum? Učeň, for one, argues in “Parties, Populism, and Anti-Establishment Politics in East Central Europe,” that the centrist variety of populism typically “channels its anti-establishment zeal into party platforms of government transparency and accountability,” and additionally notes that the political parties that fall within this category are characterized by a “relative lack of ideology” and that “their appeal contains numerous references to common sense and rational solutions on which political decision-making should be based (Učeň, 2007: 51). Frequently, these parties are based on dominant leaders who present their political projects and solicit public support” (Učeň, 2007: 51). His highlighting of the importance and general role of charismatic leadership within these centrist populist parties reflects the findings of similar analyses of leftist and rightist political parties in the populist vein. Jones, in “The Rise of Populism and the Fall of Europe,” labels the French president, Emmanuel Macron, as a populist who

falls outside the typical left-wing and right-wing populist spectrum, stating that “Macron is unique among European populists insofar as he celebrates social diversity, promotes European integration, and embraces France’s global responsibilities” (Jones, 2017: 47). Macron, who spearheads a French political movement frequently classified as centrist, could perhaps be considered a rather clear-cut example of centrist populism in contemporary Europe. Despite this, application of the term “centrist populism” has most commonly been applied in the European context to political parties found within Central and Eastern, as opposed to Western, Europe. Stanley argues that it became a “prominent feature of Central and East European party systems in the second decade of transition” to democracy, and tie the rise of centrist populism in that region to the perceived failures of both the old Communist rulership and the elected governments in the early democratic period of the states therein, as well as to “a more general lack of confidence in the institutions of post-communist democracy” (Stanley, 2017: 149-151). In conclusion, there appears to be a broad agreement among scholars that centrist populism typically manifests as an expression of popular grievances against the established system and institutions.

Overall, the term “grievances” is a running theme in the discussion on populism; common to all variants of this outlook appear to be the grievances, frustrations, and perhaps even contempt that can be found within the populist narratives, be they leftist, rightist, or centrist in nature. This is particularly interesting to a study that, after all, focuses primarily on the interactions between populist-led governments and others. Whether this antagonistic inclination is reflected in shifts in the foreign relations of the relevant states is something this research may help to answer.

1.2. RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND FOREIGN POLICY

Since the primary focus of the research presented in this thesis lies on the conduct and approach of ruling RWPPs when managing the foreign policy strategies of their governments, it is essential to have a broad yet accurate conception of the existing literature on the right-wing populist exercising of state-level foreign policy, and, with this, a clear understanding of the right-wing populist view on foreign-political matters on an ideological, or ideational, level as well. But first, a clarification of what is meant by foreign policy and interstate relations in this thesis is needed.

Firstly, the terms “interstate relations” and “interstate relationships” are widely used interchangeably, and carry an overlapping meaning with the term “international relations,” though ought to be applied mainly when describing the relations maintained by a specific state or number of states with a secondary state or number of states. Interstate relations may be defined as “those authoritative actions, understandings, or commitments of the governmental authorities – the leaders – of one state to or with the governmental authorities of another state or its groups or citizens, either bilaterally or through international organizations” (Rummel, 1979). As such, this term broadly excludes non-state entities wherever applied. The second concept, foreign policy, is one of the broader topics relevant to this research, and it is intrinsically intertwined with the realm of interstate relations. Foreign policy as a field of research and study has, in its current form, been prominent for several centuries, not least owing to the great emphasis placed on its understanding by the political leaderships of the world’s various states and organizations. The effective analysis of foreign policy benefits political leaders, as it aids them as they approach international and geopolitical issues in the political domain. Foreign relations are of particular interest to those academics and scholars involved in the field of IR, as this discipline relies heavily on theories pertaining to peace and conflict between nations, and multi-party cooperation, competition, and general interaction on the international level more broadly (Selby et al., 2017: 5-9). The foreign policies of states are crucial in determining the outcomes of international events, and determine the ways in which states address conflicts, negotiate agreements, and pursue common goals.

The specific policy areas that together make up a state’s foreign policy are plentiful, and Wright argues that these have emerged as distinct facets over time, in conjunction with the advent of the modern understanding of territorial sovereignty itself; he states that the right of states to formulate and exercise a national foreign policy has expanded to include “diplomatic immunity, innocent passage in the territorial sea, protection of citizens abroad, and the sharing of international rivers; and by treaties, such as those regulating trade, migration, cultural exchanges, postal and telecommunications; river, land, and air transits, and epidemiological control” (Wright, 1961: 73). Lodge, meanwhile, additionally treats “security and defense issues” as foreign policy, and as these pertain to interstate relations, they are largely treated as such for the purposes of this thesis (Lodge, 1988: 115).

The prioritizations and strategic aims of the RWPPs in these areas have been examined by a number of analysts, particularly in recent years, not least owing to the

strengthening of these groups in a host of states. As previously discussed, authors such as Mudde and Kaltwasser have made significant contributions to the literature on right-wing populism, and covered both the forms it may take within various states, and how it may portray international actors and foreign powers in the narrative it seeks to build. A number of other prominent scholars, too, have taken interest in how RWPPs interact with the world outside their countries' borders, including Stengel, MacDonald, and Nabers, who in a joint work produced alongside a number of other scholars, posit that populism as a policy- and outcome-defining factor had, until then, largely been neglected within the field of IR, whereas research into populism itself had mostly been confined to individual movements of this variety within their own environments (Stengel et al., 2019: 2). Various authors explore how different aspects of the nature of populism impacts governments run by RWPPs, and focus in particular, of course, on the foreign policy arena; one right-wing populist tenet highlighted by the authors as particularly significant when it comes to foreign policy is nationalism. This facet of the movement was discussed to some extent in the previous section, but ought to be looked at also in relation to foreign policy and interstate relations specifically, as it pertains directly to statehood, nationhood, and to how these groups might approach foreign actors, groups, and nations.

Wajner and Giurlando suggest that the rise of modern European populism is intrinsically intertwined with the foreign-political sphere, and emphasize the lack of research into the connections between these two topics throughout previous decades; they state that "the IR epistemic community [...] overlooked addressing the populist theorizing systematically and only a few relevant exceptions appear in the sub-field of foreign policy analysis" (Wajner and Giurlando, 2023: 4-5). Such a thing as populist foreign policy certainly exists, they posit, and the key to understanding this synthesis of populism and foreign policy lies in the dichotomy of the people versus the elite. "[Populist foreign policy] is ideologically based on the restoration of popular sovereignty from the hands of 'conspiring', 'corrupted' elites", they explain, and they suggest that the emergence of such brands of populism were "triggered by the process of globalization, denationalization, and executive centralization" (Wajner and Giurlando, 2023: 10). This is supported by other authors such as Findlay, who argues that such anti-globalist forces, in their rejection of these trends, often take up economically protectionist policies as a means to shield domestic businesses and industry from foreign competition (Findlay, 2021: 28). According to this general narrative, then, there is a correlation between the political, economic, and social

developments in several countries over the past several decades, and the ascent of populism as a strengthened political force; the rise of globalization has essentially served as a catalyst for the strengthening of the populist movements.

De Spiegeleire et al., too, argue that a tether exists between populism and sovereignism. The latter of these “links the idea of supreme authority to some territorial jurisdiction” according to the authors, and while they discuss the historical implications of this concept, they also contrast the modern incarnations of sovereignism with more internationalist doctrines (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 32). They describe how adherents of “new sovereignism [...] reject what they see as the erosion of national sovereignty” (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 34). And, in what clearly reflects a populist narrative based on the definition of that term applied in this thesis, they state that “sovereignists may call for the return of popular sovereignty to ‘the people’ through an exclusive definition of who ‘the people’ are. Often, sovereignists claim that foreigners, foreign corporations, or other ‘non-native’ groups within the nation-state disrupt the self-determination of the people and the state” (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 35). This form of sovereignism naturally appears to be highly compatible with the populist viewpoint, and, perhaps, even to be a form of populism in itself. And this is why, they posit, “populist sovereignism” is a good descriptor of the type of state-centric populism that can be found among the various modern strains of populism. Among the chief traits of the populist sovereignist political forces are an “[emphasis on] a polarizing dichotomy between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ of foreign ‘outsiders’” as well as the idea that “national law should always have priority over international law” (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 41). It would only be natural to take these notions into consideration when assessing the nature of the political parties examined in this thesis, Fidesz and PiS, as well as when looking into a potential worsening of the interstate relations of the countries they have governed.

Relevant to this final point is also an article by Hegre, titled “Polarization and Interstate Conflict” (Hegre, 2008). This work, which was published in a 2008 spring volume of the *Journal of Peace Research*, connects the concepts of polarization and conflict within single states to polarization and conflict between several separate states. A core argument of Hegre is that polarization commonly functions as a catalyst for conflict between opposing groups, with polarization itself being defined as a product of circumstances in which “individuals in a society [are] divided into two clearly identifiable groups where differences within groups are considerably smaller than differences between groups,” in accordance with a definition established by authors

Esteban and Ray (Hegre, 2008: 261). As already discussed, political polarization within societies is often discussed in relation to the rise of right-wing populism, variously as a cause, effect, or both, of the strengthening of this movement. Indeed, studies covering the increasing electoral success of RWPPs oftentimes include and discuss growing polarization as a core variable. Hegre argues that the workings of intra-societal polarization may also be applied to interstate conflict, and in a stated nod to the school of international peace theory, which proposes the idea that democratic states have less incentive to, and a lower chance of, engaging in military conflict with each other, he suggests that polarization between states in terms of political system and philosophy may incentivize interstate conflict. Although he acknowledges the theory of democratic peace, Hegre also emphasizes that, according to Souva, pairs of non-democratic states might also have a lower chance of engaging in conflict with each other; this point is particularly interesting in the context of this research, as it implies that governments that do not adhere to liberal-democratic principles in practice might enjoy improved relations with one another (Hegre, 2008: 265). This is relevant to the study of the behavior of RWPPs in power and the decisions these make when implementing their foreign policy strategies, in that it draws connections between domestic political polarization and polarization between states. Domestic polarization is, as discussed, a development often connected to the rise of populism, while the exploration of a possible increase in interstate polarization as a result of its rise is the core focus of this thesis. Whether the relevant parties can be described as non-liberal democratic in nature, meanwhile, is a contentious topic which is discussed in the next sections.

1.3. RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN HUNGARY AND POLAND

This section delves into right-wing populism as it manifests in Hungary and Poland, as well as the political and ideological nature of the political parties that rule there, namely Fidesz and PiS respectively. The review of relevant literature continues with an exploration of the works written on these political outfits and their nature.

Both of these RWPPs, as well as the governments they lead, have made frequent headlines across Europe over the past several years. Part of this coverage is explained simply by the fact that they are both leading their respective national governments, and as such their political platforms and conduct in power is a natural focus for the news media and other information agencies. However, their political

orientation and their status as RWPPs are other factors that have contributed to the great amount of focus given to these organizations and governments. As mentioned previously, several European nations, as well as the EU itself, long maintained a strict position on groups such as these, attempting to minimize their impact on the political landscapes of the continent's states. In line with this approach, news coverage in several nations, too, has often emphasized the perceived radical, or even extreme, ideologies and policies of these parties. And although this coverage helps inform the average European about the goings-on in Hungary and Poland, and specifically about the contentious political developments that have unfolded there in recent years, we must also explore what the academic communities have discovered regarding the nature of these political groups, as well as about their place in the broader European party flora, and, perhaps most crucially to this thesis, about how their political outlooks may potentially color their approach to foreign policy and interstate relations. The next two subsections look more closely at the case of Fidesz as an exemplar of right-wing populism in Hungary, and at PiS as a manifestation of the same in Poland, as well as at how existing literature accounts for these political parties and traditions. More broadly, it also delineates the main characteristics of the specific strains of right-wing populism observed in each of the two countries.

1.3.1. Hungarian Right-Wing Populism and the Case of Fidesz

The political group known as the Alliance of Young Democrats – Hungarian Civic Forum, more commonly referred to by its acronym Fidesz, was established in 1988, and is the ruling political party of Hungary. It has been in power uninterruptedly ever since scoring a landslide election victory in 2010 (Küpper, 2024: 41). Since then, its longtime leader Viktor Orbán has served as the country's head of government in his capacity as prime minister of Hungary. As such, both Orbán and his party have maintained ultimate responsibility for the political course of Hungary for well over a decade, and it is, largely, a Hungary marked by these that is explored throughout this thesis. This section explores established scholarly literature on this political party, and provide some brief background information on its history and political profile; the main objective, ultimately, is to establish a broad and comprehensive overview of the predominant strain of Hungarian right-wing populism in the present day.

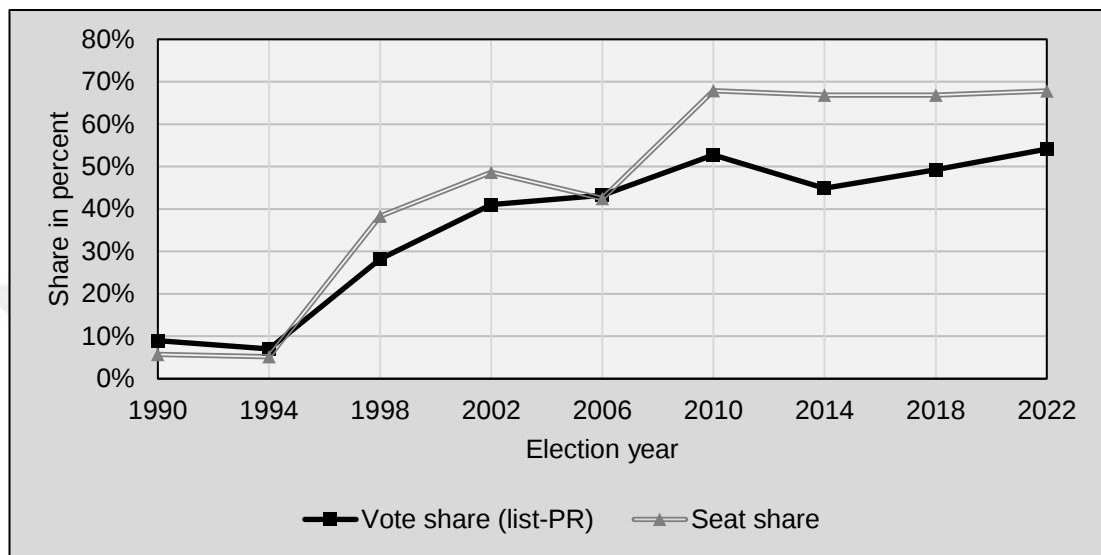
The origins of Fidesz are explored by Becker in his article "The rise of right-wing populism in Hungary," published in 2010, which provides an overview of recent

Hungarian political history and developments, as well as the circumstances surrounding Fidesz' rise to power (Becker, 2010). Becker's article came into publication shortly after the party's landslide election victory and government formation, which commenced in April 2010, and it gives us some insight into the reactions to these developments that came in their immediate aftermath. He describes the aforementioned election as "a political earthquake in Hungary," and goes on to predict that "Hungarian party democracy has been moved by tectonic shifts which will change the country" (Becker, 2010: 29). Fidesz, he writes, may be described as a right-wing conservative, or right-wing populist, political party. The author also provides some insight into the Hungarian political landscape of that time more broadly, discussing the center-left Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the traditional main rival of Fidesz, and its decimation in the 2010 election at the hands of, and to the benefit of, the aforementioned. Indeed, the Hungarian legislative elections that year represented a great shift in the composition of the country's unicameral legislature, the *Országgyűlés*, or National Assembly. The social-democratic MSZP, which scored 42.1 percent of the vote in 2002, and 43.2 percent of the vote in 2006, collapsed to only 19.3 percent in the elections of 2010, halving its support and reducing its parliamentary caucus from 190 members of parliament (MPs) to only 59 between 2006 and 2010 (Ágh, 2018).

In his article, Becker argues that prior to 2010, Hungarian politics had been defined by a bipolar, two-party system comprised mainly of MSZP and Fidesz, and that the election that year brought about the end of that order. The author attributes the collapse of MSZP's popular support, and the realignment of Hungarian politics, partly to a major political scandal in the mid-2000s, as well as the subsequent global economic and financial crises, which struck several European nations within the same timeframe. While these help explain the fall of MSZP, Becker highlights "a culture of resentment, especially against Jews, 'gypsies' and 'communists'" promoted by political figures from various political parties, as well as growing political polarization, as part of the explanation for the stark rise in support for the Hungarian right (Becker, 2010). As he writes, "this polarisation more or less tended to strengthen the ideological hegemony of the right-nationalist-fascist settlement in Hungarian politics" (Becker, 2010). He refers here not only to Fidesz, but also to what he describes as the "neo-fascist" Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), which also made a "striking entry" into the Hungarian National Assembly in 2010 (Becker, 2010: 29). The steadily rising support of the Hungarian political right is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the

popular support of Fidesz specifically increasing throughout the 2000s and 2010s, with the party and any attached electoral lists securing large majorities of seats in elections held from 2010 onwards.

Figure 1: Legislative Election Results of Fidesz and Fidesz-led Joint Electoral Lists



Source: National Election Office, 2024

The figure shows us that the rise of Fidesz as a political party has been a steady, long-term development throughout the past several decades, which aligns not only with Becker's analysis of the Hungarian political realignment and its increasing dominance over Hungarian politics as a whole, but also with the widely-held perception that the growth of RWPPs is something that has occurred mainly only in the past few decades; certainly, this has been the case in Hungary.

While these works provide a useful overview of the current standing of Fidesz, and of the position and power it now holds within Hungarian society, they do not delve all too deeply into the ideological currents that fuel the party's policies and general approach to governing. Some insight into this is provided by Todosijević and Enyedi, who in a 2008 study titled "Authoritarianism without Dominant Ideology: Political Manifestations of Authoritarian Attitudes in Hungary" argue that Fidesz has shifted from a broadly liberal position in its early years, in the immediate aftermath of its founding prior to the fall of the Warsaw Pact, to a more conservative one in recent years. They place the turning point of this ideological shift in 1995 specifically, and reveal that it came alongside a turn towards authoritarianism for Fidesz (Todosijević

and Enyedi, 2008: 779). According to the authors, the party could be classified as sitting among the least authoritarian groupings in the Hungarian political landscape in a survey conducted in 1994, with its rating dropping somewhat in a subsequent survey from 2000; it later rose sharply, however, and was placed among the more authoritarian outfits in the last of the analyzed surveys, carried out in 2002 (Todosijević and Enyedi, 2008: 781). This tells us that Fidesz as a political party shifted from a liberal ideological orientation at its establishment, towards first a conservative, followed by a conservative-authoritarian, position throughout its first decades in operation.

This analysis is further supported by Csizmadia, who places the exact year of Fidesz' abandonment of liberal politics in the year 1994, after which it "gradually moved away from the liberal pole" (Csizmadia, 2024: 80). The shift is also explored by Rogers, who classifies Fidesz as an authoritarian populist political party, and who further offers some insights into the focus points of this party's particular brand of populism. According to the same author, four so-called "moral panics" have been fueled by the party to "[secure] its longevity" as a political force and as a party of government (Rogers, 2024). These four are identified as "colonization", "otherness", "immigration", and "specific threats", and each of them is, according to the author, used by the Hungarian ruling party to stoke concerns and, in some cases, fear.

The first point, "colonization", pertains to Hungary's relationship with the EU as well as with other foreign powers, and, notably, illustrates quite pungently how the party's rhetoric around these topics takes form. A perceived subservient relationship to more powerful, foreign entities is disparaged and challenged. The second point, "otherness", builds on the concept of Hungarian exceptionalism and a vision of Hungarian greatness; according to Rogers, this form of Hungarian patriotism builds on the idea that the country is "in the 'West' but has roots in the 'East'", and that it is therefore distinguished, and in several ways historically different from, the other European nations (Rogers, 2024). Further, the third point, "immigration", primarily concerns immigration to Hungary and Europe from non-Western nations, and it is, according to the author, perceived by leading Fidesz figures as "one of the biggest threats to the Hungarian nation and 'Christian Europe'" (Rogers, 2024). It appears, then, that the Hungarian cultural heritage and its traditionally Christian religious identity plays a significant part in the populist narrative woven by Fidesz; immigration is identified by this party as a threat to these, and therefore as something negative. He quotes Fekete in saying that it has, by and large, "become hitched to the nativist

cause” (Rogers, 2024). The fourth point, “specific threats” largely covers the miscellaneous perceived enemies of the Hungarian government, which are, by extension, framed as enemies of the Hungarian people; among these is Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros, whom the Fidesz administration has often admonished.

Additionally, the strong emphasis of all of these authors on a turn towards political authoritarianism is particularly interesting, as it ties in well with what other, previously mentioned scholars such as Mudde and Oswald have posited regarding the link between populism and non-democratic or outright anti-democratic sentiments, and authoritarian practices. Rogers’ overview of Fidesz’ four “moral panics” is also largely in line with what others have written on the strategies and worldview of the modern populist movements. But although a compatibility between Fidesz’ outlook and the traditional populist outlook is thereby observable, it is important to also make clear whether the dichotomy between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” is prevalent in the party’s narrative. A study relayed in the 2021 article “Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism in the Visegrád Four” helps shed some light onto this; it provides an analysis of the political discourse in Hungary from 1997 to 2018, alongside a summary of the rhetorical shifts of both Fidesz itself, and Jobbik, over time. The author here opts to classify Fidesz in the 1997-2004 period as a proponent of “populist nationalism”; he finds that in the given period, the party would utilize words and expressions such as “civic Hungary”, “homeland”, and “national interests” in positive terms, and that it would frequently contrast these with things such as the “open society”, “cosmopolitan elite”, and the like; the latter were painted in a negative light (Kim, 2021). For the 2006-2009 period, the author posits that Fidesz’ position shifted somewhat, as it embraced “national-conservative social populism”, where common buzzwords included “new aristocracy” and “millionaires”, allowing us to glean quite clearly which groups are made to fill the role of “the corrupt elite” (Kim, 2021). Finally, some time after its 2010 return to government, Fidesz came to be defined by “illiberal populist nationalism”, and spoke positively of the “illiberal state”, “national ownership”, and “family”, whereas “foreign ownership” and “immigration”, on the other hand, were found to have most commonly been used with a negative implication (Kim, 2021). What can be surmised from Kim’s analysis of Fidesz’ political discourse is that the party has identified a perceived cosmopolitan elite, as well as foreign interests, as threats to the interests of the Hungarian people since at least the latter half of the 1990s, while a more paternalistic brand of social, and traditionalist, conservatism was made intrinsic to the vocabulary of Fidesz from the 2000s onwards, with these tenets

being synthesized with its populist outlook from that point onwards. As such, it is a socially conservative strain of populism that can be observed in present times.

To summarize, there appears to be a broad agreement among scholars that Fidesz, in its current form, is a RWPP that bases its populism on resentment to the perceived elites, be they the “cosmopolitan elite” in Hungary or the political and financial elites abroad. Arguably, Fidesz takes this to new levels with its targeting of specific, individual profiles such as George Soros, who are identified as enemies of Fidesz’ Hungarian project. While the party stems, originally, from the liberal-conservative tradition, it gradually shifted towards an increasingly nationalist and conservative position from the mid-1990s, and today emphasizes Hungary’s Christian heritage and traditional family values; it is also skeptical of foreign influence on Hungary, perceiving the nation as exceptional and in certain ways distinct from its European neighbors. In a similar vein, it possesses anti-immigrant sentiments, as is common for RWPPs, and views non-Western immigration to the continent at large as a threat to the “Christian Europe” it purportedly seeks to defend. By and large, Fidesz, with its brand of conservative and nationalist politics conjoined with a skepticism of the foreign, the “other”, and of the established elites and their institutions, fits the right-wing populist mold; as Rogers discusses, it could even be considered an ideologically nativist grouping. Further, Kim’s description of the party as an “illiberal” populist political party, meaning one that strays from the liberal-democratic conventions often found in Europe, appears to be largely accurate when taking into consideration the authoritarian trends and tendencies discussed by Todosijević and Enyedi. In all, the central themes of Fidesz’ outlook and approach to governing are, in no particular order, populism, social conservatism, nationalism, nativism, and illiberalism, and its style of governing can be classified as somewhat authoritarian in nature.

1.3.2. Polish Right-Wing Populism and the Case of PiS

The other country discussed in this thesis, Poland, is governed by a political party by the name of Law and Justice, known commonly by its abbreviation PiS. This party is younger than Hungary’s Fidesz, and was established only in mid-2001. Founded by the Kaczyński twins, this party was led by Lech Kaczyński from the party’s establishment until 2003, and subsequently by his brother Jarosław Kaczyński from 2003 until the present day. Lech served as Poland’s president from 2005 until 2010, when he perished in an infamous plane crash near the Russian city of Smolensk,

whereas Jarosław served as the country's prime minister in 2006-2007. Despite his short stint as *de jure* head of government, the latter remains a powerful, if not dominant, figure within PiS, and as such has wielded much power over the country in the periods it has been governed by that party (Hughes, 2022: 96). These periods were 2005-2007 and 2015-2023, the latter of which is the one that falls within the scope and timeframe set for this thesis. This section takes a look at literature written on PiS in general, as well as works covering its terms in government and foreign policy approach in particular.

An interesting overview on the political situation in Poland is provided by Hinsey in her work "Poland's Illiberal Challenge," a 2016 piece that mainly comprises a dialogue between the author and Rafał Pankowski, a prominent Polish sociologist and political scientist (Hinsey, 2016). Together, they discuss the background to, and effects of, PiS' rise to power the year before, and the author herself describes the country's political situation in dire terms, and that since the 2015 Polish legislative elections, "the country has been plunged into crisis" (Hinsey, 2016: 73). Further elaboration on this is given early in the dialogue, where Hinsey provides some context to the rise of Poland's ruling political party, hearkening back as far as to the 18th century. Perhaps more relevant to this thesis, however, is their discussion of religion as a major pillar of Polish national identity; indeed, PiS is often classified as a Christian-conservative or Christian nationalist political party in addition to being a right-wing populist one. But this is not the only political current underpinning that party, and the pair discuss the post-Communist reforms of the 1990s as another contributing factor. These reforms, and the changes to Polish society that followed, were pivotal in defining the political cleavages of the country as we know it today. "The economic restructuring of the 1990s resulted in large-scale structural unemployment and difficult patterns of social exclusion. There was also cultural dislocation and confusion about social values," states Pankowski, who connects these trends with rising right-wing populism in the country, saying "still today, the populist and nationalist Right speak of a sinister conspiracy involving former communists, liberals and foreigners. This conspiracy theory also often invokes older anti-Semitic myths. The liberal elites have tended to ignore these challenges" (Hinsey, 2016: 80). Here, a practical example of the populist narrative becoming interwoven with right-wing political beliefs, as discussed previously, can be observed. Historical grievances and undesired groups become central to a story portraying a malevolent or, at least, antagonistic elite as enemies of the common Polish person. Pankowski also discusses the early years of

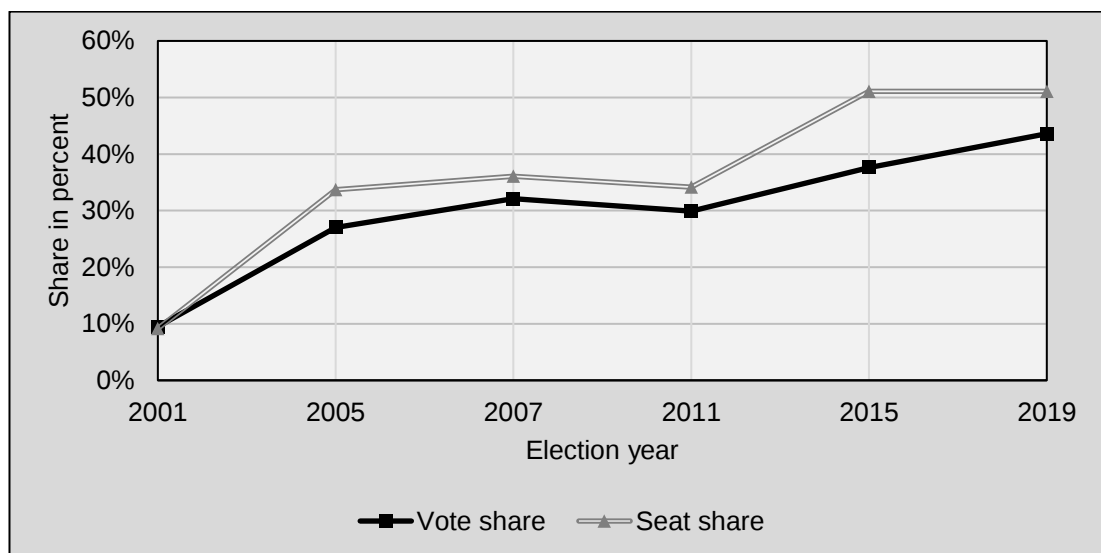
PiS' existence as a political entity, describing an ideological transformation that might appear strikingly similar to that of the Hungarian Fidesz in some respects. He states that the Kaczyński brothers were keen to distance themselves from hardline right-wing politics in the early 2000s, preferring instead to profile their political outfits as centrist in nature, while perhaps in reality veering closer to the center-right, according to the scholar (Hinsey, 2016: 81). The transformation of PiS from a center-right party to a RWPP began in 2005 and had rapidly progressed by 2007, according to his analysis. The party's actions once in power following the elections in 2015 continued on this same trajectory, and he states that the situation in the country following said elections is "reflective of a deep polarization in Polish society, and calls into question the stability of Poland's relationship to European institutions," highlighting in particular concerns over the PiS government's early record on the rule of law and judicial independence. The dialogue, overall, provides an intriguing snapshot of the mood and atmosphere in the Polish scholarly community shortly after PiS' return to power in 2015, but it does not give any exhaustive information on the changing dynamics in Polish politics that paved the way for this development, nor is it able to provide much insight into events that would transpire after 2016, for obvious reasons.

Deeper insight into the Polish political situation in the run-up to PiS' ascent to power is provided by Pienkos in a 2001 article detailing the political developments in the country from 1989 to 2001. Here, he discusses the role played by the political group known as Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), a pro-democracy outfit that played a pivotal role in the first years following the introduction of multi-party democracy in Poland. This party inherited much of the political capital of the labor union titled Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity," commonly referred to, even outside of Poland, by its local name *Solidarność*. This organization was once the political home of the Kaczyński twins. Another important political player discussed by Pienkos is the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD), which he describes as the post-communist successor of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), and which ruled the country as a one-party state for much of the latter half of the 20th century, during the Warsaw Pact period. As Pienkos details in his article, the SLD managed to regain a solid foothold in Polish politics throughout the 1990s, growing its support from 12.0 percent of the vote in the legislative elections of 1991, to 41.0 percent in 2001, the first elections in which PiS also participated. This trend turned in the elections of 2005, however, and in a different article published in *The Polish Review* in 2006, Pienkos describes how support for the post-communist party crumbled in the time leading up

to this vote. In its place, he writes, PiS and the Civic Platform (PO), which he describes as a more “traditionally liberal, secular” party, rose to dominate the country’s politics; he remarks that both of these political parties stem from the tradition of the Solidarity movement. The collapse of the post-communist social democratic party in Poland, and the supplantation of this by center-right and right-wing political parties interestingly mirrors the developments observed in Hungary only a few years later; in other words, both Fidesz and PiS have in common that they gained increased support concurrently with, or following, the collapse in support for these social democratic groups, namely MSZP in the case of the former, and SLD in the case of the latter.

Figure 2, presented below, illustrates the rise in support for PiS from 2001 onwards, with a sharp increase in the party’s vote share being visible in 2005, the same year SLD collapsed and dropped from 41.0 percent to only 11.3 percent. PiS, on the other hand, saw its share of the vote rise from 9.5 percent to 27.0 percent in that same election. Whether a correlation exists between the collapse of social democratic parties and the rise of RWPPs, or between post-communist political party landscapes and the proliferation of RWPPs, falls somewhat outside the scope of this thesis, but is an interesting subject, nonetheless.

Figure 2: Legislative Election Results of PiS and PiS-led Joint Electoral Lists



Source: National Electoral Commission, 2024

As can be gleaned from Figure 2, the electoral rise of PiS in successive elections has, much as in the case of Fidesz, been a steady and gradual development.

Noticeable boosts are observable in 2005 and 2015, the latter of which marked the party's return to power and the formation of its current administration. PiS, along with its electoral partners, obtained legislative majorities in the lower house, or *Sejm*, of Poland's bicameral legislature, in both of the two most recent elections that fall within the timeframe of this study; in 2015, a number of smaller, likeminded political parties partook in the election as part of the PiS electoral lists, whereas in 2019, the ruling party spearheaded a joint list referred to as the United Right (ZP), once again composed of PiS and a collection of minuscule political groupings. The rise of PiS mirrors that of Fidesz, albeit somewhat delayed, and further corroborates the widely held perception that RWPPs have strengthened themselves largely in the past few decades. Like the Hungarian ruling party, the Polish one, too, effectively controls its country's legislative branch, and, in that both practice parliamentarism, by extension its executive branch as well. This leaves little doubt that both of these political parties bear the responsibility for the exercising of their countries' respective foreign policy strategies in the timeframe covered by this thesis.

There is little doubt that the Polish political scene has come under much scrutiny, and been thoroughly researched, by analysts and scholars over the past several years, with a number of detailed and in-depth accounts of these readily available. The rise of PiS and its most recent terms in government, specifically, have also been discussed in a number of works published as those conditions have arisen. Notably, many of these have been starkly critical of the political developments observed in the country since 2015, with some, such as Young, focusing in particular on the judicial reforms carried out by PiS throughout its time in power. In a 2020 article, published in the *Harvard International Review*, she dubs these reforms "uniquely destabilizing for Polish democracy" and as a "siege on its judiciary" (Young, 2020: 65). She further connects findings from the Global Happiness and Political Attitudes Survey with the rise of populism and RWPPs in various countries, giving us, perhaps, some more insight into the underlying causes of PiS in Poland. When it comes to that party's ability to maintain power, though, she provides a number of reasons, among them the perceived weakness of the opposition parties, including the main opposition PO. She discusses the rise of RWPPs as seen in a number of European nations, including Hungary, Italy, and Germany, as well as Hungary's Orbán in some detail. It appears clear that, like in the case of Hungary, more recent and contemporary literature on the political situation in Poland tends to emphasize an observed democratic backsliding, complete with a weakening of the rule of law and of public

and governmental institutions, as well as intensified attacks on “non-government organizations, media, and the courts,” as she writes (Young, 2020: 65). PiS’ time in power would therefore appear to demonstrate and exemplify the continuation of populism’s authoritarian streak.

Besides PiS’ electoral and governmental record, analysts have also produced several works on the party’s ideological character. For although it is treated as a RWPP, this designation alone does not in itself necessarily provide much insight into the ideational basis of the party’s political outlook. Pankowski describes the party as “illiberal”, in what mirrors descriptions of Hungary’s Fidesz, and states that its vision for Poland “was represented as a holistic social project, a thorough alternative to liberalism in cultural, social and economic fields” (Pankowski, 2010: 164). Hennig, meanwhile, emphasizes the Christian-conservative nature of PiS, stating that “national Catholicism is also present in the rhetoric of the governing PiS party”, while noting that this identity developed over time; as she explains, the party “at first seemed to take a neutral stance on the politics of religion. Only in 2005 did the party issue a document titled ‘A Catholic Poland in a Christian Europe’ which committed the party to religious values and the defense of Poland’s Catholic identity” (Hennig, 2023). Słowikowski and Pierzgalski specify that the Catholic identity of PiS is explicitly rooted in Catholic social teaching, and that it “combines conservative, traditional sociocultural values with a support for economic interventionism and a social market economy, along with mild Euroskepticism” (Słowikowski and Pierzgalski, 2019: 46). They provide a host of examples of the conservative policies of PiS, listing “restrictions on abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage” as prominent initiatives espoused by its political cadre; overall, it “appeals to those who have not benefited from economic transformation in Poland and are suspicious about the economic and sociocultural consequences of Poland’s membership of the European Union” (Słowikowski and Pierzgalski, 2019: 46).

The ideological orientation of PiS places it in relatively close proximity to Fidesz on the political spectrum, with both parties espousing a socially conservative, Christian, nationalist, and, to some degree, Euroskeptic, set of tenets. Interestingly, the shift of both parties towards their current orientation took place at least in part throughout the 2000s in the case of both parties, with each having been founded as more moderate, right-leaning parties before undergoing a gradual transposition to the more radical and anti-establishment right. In the case of PiS, in particular, this accompanied the embrace of an overtly Christian-conservative outlook, which

continues to fuel its domestic policy to the present day. And for both groups, this metamorphosis heralded an increasingly illiberal approach, by which they have come to stand at odds with liberal democracy and display authoritarian tendencies while in power. As can be seen in the case of PiS, it has further come to be considered a RWPP in recent literature, not least given its rhetorical emphasis on a perceived elite standing against the Polish common people.

1.4. RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN HUNGARIAN AND POLISH FOREIGN POLICY

The successive electoral victories and legislative majorities secured by Fidesz and PiS in recent years have given them ample room to exert their will on their respective states of Hungary and Poland, and to implement their policies with relatively little legislative pushback. Where the previous sections largely discussed the implications of this on the domestic politics of the two countries, this section examines the approach of these RWPPs in the foreign-political realm. It looks at the interplay between right-wing populism and foreign policy, and at how the Hungarian and Polish right-wing populists view foreign states and other entities.

1.4.1. Right-Wing Populism and the Foreign Policy of Fidesz

The Hungarian ruling party, Fidesz, has, throughout its several years in power, become something of a perennial player on the European political scene. The longevity of its government, and by extension therefore also of its control over the official Hungarian foreign policy, has made it a familiar factor to the leaderships of Europe, as they barter and broker over international and supranational policy. And although this may at times be considered a boon and a source of predictability, Fidesz' relationship with Hungary's neighbors and traditional allies has not always been straightforward. In fact, Végh remarks that "since the Fidesz government came to power in Hungary in 2010, confrontation between Brussels and Budapest has become the norm" (Végh, 2016: 72). The data presented in Végh's work bases itself on the EU Cohesion Monitor, which aims to measure overall cohesion across the various member states of the EU, and it also explores the practical cohesion of the Hungarian government with the EU in several areas, namely resilience, economic ties, funding, neighborhood, policy integration, security, approval, attitudes, engagement, and experience. And to summarize the verdict on these points, she states that "all in all,

the common perception of Hungary is that it is a troublemaker, reaping the benefits of its EU membership while undermining the EU's unity and cohesion, instead of contributing to the Union or even identifying with the European project" (Végh, 2016: 73).

The view of Fidesz' government as a "troublemaker" by the European establishment is linked, at least to some extent, to the nature and outlook of the ruling party itself. Fidesz is widely considered a nationalist and illiberal political party, but it is also, according to other authors, a proponent of sovereignism within Europe; according to Balázs and Molnár, the leadership of Fidesz believes an "existential struggle" is taking place "between 'sovereign nations' and 'globalist forces'", and seeks to champion the former (Balázs and Molnár, 2024: 311). They suggest that the sovereignist brand of this party does not lean on isolationism, but rather on the "cooperation of 'sovereignist' national actors across the globe, especially in Europe", meaning, in essence, that the party seeks to bring together likeminded groups abroad, in a cooperation aimed at bringing about an international order in line with its own vision (Balázs and Molnár, 2024: 311). It is not difficult to see how the promotion of, and support for, illiberal ideals and movements abroad might be at odds with, for instance, the vision of the EU for Europe, and it is certainly not inconceivable that Fidesz' ambitions on this front may constitute one of the underlying reasons for their somewhat rocky relationship with the bloc. A desire to reshape the international order to better align with its own ideological outlook has, according to the aforementioned authors, driven the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, to "[frequently call] for renewing the European Union including the radical revision of some of its institutions (like the European Parliament) while supporting ever closer union in other fields (e.g. military cooperation)" (Balázs and Molnár, 2024: 311). Fidesz considering the EU a useful potential tool for upending the European political conventions and systems is both an indicator of high, international ambitions, and a potential source of the contentious relationship between the Hungarian ruling party and their foreign counterparts. As with the party's domestic policies, this is, by and large, a set of aims highly in line with populist thinking; indeed, a desire for confrontation with the international establishment and "globalist forces" could certainly be interpreted as a case of the classic dichotomy from the populist narrative being extrapolated onto the realm of foreign policy and interstate relations. This is supported by Jenne and Thies, according to whom it is expected of populist political leaders that they "implement foreign policies that elevate the will of 'the people' against that of 'elites' by pursuing

protectionist trade policies or by pulling out of international commitments”, though they note that both Fidesz and PiS, despite this, have not positioned themselves in direct opposition to the EU and NATO memberships of their respective countries, despite their criticisms of, and clashes with, their partners in both; the authors consider both of these groups to fall within the populist classification nevertheless (Jenne and Thies, 2024: 232).

Several other major facets of Fidesz’ foreign policy approach are discussed by Buzogány and Varga in a 2018 article covering the party’s most recent period in government. These authors argue that the party’s rejection of political liberalism has left an imprint of its foreign policy, and that it seeks to challenge both this ideology itself, as well as related concepts such as institutionalism, consensus politics, and relativism both at home and abroad (Buzogány and Varga, 2018: 818). They stress that Fidesz, in its current form, considers liberalism symbolic of an “erosion of authority” that both undermines the domestic societal structures and the ability of states to pursue those policies that are deemed to be in the interests of the common people and community; overall, the party “[rejects the] liberal celebration of individual rights and freedoms, which needs to be replaced by a system that commits individuals to community-based virtues and a state that educates individuals to become patriotic citizens” (Buzogány and Varga, 2018: 818). This analysis helps connect Fidesz’ broader ideological outlook, and particularly its view on liberalism, to its foreign-political stances; it is especially useful for understanding the reasons behind Fidesz’ chosen approach to the institutions of blocs such as the EU. Buzogány and Varga further discuss Fidesz’ international ambitions and connections, noting especially the historically cordial ties between that party and the Polish PiS, and that this partnership has helped bring about “a region-wide contestation of liberalism and contemporary Western-inspired democracy” within East-Central Europe (Buzogány and Varga, 2018: 821).

In addition to this direct cooperation between some of the region’s RWPPs, the nature and priorities of the ruling political parties within the member states of the Visegrad Four, namely Hungary and Poland alongside Czechia and Slovakia, have helped rally each of these countries around a “consensus on the security issue, the promise to stop immigration, and the opposition to [the EU]” (Martinelli, 2018, 30). This group of countries, established in 1991 to foster cooperation between its members, all of which are also members of the EU and NATO, is also described as having maintained close relations with other RWPPs in Europe, such as the League

(LEGA) in Italy (Martinelli, 2018: 30). This quartet has been labeled Euroskeptic, and generally “[opposed to] any kind of further EU development” (Berend, 2019: 76). Von Beyme considers the alliance a “pressure group” within the EU framework, aimed at “[limiting] the influence of the EU on their national identity” (von Beyme, 2018: 61). Notably, each of these four states have been governed in recent years by political parties that have been described as populist in some capacity. In addition to the familiar RWPPs in Hungary and Poland, there is also the Czech ANO 2011 (ANO), which served in several governments between 2013 and 2021, and which has frequently been described as right-wing populist (Frankenberg, 2020: 61). In Slovakia, too, the party known as Direction – Social Democracy (SMER–SD), in power from 2012 to 2020, has been classified as a populist group, albeit of the left-wing variety (Sadurski, 2019: 24). As such, all member states of the Visegrad Four have been led by populist political parties of various strains in recent years, which perhaps helps explain the prioritizations of the group within the EU framework in recent years.

Overall, it can be deduced that the political outlook, and the right-wing populism, of Fidesz is reflected in its foreign policy in a multitude of ways. Firstly, in its opposition to liberal norms both within and without the structures of the EU, and secondly, in its pursuit of close interstate relations with likeminded, and in certain cases similarly right-wing populist-led governments in its vicinity, and thirdly, in its active and deliberate maintaining of cordial relations with ideologically proximate political parties in other countries with the aim of altering the European political order to better align with its own right-wing populist policy prioritizations.

1.4.2. Right-Wing Populism and the Foreign Policy of PiS

The Polish PiS, which has been known to promote a populist narrative on the domestic political scene, has also taken a similar approach to foreign policy; according to Cadier and Szulecki, “rising from our knees” has been used by the party as a political slogan to express its vision for Poland as an international player (Cadier and Szulecki, 2022: 58). The authors state that the narrative the party seeks to sell to the Polish electorate is one in which “Poland has been kept down on the regional scene by EU elites and European powers (Germany especially), with the complicity of domestic elites”, and they state outright that it “reflects the kind of vertical political antagonism” that “[characterizes] the populist discourse and the way it constructs identities” (Cadier and Szulecki, 2022: 58). As the authors emphasize, this approach

to foreign policy is overtly populist in nature, and, much like the approach of Fidesz, takes the idea of the struggle between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” to an international scale. It is as though it becomes the role of the Polish electorate to combat this latter group both domestically and abroad via the political instrument that is PiS and its administration. The connection made between domestic and foreign elites highlights how the party’s stances form part of a narrative that identifies quite clearly the perceived antagonists both at home and abroad. The authors describe Jarosław Kaczyński himself as having directly targeted members of the Polish main opposition party, PO, in speeches made in the European Parliament (EP); reportedly, he uttered the following to their representatives therein: “you are the external party today, you are compromising Poland, you are against Poland”, seemingly accusing the group of treason or, at the very least, collusion with foreign powers against the Polish national interest (Cadier and Szulecki, 2022: 58). Such combative and antagonizing rhetoric, complete with accusations of undermining “the pure people” often forms part of the populist strategy in practice, as previously discussed. In another of Cadier’s works, he states that PiS has increasingly attempted to “withdraw” Poland from the established norms and conventions of the EU, and to posit itself in opposition to Germany in particular, not least owing to the strong position of that country within the EU and its institutions, as well as in Europe overall (Cadier, 2023: 76). According to the same author, actors from PiS have been found to “castigate Germany as a political and cultural hegemon in Europe, one that encroaches on Poland’s sovereignty [...] and that obstructs PiS’ transformative conservative agenda” both in Poland itself and within the EU framework (Cadier, 2023: 76). This, he claims, has allowed PiS to present its country as an “underdog” that can, and should, resist a number of the political efforts and initiatives proposed by the continent’s “establishment”, including Germany and other major European states, particularly those that wield great influence within the institutions of the EU (Cadier, 2023: 76).

PiS’ skepticism towards certain established European conventions and institutions has, somewhat interestingly, not necessarily translated into a skepticism of all westward cooperation. As Trzcielińska-Polus suggests, in the case of the Polish political right, “relations with the USA [...] were formulated as an alternative to European integration” (Trzcielińska-Polus, 2023: 157). Given what is known about PiS’ views on cooperation with, for example, Germany, this suggests that a closer Polish-American bond has constituted a way for the party to conveniently circumvent some the partners with whom its leaders are less eager to cooperate. This contrasts

with Fidesz' outlook, which, as previously discussed, generally views both the European and the American leaderships with some skepticism. PiS' stance on relations with the United States, frequently labeled a form of Atlanticism, is further discussed by Zima, who also explores the implications of this throughout the presidency of Donald Trump, whom she describes as having "ideological proximities" with PiS itself (Zima, 2020: 54). This does not represent a significant departure from the general consensus on PiS nor on Trump himself, given that these have both frequently been described as right-wing populist in some capacity. In addition, the same author also emphasizes that PiS "shares similar political tactics with Hungary's Fidesz but with anti-Russian stances", drawing an additional contrast between these RWPPs when it comes to their views on Europe's eastern neighbor (Zima, 2020: 54).

Sadurski describes PiS as anti-Western in essence, and suggests that this position is informed by its socially conservative and traditionalist outlook; its rejection of a perceived Western "decadence" and the socially and culturally liberal stances of a number of Western governments are central issues here (Sadurski, 2019). But as was also noted by Zima, this does not mean that PiS necessarily seeks closer ties with, for instance, Russia, another prominent decrier of modern Western culture. In fact, Sadurski states that "many poles, especially those who are pro-PiS, are at the same time strongly anti-Russian" and that this "prevents these attitudes from pushing Poland into alliance with Putin's Russia, but nevertheless they erect important obstacles to strongly and unconditionally aligning Poland with 'the West', unless 'the West' is identified with Donald Trump" and other figures and groupings among the European right-wing political parties (Sadurski, 2019).

And so, from this, it is clear that there is a strong ideological foundation underpinning PiS' approach to foreign policy; much like in the case of Fidesz, ideologically rooted prioritizations in some cases have a direct impact on specific positions taken by the party when it comes to foreign policy. For PiS specifically, this includes taking a cautious or even somewhat adversarial approach to several Western powers, and to Germany and other powerful EU states in particular, due not least to disagreements over cultural values and power dynamics, while at the same time embracing closer cooperation with other, foreign right-wing populist leaderships, such as the United States under Donald Trump. As discussed, the bond with the United States also grants PiS governments an additional leg to stand on, geopolitically, allowing it to circumvent both rivals like Germany within the EU, and hostile external powers such as Russia.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Two of this thesis contains an overview of the methodology applied in the research it presents. It provides information on the overall methodological approach taken throughout the research process, including a summary of the specific research type and design that has been applied; this is covered in section 2.1. Additionally, sections 2.2. and 2.3. provide some insight into the selection of cases and variables up for examination, respectively, whereas section 2.4. largely covers the topic of data collection more specifically. Finally, section 2.5. comprises a short discussion on which methodological limitations and potential shortcomings may result from the methodological approach taken. The overall aim of this chapter is to explain how this research has been carried out, and why.

2.1. RESEARCH TYPE AND DESIGN

The overall methodological approach of this research is a qualitative one, with the thorough examination of a limited, though clearly delineated, set of dimensions forming its backbone. It is, in essence, a comparative case study utilizing the states of Hungary and Poland in their capacity as exemplars of right-wing populist governance, complete with foreign policy strategies demonstrably pursued by RWPPs, in hopes of these allowing us to better understand the impact of right-wing populist governance on the quality and nature of interstate relations in contemporary Europe. The research question presented earlier in this thesis (is there a correlation between the exercising of government foreign policy by RWPPs, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states?) has been formulated in such a way as to allow for the exploration of a variety of dimensions within the foreign-political sphere of international politics, and to not limit the scope of the study too drastically. This chapter accounts for the decisions that have been made while formulating this research question, and discusses how the aforementioned methodological approach is intended to aid in providing us with adequate answers.

As stated, the research type applied in this thesis is primarily based on a qualitative approach. Such an approach is defined mainly by the reliance of a smaller number of cases or variables, and is well-suited for producing a more in-depth piece of research, though it may lack some of the breadth allowed by quantitative methods,

which most commonly include a larger array of cases or, at the very least, variables. Since the aim of this thesis is to determine whether right-wing populist governments tend to impact the interstate relations of their countries, however, it was deemed necessary to include more than a single case country very early in the planning process. It could be argued that a number of countries greater than two would allow for the drawing of even stronger conclusions from the observations recorded in this research, but given the length and scope of this thesis, it was deemed best to confine this work to a smaller number of cases, albeit ones that have a bearing on European affairs to some degree. Indeed, the design of this research makes it a case study, although one that aims to say something about wider trends that may apply to the rest of the population as well. Additionally, the research design applied here is largely analytical in nature; this research type is defined by its reliance on the measurement of variables and a subsequent breakdown of the implications of these findings, and it allows us to observe and describe overarching trends and characteristics, including developments in political and interstate relations. The decision to opt for this design variant was founded in the perception that in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of the multi-dimensional realms of foreign policy and interstate relations in the relevant cases, a deep and multi-faceted examination is necessary.

2.2. CASE SELECTION

The case selection for this thesis was carried out using a deliberative process of elimination; given that there are multiple countries in Europe that host RWPPs, it was necessary to select case countries based on which of these would be best suited to provide reliable and relevant data over a sufficient timespan. A number of such political parties are mentioned in this thesis, but relatively few of these have been able to form lasting governments in recent years, meaning that utilizing these for this case study could possibly have yielded less definitive answers. Fidesz and PiS, on the other hand, have ruled their nations for multiple consecutive years and through at least two election cycles each, allowing for the delineation of a timeframe spanning several years. The timeframe for each country is not identical; at the time of writing, Fidesz has governed Hungary for 13 years, whereas PiS has governed Poland for eight. Nevertheless, each timeframe is long enough to suffice for the purpose of this thesis, which is to determine whether their control over their respective states' foreign policy strategies has led to any observable shift in their interstate relations. There is

little reason to assume that between two and four terms in power is too little time to affect a country's conduct on the international scene; since both Fidesz and PiS have effectively commanded working legislative majorities for much, or all, of their most recent terms in government, there is on the contrary much that points to these RWPPs having all the political authority they would need to alter the foreign-political course of their nations if they so desired.

Although both Hungary and Poland fit this research quite well given their governance by RWPPs over extended periods of time, a number of other cases were also considered for inclusion in this research. Among these was the Republican Party (GOP) in the United States, specifically under the *de facto* leadership of Donald Trump and his political faction. Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2021 was often described as encapsulating right-wing populist governance, and questions surrounding the international role of the United States were frequent during that time (Wilson, 2021: 15). European political actors expressed dismay over the country's political direction under Trump, and a number of analysts discussed whether the country could potentially stand to lose its central position in the Western geopolitical sphere due to the style and substance of his leadership (Al-Bayati, 2020: 88). After some deliberation and further research, however, the GOP was ultimately discarded as a possible case for this study, for several reasons. First of all, the GOP is comprised of multiple large and disparate factions and ideological tendencies, so although some of these might fit the right-wing populist label, it would be difficult to prove that the party as a whole qualifies as a full-fledged RWPP, meaning that only Trump and his circle could be reliably used in the study, which in turn would risk making each case country somewhat imbalanced. Additionally, Trump's first administration failed to secure immediate re-election in 2020, meaning that the timeframe would be short, and that drawing any definitive conclusions on any lasting foreign policy impact might be more difficult. Jair Bolsonaro's presidency in Brazil from 2017 to 2021 suffered from some of the same issues, as well as the additional problem that his administration was propped up by a multi-party coalition for the duration of his term; some of these parties were not considered RWPPs, and as such it would be more difficult to determine whether the Brazilian foreign policy in the aforementioned time period could truly be considered a reflection of right-wing populist governance. A host of other parties, such as the Dutch PVV and the Danish DF, were dismissed early in the process on the grounds that these RWPPs never formed their own governments, and have

historically only served as confidence-and-supply providers to sitting governments in their respective countries.

In contrast, Fidesz and PiS have formed their own governments, based on clear majorities in, and control of, the legislative branch. This, combined with extended periods in power and systemic similarities such as the employment of the parliamentary form of government, is one of the main reasons for why these countries were ultimately selected. Additionally, both Hungary and Poland are members of a number of inter- and supranational organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the EU, meaning that parallel measurements of their relationship with, and role within, such organizations would be possible. Naturally, this selection process exemplifies non-probability sampling, meaning that the cases used in this study were not selected in a random way, but rather in an intentional and deliberate one, in order to maximize the efficiency of the measurements to be taken (Kothari, 2004: 15).

2.3. VARIABLE SELECTION

First, though, it is necessary to discuss the process behind the variable selection for the research. Much like in the case selection process, this, too, required some weighing of multiple options, and some elimination, in order to obtain a set of variables that might be both effective and reliable enough for the purposes of this study. These variables must each necessarily be a dimension of foreign policy and interstate relations that serves as a reflection of the overall state of these, and that both alone and in combination can give us information about the foreign relations of each case country and government. As previously mentioned, foreign policy and interstate relations are highly multi-faceted and comprise a wide array of different policy areas that may or may not be suitable for this research. Some of these are international treaties and agreements, international and supranational organizations and bodies, crime and justice, international trade, foreign aid, cross-border migration, and defense policy and the interstate coordination of this. Personal relationships between the leaders and diplomats of various states, expressed through diplomacy, public and official statements, and even polemics, is also a real factor in interstate relations, albeit one that might be difficult to measure with much certainty.

In order to measure any improvement or deterioration of the foreign relations of states governed by RWPPs, some of these dimensions must be measured and

analyzed; hypothetically, a greater number of variables ought to provide a fuller and more holistic understanding of the aforementioned. The inverse is also true: a low number of variables will be less suited to provide a complete overview of the foreign relations of the case countries, as these would be less reflective of the totality of their interstate relations. This could still provide some insight into developments and potential changes in specific areas, which may be useful *per se*, but insufficient to answer the research question of this thesis. Nevertheless, the scope of this thesis does not allow for the examination of every single dimension of foreign policy, and so a selection of relevant variables has been made.

The four variables explored in this thesis are the following: 1) the establishment and ending of international treaties and agreements, 2) international trade, 3) international coordination of foreign and defense policy, and 4) the imposition of international sanctions and other disciplinary measures.

Each of these dimensions of foreign policy is quite broad, and they each constitute overarching areas that define the case countries' relations with their neighbors and traditional allies, as well as foreign states more generally. Unless more precisely defined, they are also somewhat vague, nebulous, and, potentially, difficult to measure. For this reason, it is necessary to establish certain methods of measurement for each of the aforementioned dimensions in order to draw clear conclusions from this research. An overview of what exactly is measured within each of these foreign policy areas is presented here, along with the reasons for their inclusion in the research in the first place.

The selection of the four dimensions is rooted in established literature and the core facets of foreign policy discussed therein. As covered in the previous chapter, international treaties, for instance, are considered a central part of modern interstate relations, and constitute one part of the diplomatic toolkit of the governments of states (Wright, 1961: 73). As explored, these can cover a variety of policy areas, but given that the topic of this thesis pertains mainly to shifts in the interstate relations of the case countries, it is also particularly relevant to examine the approach taken by their governments when it comes to already existing treaties, as well as the crafting of new ones. By exploring the contents and status of these treaties, we may gain insight into any potential changes in the foreign policy prioritizations of the Hungarian and Polish governments while under RWPP administration; whether the previously discussed sovereigntist approach to interstate relations manifests in the strategies of these governments is also of interest. Regardless, in order to actually measure an increase

or decrease in the establishment and ending of international treaties and agreements, it is necessary to obtain an overview of which of these commitments (or eliminations thereof) have taken place throughout the terms in government of the relevant RWPPs. Although it might be difficult to obtain an exhaustive overview of every major and minor international treaty created and abandoned in the relevant timeframe, the contents of these treaties should add supplementary context and further insight into the case countries' prioritizations to such a degree that any significant shifts, or a lack thereof, may yet be discerned.

Meanwhile, international trade is a readily measurable variable, as we may with some ease gain insight into the import and export values of each case country, as well as fluctuations over time that may be observed therein. This might give us an idea of the state of the international trade policy pursued by the Hungarian and Polish governments, though it must be noted that unwilling and inadvertent effects may also affect these numbers. The theoretical basis and justification for the inclusion of this dimension lies partly in the frequent discussion in scholarly circles of such topics as populist protectionism, as well as in the stated desire of some of the relevant political actors to refocus their attention to sovereign partners beyond their circle of traditional neighbors and allies; exploring whether a shift in the mercantile relations of the case countries has taken place as a result, is of interest to this study (Findlay, 2021: 28).

When it comes to the measurement of the case countries' approach to the international coordination of foreign and defense policy, we must look at the degree to which each of them adheres to the direction set by their international allies and partners; in this way, it may be determined whether their reliability as international defensive partners have improved, deteriorated, or remained unchanged within the relevant timeframe. This third dimension is somewhat connected to the first, in that it explores the international commitments of each case country, though it covers somewhat different policy areas overall. The various descriptions of Fidesz and PiS as Euroskeptic, nationalist, or sovereignist should in theory surely affect their approach to international coordination of these policy areas; the idea that "national law [should always have] priority over international law" might indeed be difficult to reconcile with a deepening, ever-closer integration into inter- and supranational partnerships, blocs, and unions. (De Spiegeleire et al., 2017: 41). Exploring whether the ideologies of these RWPPs have affected the level of cohesion of their governments with neighboring and traditional allied states in this area is the main reason for the inclusion of this particular dimension.

Lastly comes the fourth dimension, namely the imposition of international sanctions and other disciplinary measures. In this particular study, this pertains specifically to the impositions of disciplinary measures on each of the two case countries, and not the inverse. This information can be discerned with relatively little difficulty, by examining the decisions made by other geopolitical actors *vis-à-vis* each of the two governments at the center of this research. The reasoning behind the selection of this dimension bases itself on the works of those scholars, like Todosijević and Enyedi, who believe that either one or both of the relevant RWPPs are illiberal or outright authoritarian in nature, and thereby more likely to reject the rules and norms of the current, liberal international order that reigns in Europe, particularly within organizations such as the EU and NATO (Todosijević and Enyedi, 2008: 779). Examining whether their views on the established order have caused any actual friction with foreign entities, and, consequently, any reprimands of some shape or form, would be a solid indicator of souring interstate relations.

One of the main benefits of the selection of these four variables is that each of them is practically measurable to some degree. Returning to the dimension of personal relationships between political actors of the various states, this exemplifies one that is considerably more difficult to measure reliably. One would have to first discern which political actors to take into account, and how their expressions compare to the actual, practical political moves made by the governments they represent; these may, in some cases, not reflect the *de jure* policy of these authorities, and could hypothetically run completely contrary to the foreign policy strategy of their state. In contrast, most of the variables selected here come with either measurable numerical values that may serve as indicators of wider trends, or official documents or other commitments signed, or otherwise adhered to, by the authorities of the relevant case countries. Tangibility such as this is important to factor in during the variable selection process, lest the study become too vague and thereby difficult to draw conclusions from.

2.4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Let us now take a closer look at how each of the four overarching variables are collected, measured, and analyzed. Each of them is distilled into a certain number of measurable values or trends that may help determine whether an improvement of deterioration within each area has taken place within the relevant timeframe –

technically, the past 13 years in the case of Hungary's Fidesz government, and the past eight years in the case of Poland's PiS government. However, as the writing of this thesis commenced in 2023, some of the data collected will be from up to, and including, 2022, for a total of 12 years for Hungary, and seven for Poland. This is to ensure that all collected data from any given year reflects the final numbers from that year, and mainly relates to the data on international trade. At an earlier stage of the process, the inclusion of relevant data from timeframes extending back to sometime before the ascent of each RWPP to power was considered, in order to better illustrate any marked changes in the trends up for examination, as well as any contrast between the periods prior to the swearing-in of these right-wing populist governments, and the periods of RWPP governance. Ultimately, however, the timeframe was definitively confined to only their years in power, as the earliest collected data (2010 for Hungary, and 2015 for Poland) would be just as adequate an indicator of the conditions observable in each country prior to the formation of their right-wing populist governments.

With the rationale behind this delineation of the study's time scope accounted for, let us take a more in-depth look at the nature of the specific data that is to represent each of the four main policy areas, beginning with the first of the four, namely the area defined as the establishment and ending of international treaties and agreements. An exhaustive, numerical overview of these actions could have served the purposes of this thesis well, but one important aspect lessens the value of a numerical approach to data collection, namely the fact such an approach limits our ability to determine whether such commitments have entailed positive or negative changes in the case countries' international relations. Certain treaties and agreements could, hypothetically, contain stipulations that stand to the detriment of either the case countries themselves, or of other states. Therefore, a more qualitative form of measurement has been applied here; a number of landmark international treaties have been passed during Fidesz' and PiS' terms in government, and this study will explore whether their administrations have attached their states to the commitments that come with each of these; in the event of the formal and official withdrawal of either case country from any of the relevant agreements, this information is also provided. A summary overview of each treaty and agreement is included as well.

As this research aims to reveal changing trends in the relations of the case countries specifically with their neighbors and traditional allies, the selection of treaties is reflective of this, and mainly focuses on treaties between each of the case countries,

and states and organizations that fall into this category. An overview of the nations that are included here is provided for the sake of clarity, and this applies to the entirety of the study, across all variables. Broadly, the member states of the EU and NATO are the ones comprising this group of states, since both Hungary and Poland are full members of each of these organizations, thereby being demonstrably intertwined politically, economically and militarily with the aforementioned. Table 1, presented below, includes a list of every member state of these organizations, including the two case countries. These are the states defined as neighbors and traditional allies of the case countries for the purposes of this thesis, though it is critical to note that each of them may have additional neighbors and/or allies that do not form part of this bloc. In other words, the selection used for this research is by no means exhaustive.

Table 1: Associated States of Hungary and Poland, via EU and NATO Membership

Members of the EU only (4)	Members of NATO only (9)	Members of both orgs. (23)
Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta	Albania, Canada, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Türkiye, United Kingdom, United States	Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

Source: Thompson, 2023

The next variable, international trade, will be of a similar scope, in the sense that data is collected from the case countries' trade relations with neighboring states and traditional allies. Among these, the 27 states that make up the EU are included, as in the case of both Hungary and Poland, this bloc of nations is their largest trading partner, while the countries' NATO commitments do not come with any stipulations covering trade or international commerce. In addition to these, the five original member states of BRICS are also included as a second bloc; these are Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. This bloc of loosely associated states is included here to allow for a comparison between the case countries' neighbors and traditional allies on the one hand, and a collection of some of the world's most influential non-Western economic powers on the other, perhaps allowing for the measurement of any shifts in

the relative alignment of the two case countries. The specific data to be collected in this area are the ones covering the value of overall imports and exports. In other words, this section will be looking at how much the case countries have traded with their partners in the EU, and the members of BRICS, throughout the relevant time period.

Whereas the second variable omits those countries that are only members of NATO but none of these other organizations, the third emphasizes NATO heavily. The third area this research looks at is, specifically, the case countries' participation in the international coordination of foreign and defense policy. This touches upon military alliances, geopolitical stances, and relations with states and other powers that do not belong to the main blocs of nations, the EU and NATO, that align with both of them. This section examines the spending and prioritizations of the case countries when it comes to defense policy and budgets, as well as their stance on the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, since this conflict in particular is frequently seen as having large repercussions in Europe specifically, and since the involved states both have significant historical ties to the case countries. The stances of each case government on this conflict will reveal to us, to some degree, the extent to which each of them adheres to the common NATO policies in the realms of defense and foreign policy.

The fourth and final variable, the imposition of international sanctions and other disciplinary measures on the case countries, will be explored using a clearly observational approach, and this section explores whether any such reprimands have been dealt by their neighbors and traditional allies in the EU and NATO. This fourth dimension is perhaps the most straightforward of them all, as it essentially boils down to a question that demands only an answer of either "yes" or "no". However, beyond this, it is also necessary to provide some insight into the background and causes of any such measures, and so any sanctions or disciplinary actions imposed on either Hungary, Poland, or both, by other associated states or organizations, will be explored more in-depth.

In combination, the four overarching dimensions that are explored in this thesis provide it with a multi-faceted empirical foundation. The intended outcome of this is that these policy areas together ought to be able to provide us with a sufficiently full and rounded image of the foreign relations of the case countries; they cover diplomacy, trade, defense, and international laws and conventions; in other words, several of the major dimensions that make up interstate relations in modern European politics. They also take into account the multiple layers of alignment that the case

countries maintain with their neighbors and traditional allies, by differentiating between, but including, member states of the EU and NATO in these measurements. Based on this, both the cases and variables selected for this thesis should allow us to adequately answer its research question, and determine whether a correlation exists between the exercising of government foreign policy by RWPPs, and a lasting shift in their states' foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states.

2.5. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Research design is a crucial step in the preparation and development of the research process, and yet, no matter how meticulously crafted, no approach is infallible nor immune to certain methodological limitations. Such limitations may manifest as a result of logistical issues, time constraints, sampling problems, or myriad other causes. One of the risk factors in this thesis, specifically, is connected to the applicability of its findings. As a qualitative study aimed at providing greater understanding of a broader subject through the in-depth study of a small number of cases, extrapolation is required in order for its findings to be relevant and applicable to the rest of the population. It is for this reason that the two case countries covered in this research have been chosen with great care and through multiple rounds of research, deliberation, comparison, and elimination. The sampling process itself can in some cases constitute a potential pitfall, though provided such a selection process is undertaken with care, it should not prove detrimental to the research. The process of variable selection, too, is critical to ensuring both validity and significance, and it is for this reason that a diverse array of variables have been used in this research. Overall, the methodology applied in this research has been crafted with the avoidance of methodological pitfalls such as these in mind, and, as such, should not be at risk of producing gravely distorted or insignificant results; its research design serves its intended purpose, to the overall benefit of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the data collected as part of this research. This data covers a multitude of different areas, and for the sake of order and clarity, each of the policy areas under examination has been split into different sections. Treaties and agreements are presented in section 3.1.; trade in section 3.2.; foreign and defense policy coordination in section 3.3.; and sanctions and disciplinary measures in section 3.4. The findings for each case country are grouped together in these sections where possible.

3.1. EXAMINING TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

The first dimension of the case countries' foreign policy strategies that this research covers, is their participation in international treaties. This includes both their signing of, and withdrawal from, such agreements, in addition to their role in the creation and ending of these. As most states do, these, too, partake in a large number of international treaties, both with their neighbors and traditional allies, as well as with geopolitical actors outside these spheres. This section largely ignores broad agreements that include a large number of states, and instead focuses primarily on the case countries' role in the diplomacy surrounding treaties and agreements that either diverge heavily in nature from previously established treaties, or in the abandonment of central or influential treaties that were once in place.

3.1.1. Establishment of Treaties

Since the return to power of Fidesz and PiS in Hungary and Poland in 2010 and 2015 respectively, each country has entered into several new international treaties covering a wide array of different international issues. These include treaties of cooperation and friendship, such as the 2018 agreement titled the Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Poland on Defence and Security Cooperation, which comprises two states already allied via the NATO defense alliance. Others fall outside these bounds, including agreements on a strategic partnership between the governments of Hungary and China signed in 2017, and on economic cooperation between these in 2023 (Wenwen, 2023).

Hungary further pursued agreements with Türkiye in 2018, signing a number of new pacts that year on strategies ranging from cooperation in social services to science and innovation (Bozdogan, 2023). In October that year, Orbán addressed some of these initiatives in Budapest, providing some insight into the foreign policy strategy of his administration; he stated that “Hungarian foreign policy must at all times pay particular attention to three capital cities: Istanbul – which today has been replaced by Ankara; Moscow; and Berlin” and that “these represent the three great powers and large countries within whose sphere of influence Hungary has lived its life for many hundreds of years” (Website of the Hungarian Government, 2018). With this, he highlights the Hungarian ambition of maintaining close relations with states beyond the EU, and with governments whose relationship to that bloc have at times been strained in recent years. His speech stressed the close ties and sense of respect between Hungary and Türkiye, but also addressed specific policy areas that he hoped these initiatives would improve. He highlighted migration in particular, stating that “a stable Turkish government and a stable Türkiye are essential for ensuring that Hungary faces no threats of any kind on the land route for migration,” and that he would like to “clearly state that one of Hungary’s strongest national interests is for Türkiye to always be stable and strong enough to be able to create peace in the region, and to hold back the illegal migration that would flow from that region towards Europe” (Website of the Hungarian Government, 2018). The emphasis on migration was accompanied also by statements on increased military and economic cooperation (Website of the Hungarian Government, 2018). Neither the EU itself nor any major European leaderships issued direct statements in reaction to this.

The Hungarian approach to Russia, however, has received significant attention from the bloc, as well as from the domestic Hungarian opposition, in recent years. Mere days before the commencement of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Orbán traveled to Moscow to meet with Russian president Vladimir Putin in order to discuss issues such as a “nuclear power plant project, the extension of a gas supply contract and the production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine in Hungary” (Chachanidze, 2022). Two gas agreements between the two states had also been signed in 2021, providing Hungary with Russian natural gas, though this notably occurred before the Russian invasion and at a time when Russian gas exports to the European market was more widespread (Kardaś and Sadecki, 2021). Orbán’s move to meet with Putin in early 2022 was met with criticism from the Hungarian opposition, who issued a joint statement on concerns of the meeting sending the message that

“NATO and EU are not united in rejecting Russia’s proposals” in the Ukraine conflict (Chachanidze, 2022). Nathalie Loiseau, a high-ranking EU security and defense official, responded to Orbán’s approach by saying “I sincerely hope that Viktor Orbán is aware of what is at stake, and that he sticks to the EU’s message of unity” (Walker, 2022). The perceived closeness between Hungary and Russia has reportedly been a concern to officials from the United States as well; their ambassador in Budapest condemned the Hungarian premier’s decision to again meet with Putin in late 2023 (Starcevic, 2023).

Poland under PiS, meanwhile, has largely confined its new treaties to its traditional partners, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, in the relevant time period. In 2020, for instance, Poland signed a treaty with the United States, on defense cooperation; this agreement, titled the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), was signed by the American secretary of state and the Polish defense minister in August that year (Myers and Rempfer, 2020). In the same year, a treaty was established between Poland and the United Kingdom on voting rights, to ensure that nationals from each country would continue to be eligible to run for office, and vote, in each other’s elections in the aftermath of Brexit, the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU; the UK-Poland Voting Rights Treaty was signed by the British ambassador to Poland and a Polish secretary of state under the country’s foreign ministry (Morton, 2020). Nevertheless, some attempts to approach non-Western powers have also been made in Poland throughout the PiS’ years in power, with the country also having signed a strategic partnership declaration with China in 2016 (Website of the Polish Presidency, 2016). During this meeting, which was attended by Polish president Andrzej Duda and Chinese president Xi Jinping, the Polish government also asserted its support for China’s policy towards Taiwan, known as the “One China Policy” (Website of the Polish Presidency, 2016). Although Taiwan does receive support from the United States and other Western partners, the *de jure* recognition of China as one country, ruled from Beijing, is the approach of nearly all states, including Poland’s own allies, and as such this did not represent a significant departure from the EU position.

In addition to all the aforementioned bilateral agreements, Hungary and Poland have also partaken in new multilateral agreements in the same timeframe, such as the EU treaties on the European Fiscal Compact effective from 2013 (therefore during Fidesz’ time in power but not that of PiS), which was signed in 2012,

and on the Unified Patent Court (signed by Hungary but not by Poland), effective from 2023.

3.1.2. Ending of Treaties

A number of treaties have been abandoned by the case countries in the timeframe covered by this thesis. One of these is the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) which was originally signed in 1990 and came into effect in 1992. This treaty imposed limitations on the amount of military equipment that could be stored in Europe, and stipulated that excess military equipment ought to be destroyed. The treaty was signed around the conclusion of the Cold War, by the member states of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and imposed equal limitations for both of these geopolitical blocs. In the period from 2007 to 2015, Russia suspended its participation in the agreement, however, and abandoned it entirely at the end of that period. NATO as a whole later responded with plans to abandon the treaty altogether, with this withdrawal to include both of this thesis' case countries of Hungary and Poland (Alberque, 2023). Their suspension or withdrawal from the treaty is therefore in line with the position taken by NATO at large.

Another prominent international agreement, crafted in association with the UN and titled the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), was adopted by that international organization in 2018; it was supported in the UN General Assembly by 152 member states, with five voting against, 12 abstaining, and 24 being absent (UN, 2018). Among the five states that rejected the GCM were Hungary and Poland, which abandoned the work pertaining to the GCM around the same time. Two of their traditional allies, the United States and Czechia, were among the remaining states that rejected the treaty. A 2019 report for the British House of Commons on the agreement discussed these rejections, claiming that "opposition to the GCM was encouraged by an on-line campaign by far right and anti-immigrant activists. This involved claims that the GCM would declare 'migration as a human right' and make criticism of migration a criminal offence and that it encouraged mass immigration" (Fella, 2019). According to Espinoza, Hadj-Abdou, and Brumat, the Hungarian government, in particular, was concerned that their approval of the GCM could have been seen as "a sign that they are promoting migration," hence their rejection of the agreement (Espinoza et al., 2018).

Yet another treaty withdrawal was discussed in Poland later in the relevant time period in relation to the agreement titled the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention. This treaty was drafted and signed in 2011, and came into effect in 2014; PiS stated its opposition to Poland's ratification of this convention, however, and after returning to power in 2015, commenced the process of withdrawing the country from the Istanbul Convention (Koutrakos and Soñeca, 2022: 192). The Polish minister of justice at the time, Zbigniew Ziobro, claimed that the document was "harmful" because it required schools to teach children about gender" and that it "contains elements of an ideological nature" (BBC, 2020). According to Ziobro, recent Polish reforms in this area already "provided sufficient protection for women" (BBC, 2020). Marija Pejčinović Burić, the secretary general of the Council of Europe (CoE), condemned the PiS government's withdrawal attempts, calling them "alarming" and stating that the country abandoning the treaty "would be highly regrettable and a major step backwards in the protection of women against violence in Europe" (Council of Europe, 2020). The government's move was further opposed by much of the Polish opposition, and PiS' objective of pulling the country out of the agreement has yet to materialize; despite the intention of their government, Poland remains a signatory of the Istanbul Convention.

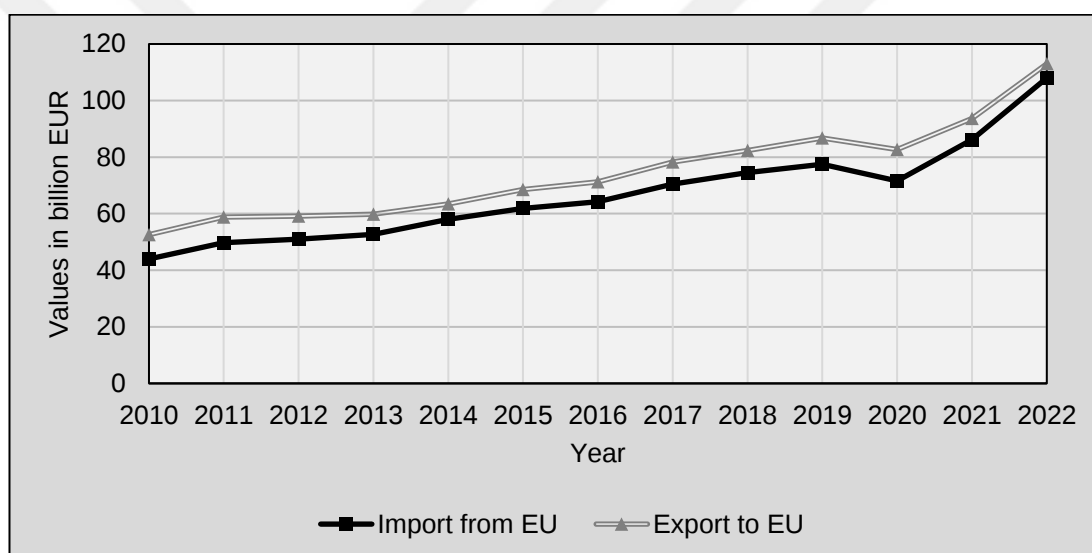
3.2. EXAMINING TRADE

The second policy area included in this study is international trade. As previously discussed, this dimension is in itself multi-faceted, and the total value of both imports and exports between the case countries and their trading partners in the EU and in BRICS has been observed here. Given the focus of this thesis, each of these have been measured for Hungary and Poland *vis-à-vis* the EU member states and the five original BRICS member states as single blocs, meaning that the values and trends presented here effectively illustrate the trade relations between each of the two case countries individually, and the remaining 26 member states of the EU, as well as the five member states of BRICS. As such, trade between Hungary and Poland themselves is also measured and included in the EU figures.

3.2.1. Trade with EU Partners

The total value of imports to, and exports from, each of the two case countries is presented in this section – though it is important to note that these numbers reflect the values only between each case country and the EU as a bloc. In other words, these numbers do not cover imports and exports to any other state or group of states beyond those who are full members of the EU. First, let us look the total value of imports and exports for the case country of Hungary, in the aforementioned timeframe of 2010 to 2022; these numbers are presented below, in Figure 3.

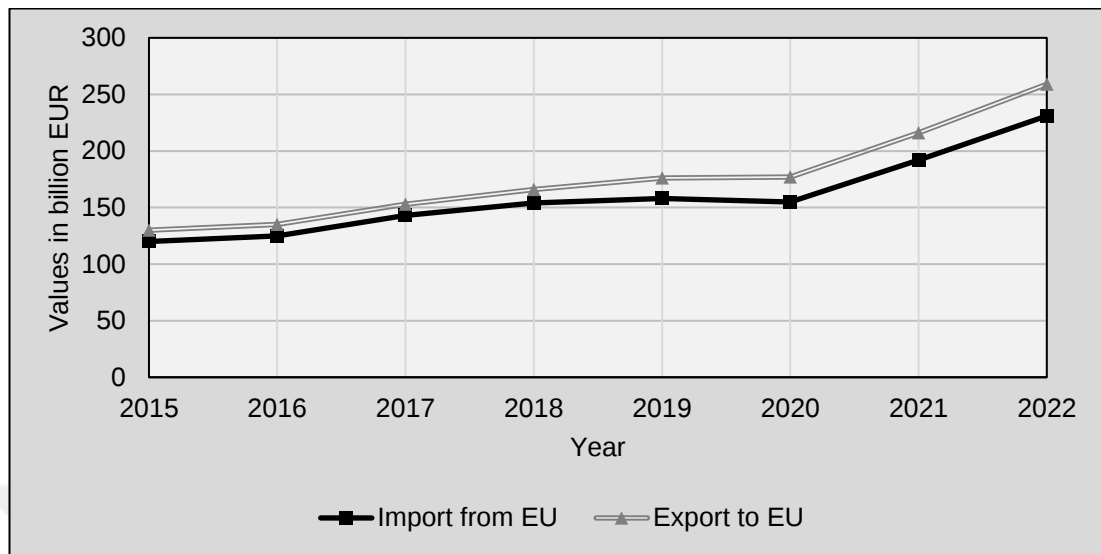
Figure 3: Value of Import and Export Trade between Hungary and the EU



Source: Trading Economics, 2024

As can be observed, no marked decrease in the total value of imports or exports between Hungary and the EU bloc has taken place in the timespan from 2010 to 2022; in fact, the total value of annual imports has increased from roughly 44 billion EUR in the former year, to approximately 108 billion EUR in the former; the same trend can be observed in the exports sector, where the total value of exports to the EU has increased from below 53 billion EUR in 2010, to 113 billion EUR in 2022 (Trading Economics, 2024). Next, let us take a look at the same statistics for Poland, in the time period from 2015 to 2022.

Figure 4: Value of Import and Export Trade between Poland and the EU



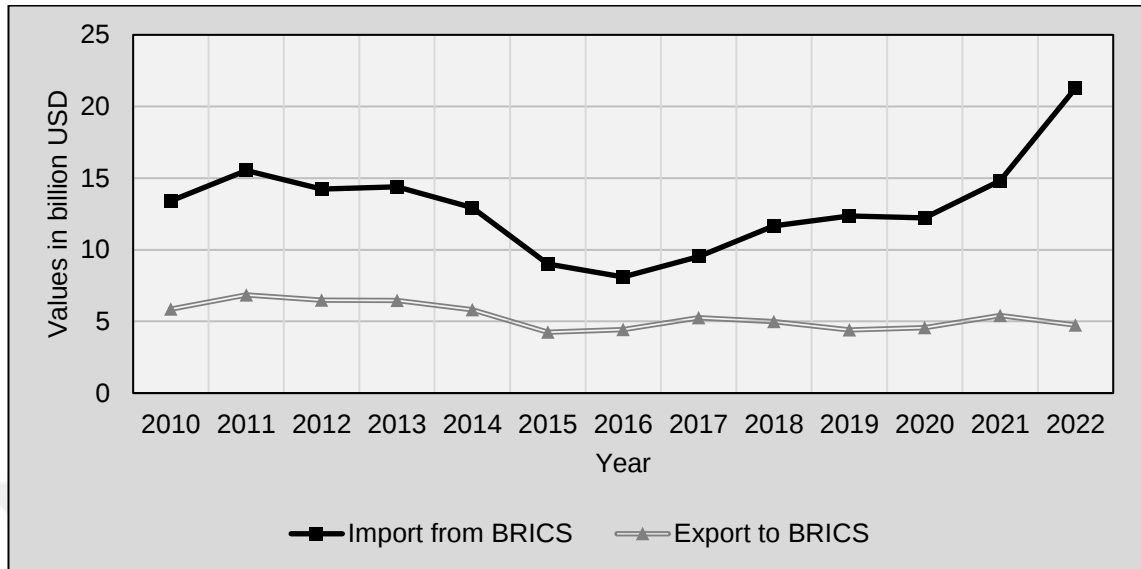
Source: Trading Economics, 2024

As in the case of Hungary, it appears no overall decrease in Poland's import and export values can be observed in the relevant timeframe. The value of imports from the EU rose from 120 billion EUR in 2015, to 231 billion EUR in 2022, whereas the value of exports to the EU rose from approximately 130 billion EUR in 2015, to 259 billion EUR in 2022 (Trading Economics, 2024). This represents a near-doubling of the overall value of all imports from, and exports to, the EU in the case of Poland.

3.2.2. Trade with non-EU Partners

The total value of imports from, and exports to, a selection of non-EU partners is presented here. These are the five original BRICS states discussed previously, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These countries are presented and treated as a single bloc in Figures 5 and 6, and the trade values are presented in US dollars as opposed to in euro, given the extra-European nature of these trade relations.

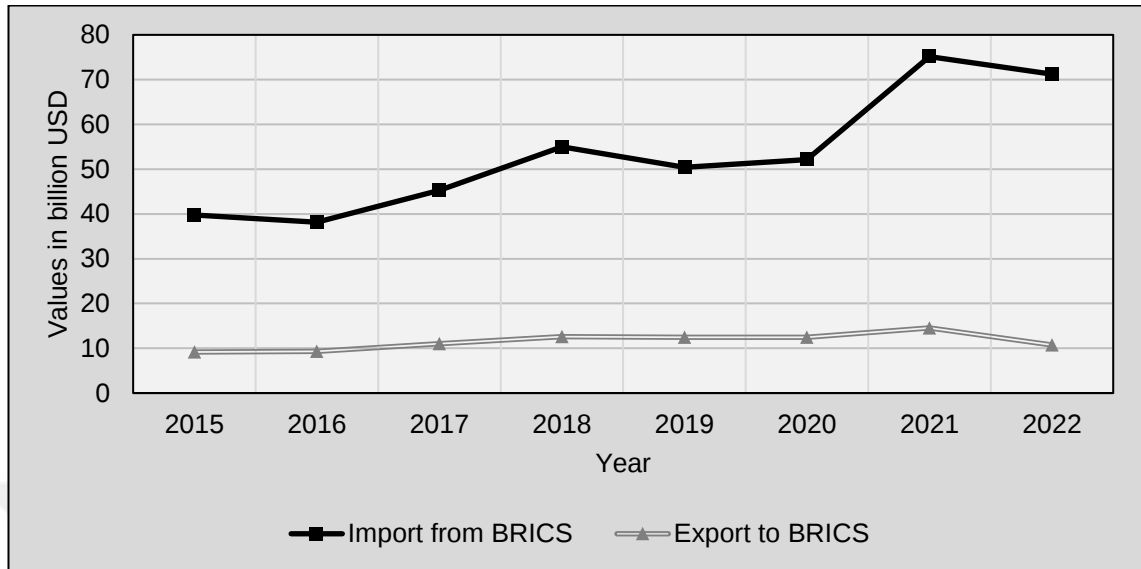
Figure 5: Value of Import and Export Trade between Hungary and BRICS



Source: Trading Economics, 2025

In the 2010-2022 timeframe, the total value of all Hungarian imports from the five BRICS countries markedly increased, with the largest single year-on-year increase having taken place in 2022. A significant dip can be observed in 2015, and the bulk of this decrease was caused by reduced imports from Russia in particular; from 2014 to 2015, around the time of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the consequent sanctions on Russian trade, the total value of Hungarian imports from Russia fell from 7.29 billion USD to 3.64 billion USD, constituting more than a halving of import values in that period (Trading Economics, 2025). From 2017 onwards, however, the import values gradually increased once again, and, as mentioned, ultimately peaked in 2022. That year, the import values from Russia notably more than doubled from 4.27 billion USD to 9.64 billion USD, effectively returning to the pre-2014 norm (Trading Economics, 2025). Hungarian exports to the BRICS countries have overall remained more stable throughout Fidesz' time in power, albeit at a far lower level in all, though the same overall trends that can be observed in the 2013-2016 period apply here as well. Figure 6, shown below, further displays the import and export values for Poland in the 2015-2022 time period.

Figure 6: Value of Import and Export Trade between Poland and BRICS



Source: Trading Economics, 2025

As in the Hungarian case, it can here be observed that import values have steadily increased since the mid-2010s, with peaks in 2021 and 2022, and this also mirrors the development in the case countries' trade relations with their EU partners. These numbers reveal one significant difference between Hungary and Poland, however, namely a stark contrast in their trading relationship with Russia from 2022, which marked the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Whereas Hungary, as mentioned, imported goods for more than twice as much in 2022 as in 2021, Poland imported goods for a total value of 16.7 billion USD in 2022, down from 20.1 billion USD in 2021. And in terms of Polish exports to Russia, this value was close to halved to 4.82 billion USD, from 8.79 billion USD in 2021; the Hungarian export numbers for the equivalent period only showed a decrease from 2.07 billion USD to 1.39 billion USD, a far smaller shift (Trading Economics, 2025).

The large increase in Hungarian imports from Russia, contrasted with the collapse in Polish exports to the same country, show that the two case countries maintained markedly different trading relations with Russia in particular from 2022, even if both countries enjoyed overall strengthened economic ties to the BRICS states in sum.

3.3. EXAMINING COORDINATION OF FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

The third dimension of Hungary and Poland's interstate relations that this thesis examines, pertains to the international coordination of foreign and defense policy. More specifically, this section of the research looks closer at the degree to which each of the two case countries adhere to the direction staked out in these policy areas by their neighbors and traditional allies; both the EU and NATO are relevant partners in this context, as they both influence the foreign and defense policy of their member states. This section first looks at the international coordination of foreign policy more broadly, and then at the international coordination of defense policy more specifically. The results for each case country are generally grouped together.

3.3.1. Coordination of Foreign Policy

As full members of both the EU and NATO, Hungary and Poland are bound to maintain some degree of foreign policy coordination with the other European and Western nations, who constitute their geopolitical neighborhood, and, since at least the end of the Cold War, their allies. Let us look at some of the ways in which the two states coordinate their foreign policies with other states both within and without this framework. The two countries are subject to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU; this is a broad policy covering, as its name implies, mainly foreign and security policy, and has a long tradition in the bloc. It was once described as one of the three foundational pillars of the EU as a whole, until the Treaty of Lisbon redefined its purpose when that agreement came into effect from 2009 onwards. Both Hungary and Poland, along with all other EU members at the time, signed this agreement, and they both partake in foreign policy coordination with their neighbors and traditional allies through this partnership; this situation has been largely unaffected by changes in government or of the foreign policy direction of individual administrations in the case countries.

Within the relevant timeframe, one foreign-political issue has been observed to be especially important within the Central and Eastern European spheres in particular, namely the issue of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This conflict garnered Russia widespread condemnation from the European states following their February 2022 invasion of their neighboring state, Ukraine. The governments of Hungary and Poland both condemned this act in line with the positions of the other EU and NATO

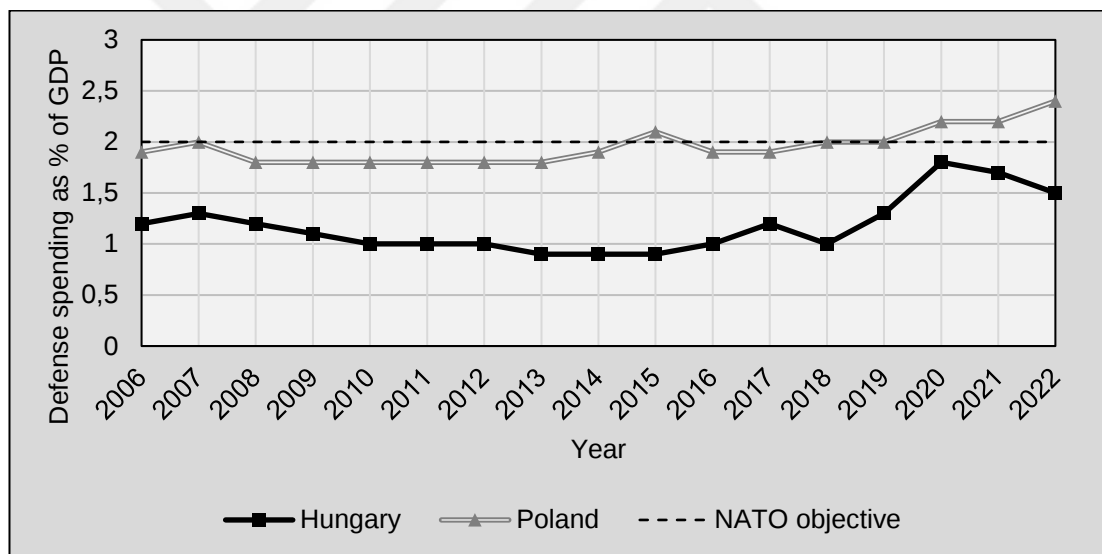
governments, but later cracks in this consensus can be observed. Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán advocated for a ceasefire between the warring parties sometime after the escalation of the conflict, maintaining this position well into 2023 at least; in February of that year, he expressed support for a peace plan composed by the Chinese government (Preussen, 2023). This stance contrasts strongly with the general EU position of rejecting any peace plan that includes concessions of Ukrainian territory to Russia. His government's position has also been to oppose European sanctions on Russia in response to the invasion, which has caused tensions between the Hungarian Fidesz and other associated political parties within the EU, as most of these hold the opposite view (Than and Komuves, 2022). Throughout the relevant time period, Orbán has stressed the importance of Hungarian cooperation with non-European nations, and expressed his desire to follow in the footsteps of "illiberal" states, including, according to him, Russia and China, in what constitutes a break with the positions and strategies of the EU and NATO member states (Lendvai, 2018: 141). In a 2014 address, he laid out his position on this matter in detail, saying that "the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state" (Website of the Hungarian Government, 2014). He continued, saying that "the most popular topic in thinking today is trying to understand how systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful", claiming that "the stars of the international analysts today are Singapore, China, India, Russia and Türkiye. And I think that our political community recognised and touched on this challenge correctly several years ago", referring to his own political movement (Website of the Hungarian Government, 2014).

Poland's PiS, meanwhile, can largely be observed to have maintained a pro-Ukrainian and outspokenly anti-Russian stance throughout the conflict; they have supported EU sanctions against the latter, and established a commission to investigate "Russian political influence" within Poland in 2023 (Krzysztosek, 2023). This stance is more in line with that maintained by the majority of other EU and NATO member states in the same time period, and forms part of what has been dubbed PiS' "Atlanticist" foreign policy prioritizations (Zima, 2020: 54).

3.3.2. Coordination of Defense Policy

In order to measure the case countries' participation in the coordination of defense policy with their neighbors and traditional allies, a natural place to start would be exploring their ties with the defense alliance of which they are both a member, namely NATO. This organization, which coordinates the defense strategies of its 32 member states, vowed in 2006 to pursue a policy under which each member state would dedicate at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to defense (Testoni, 2020). Let us look at how the two case countries, have held up in this measurement in recent years. The temporal scope of the numbers presented in Figure 7 expands beyond that of most other measurements in this research, beginning from 2006, the year this pledge was made, and covering each year until 2022.

Figure 7: Hungarian and Polish Defense Spending



Source: World Bank, 2022

As Figure 7 illustrates, Hungary has not met the stated NATO objective of having each member state spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defense in any of the years measured; Poland, on the other hand, met this objective in 2015, and then again in the years from 2018 up to, and including, 2022 (World Bank, 2022).

In addition to funding their own national militaries, the case countries are integrated members of the NATO defensive alliance. In the years since 2010, when Fidesz returned to power in Hungary, and since 2015, when PiS returned to power in

Poland, both countries have partaken in regular NATO exercises, as they did before these parties formed their latest governments. Despite this coordination, there is observable evidence of some tension between some of the bloc's members, including in the case of one of the two relevant countries, pertaining to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, while the full-scale invasion launched by the Russian military into the Eastern European nation in February 2022 united several European leaders in support of Ukraine and its government, others remained more reluctant to rush to its defense. Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister since 2010 and longtime leader of Fidesz, has been described by some as taking neutral, or even pro-Russian, stance in the conflict, expressing opposition to any Hungarian participation in the event of a direct NATO intervention in the war (Schmidt, 2023: 248). In addition to this, Orbán's administration has on certain occasions moved to veto aid and funding for the Ukrainian war effort, such as in 2023, when it vetoed a 50 billion EUR package to the country that had been intended to help that country "survive for the next three years" under the ongoing Russian onslaught (Thorpe, 2023). The Hungarian premier's stance on the Ukraine issue has been noted in the European press and by the Western leaderships, with one analyst noting that "while other EU leaders queue up at the Brussels summit to have their photos taken with the Ukrainian leader, Mr Orban turns away" (Thorpe, 2023).

This contrasts starkly with the Polish stance to the conflict throughout the tenure of the latest PiS government; according to Konończuk, the Russian invasion has heralded a "honeymoon period in Polish-Ukrainian relations", with the Polish state having provided approximately 3 billion EUR in military aid to the war-torn country by late 2023 (Konończuk, 2023). In 2022, the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Zbigniew Rau of PiS, discussed the war and his position on the current geopolitical tensions in Europe; in his speech, he praised the United States, claiming that it has become a "global power through its rejection of all forms of imperialism" and that "in that same vein, many Poles believed that their struggle against foreign empires led to the lasting victory" in the European wars of previous centuries, drawing parallels and highlighting the bond between these two allied states (CSIS, 2022). In opposition to them both, meanwhile, he posits Russia, stating that "Russian aggression against Ukraine [...] initiated unprecedented solidarity among the nations of a free world to defend sovereignty and democracy in Ukraine" and that "in the face of this war Poland was the first to help Ukraine. We became her closest frontline partner, humanitarian supplier, and logistical hub. Not only are we the first among the European allies to

send military donations to Ukraine, but we are second behind the United States in all military support” in a patent expression of pro-Ukrainian sentiment (CSIS, 2022). This position is far more in line with the broader EU and NATO stance on support for Ukraine, including in terms of military and financial aid.

Furthermore, in the same way that Hungary and Poland partake in the CFSP along with the other member states of the EU, they are also involved as full participants in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which is, for all intents and purposes, a major part of the CFSP, focusing on crisis management and managing troubled regions via military and civilian deployment. Similar to the operation of NATO, the CSDP functions as, effectively, a defensive alliance between its member states (Luzárraga, 2022: 38). Through their adherence to the CSDP, Hungary and Poland coordinate their defense policy with their neighbors and traditional allies, and they have participated in a number of CSDP missions, both military and civilian, over the years. Some of these include the military-centered operation known as the European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR BiH), and the civilian European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo), among a number of others (Ekengren, 2016). Under the CSDP, the EU also carries out ongoing civilian and military missions in Ukraine, in the form of the European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) and the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), respectively. EUAM Ukraine has been in operation since 1 December 2014, following the Ukrainian Maidan Revolution and the Russian annexation of Crimea, while EUMAM Ukraine was launched on 17 October 2022, a few months after the commencement of the full-scale Russian invasion of the country. The civilian mission contains representatives and advisors from nearly all EU member states, while the military mission, which notably does not directly partake in military action but is rather aimed at providing Ukraine with military aid and expertise, includes 24 EU member states, in addition to Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Ostanina, 2023). Poland, along with Germany, provides one of the two main coordination centers for this mission, along with Germany. With this, the country aligns itself with the stance of its allies on this matter. The Hungarian government, in contrast, has been skeptical or outright opposed to the mission since its inception, with its core agreement having only been passed in the EU due to the Hungarian government's abstention from, as opposed to effective veto of, the initiative. Since then, it has been cited as a roadblock in the way of the project's smooth operation: “Contrary to EU claims of supporting Ukraine ‘as

long as it takes', the Union keeps running into last-minute aid allocation hurdles. Hungary's refusals to greenlight aid for Ukraine is a case in point. Repeated disruptions of timely funds allocation hamper Ukraine's military planning ability and add fuel to claims of alleged Western aid fatigue," states one analyst (Ostanina, 2023). Once again, this demonstrates the existence of a discrepancy between the strategies of Fidesz' government in Hungary and the majority of its European counterparts, while highlighting what can be observed as an overall adherence by the Polish government to the EU and NATO strategies.

3.4. EXAMINING SANCTIONS AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

The fourth and final dimension of the case countries' interstate relations that this thesis examines, is the one pertaining to international sanctions and other disciplinary measures imposed on these. Measures such as these can be imposed by foreign powers of various types, including states and inter- and supranational organizations. Since this thesis primarily focuses on the case countries' relations with their neighbors and traditional allies, it is the EU and NATO blocs of states that have been included for the purposes of this research. In addition to economic sanctions, it covers disciplinary measures such as those made possible by the stipulations of the various EU and NATO treaties and agreements.

3.4.1. Sanctions

A number of sanctions, fines, and other economic and financial reprimands have been imposed on the case countries in the relevant time period, primarily by the EU and the various bodies and organizations affiliated with this bloc. In the case of Hungary, the EC decided to freeze a number of standard EU payments and grants normally intended for Hungary in 2022, on the grounds that the country was responsible for a number of rule of law-based breaches of EU policy, and that it had failed to address these after having been warned by the aforementioned authorities (Liboreiro, 2023). This came after a mid-2020 decision by the European Council (EUCO) to make such payouts from the EU budget dependent on compliance with the bloc's rule of law standards (Puetter, 2022: 234). Hungary had been found to be non-compliant with these in areas such as "the functioning of the constitutional and electoral system; the independence of the judiciary and of other institutions and the

rights of judges” and several others, and had therefore been presented with a list of 27 so-called “super milestones” in order to rectify this (Tidey, 2022).

In the case of Poland, similar measures have been taken by the EU in the same time period; in 2021, the ECJ decided to begin fining the country on a daily basis for its alleged breaches of the EU’s rule of law stipulations, with the daily amount to be paid amounting to one million EUR; this amount was reduced to half a million in 2023 (Camut, 2023). The rule of law and controversial judicial reforms were also the stated reason for the EU withholding funds from both Hungary and Poland in 2023, as both of these countries were described as having failed to implement reforms as requested of them by the bloc. The EC had released the annual Rule of Law Report on the state of the rule of law in the EU member states since 2020, and by 2023, these two states still remained “serious concerns” to the Commission, according to that year’s edition of the report (Riegert, 2023).

3.4.2. Miscellaneous Disciplinary Measures

Let us now look at Hungary’s history with miscellaneous EU disciplinary measures and diplomatic reprimands in the period from 2010 to 2023, the first 13 years in government for the country’s incumbent Fidesz administration. This section provides a brief timeline of key events related to this topic. Early in this time period, specifically from January until June of 2011, Hungary headed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Despite this, the country faced condemnation from several EU states already later the same year, due to domestic reforms of the country’s central bank; according to statements from the European Commission (EC), the law constituted a potential threat to the independence of the Hungarian central bank, and the Commission president of the day, José Manuel Barroso, personally implored Hungary’s ruling party to drop the reform (Royer, 2012). The law was nevertheless passed by the Fidesz-controlled Hungarian legislature towards the end of 2011. Following this development, the EC announced that it would initiate infringement procedures against the Hungarian government over this issue (Madsen, 2018: 235), and other related, contentious issues such as some related to other judiciary reforms and to data protection; later, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) did indeed conclude that the country had infringed EU law, and issued press releases relaying its condemnation of the Hungarian government for this in November 2012 and April 2014, with these including warnings to the Hungarian government that failure

to comply with the ECJ rulings could result in “a further action seeking financial penalties” (Kelemen, 2018: 234).

In 2015, Hungary faced criticism from EU officials for its refusal to comply with the bloc’s refugee allocation plan at the height of that year’s European migrant crisis; a few years later, in 2019, an advisory body to the ECJ, the Advocate General, maintained that this was a breach of EU law; this statement was repeated in 2020 (Gehrke, 2020). New sets of infringement procedures against Hungary were introduced in 2021 owing to concerns from the EC regarding the state of the rule of law and the Hungarian government’s ability or willingness to uphold equality under the law and other fundamental rights, a process that Hungary’s government opted to ignore for some time, even as a host of other EU member states joined the procedures against the country over the following years. Following these controversies, a majority of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted in favor of a non-binding resolution that aimed to scrutinize Hungary’s ability to take on the presidency of the European Commission in the future; this rotating presidency was at the time expected to go to Hungary once more in the period from July to December 2024.

Next, let us look at the timeline of miscellaneous disciplinary measures levied against Poland from 2015 to 2023, the first eight years in government for the latest PiS administration. Following the election of the PiS-nominated Andrzej Duda as president and head of state of Poland in May 2015, he blocked the appointment of several justices to the country’s constitutional tribunal by the then-governing PO party and its ruling coalition; the issue culminated in a judicial and constitutional crisis that went on to last for several years, with opposing sides disagreeing on which justices were rightful members of the tribunal, and on whether the tribunal in its current state was even eligible to hear cases (Kustra-Rogatka, 2021). PiS garnered a majority in the legislature in October of that year, and subsequently formed a new government; this administration drafted and passed a number of bills appointing new justices to the tribunal, and compelling it to hear new cases regardless of any concerns over the validity of these appointments or over the still-ongoing constitutional crisis. These actions were condemned by the EC, which opted to open an investigation into Poland over its concerns that the rule of law in the country was now under threat. This resulted in the commencement of a full assessment of the state of Polish rule of law by the EC in 2016, and the European Parliament (EP) voted in April of that year to pass a resolution that accused the country’s government of undermining democracy and the rule of law (Rankin and Smith, 2016). These events were followed in 2017 by the

Polish legislature's passage of a law imposing a mandatory retirement age for all judges across the country's judicial system, which was once again condemned by the EC, which further warned about the general direction taken by the PiS-led government, and threatened to commence procedures against Poland on the grounds of concerns that the country had broken the EU regulations on the rule of law and common values. Towards the end of the decade, and around the time of PiS' 2019 re-election victory, a number of Polish local municipalities and voivodeships declared themselves "LGBT-free zones," in response to the signing of a pro-LGBT rights declaration by the mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, a member of the opposition PO party (Ash, 2020). Over 100 of these local authorities declared themselves as such with non-binding resolutions. These moves on the Polish local government level were criticized by several EU officials, with the issue being addressed at the 2020 EU State of the Union address, held by EC leader Ursula von der Leyen; she rebuked the policy, and said that "I want to be crystal clear – LGBTQI-free zones are humanity free zones. And they have no place in our union" (Rankin, 2020). She further dismissed the conflation of sexual or gender identity with political ideology, stating that "being yourself is not your ideology" (Rankin, 2020).

As can be observed, a number of disciplinary measures, both in the form of economic penalties and sanctions, and political reprimands, have been imposed on both Hungary and Poland in the relevant timeframes. What this says about the overall developments in these two countries' relationships with their neighbors and traditional allies is discussed more in-depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

This fourth and final chapter discusses the findings and results produced by the research presented throughout this thesis. This discussion is divided into five sections, of which the first four, namely 4.1. through 4.4., touch upon each of the core dimensions that are central to this research. The fifth section, 4.5., consists of reflection on what all these findings might tell us overall, and it provides an answer to the research question posed earlier in this thesis. In all, this chapter synthesizes the various observations made here to form a wholesale and more complete picture.

4.1. ON INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

The findings presented in Chapter Three pertaining to the approach of Hungary and Poland to international treaties and agreements in the relevant time period gives us some insight into the foreign-political conduct of the right-wing populist governments of these states. As is briefly touched upon in the chapter in question, it is important to understand that the foreign policy strategies of these two nations are directed to a not insignificant degree by their obligations to the EU and to NATO. These obligations are cemented by a number of important and, in many cases binding, treaties, such as the Lisbon Treaty, the treaties on the CFSP and CSDP, and other fundamental agreements that underpin the contemporary international order on the European continent. Realistically, there is not much small- to medium-sized EU member states can do to dodge the stipulations of such treaties, unless they are willing to either face the penalties for doing so, or leave these various cooperations entirely. This means that any EU and NATO government, regardless of its ideological orientation or narrative outlook, is inherently limited in its ability to change any of these realities unilaterally; this informs and shapes the positions of these governments as they approach the international obligations they have towards their neighbors and allies. It also means that a European country's compliance to these obligations is not necessarily an adequate way of measuring its true priorities on the international arena; a better indicator of the aforementioned might be the treaties joined and abandoned by the case countries on their own volition, independently of any established obligations. We have, for example, observed the way in which Poland has attempted to scrap its commitment to the Istanbul Convention, and the way in which Hungary

has sought to build stronger relations with the non-European and, by and large, illiberal regimes in Russia and China. These are far stronger indicators of the true sympathies, allegiances, and priorities of the governments of the two case countries. These actions reflect not only geopolitical prioritizations, but also ideologically founded concerns. PiS' attempts to scrap a convention on violence against women and domestic abuse is, perhaps, a product of traditionalist prioritizations in Polish domestic politics, and an expression of that party's socially conservative outlook. Similarly, the eagerness of Fidesz to embrace closer relationships with states such as Russia and China, based partly, at least officially, on a shared abhorrence of liberal democracy, might well be a reflection of that party's illiberal-populist outlook within Hungary proper.

Indeed, as can be observed, the RWPPs governing these two nations do not shy away from going against the current when their doing so is largely without disciplinary repercussions; of all the states in the world, they were, after all, among the only five that voted against the GCM migration agreement in the UN General Assembly. Was this yet another reflection of the right-wing populist sentiments of the ruling political parties of these states? If their general conduct in relation to other voluntary treaties, and their public and official statements on migration in general, are any indication, then it does seem likely. And yet neither Hungary nor Poland ought to be dubbed rogue states; they have both demonstrated a willingness throughout the relevant time period to adhere to the mandatory and most essential international treaties that form the fundament of the European and Western diplomatic order. In short, the Hungarian and Polish governments, under the administration of their respective RWPPs, may perhaps be characterized as partly pragmatist, partly idealist. Indeed, from the findings presented in this thesis, it can be deduced that they remain at least nominally committed to their treaty obligations within the EU and NATO, but simultaneously that they do not take any noticeable issue with forging alternative bonds with other, external powers, some of which are even rivals of their own bloc, in cases where this course of action aligns with their views and, surely, ideological prioritizations.

And so, two questions remain: firstly, do the ruling political parties in Hungary and Poland approach international treaties and agreements in a manner that can be said to be consistent with, and reflective of, a right-wing populist approach? And secondly, has their approach served as a conduit for shifting relations with the two countries' neighbors and traditional allies? The answer to the first question would be

yes, based on the observations accounted for in this section. The answer to the second question, however, may not be as clear-cut. Based on the findings presented in Chapter Three, it might seem like Hungary has gone further than Poland in realigning its foreign-political and diplomatic alignments; as described, American officials are among those who have expressed concern over Hungary's perceived closeness with states such as Russia (Starcevic, 2023). Meanwhile, Poland under PiS, on the other hand, cannot be observed to have strayed overly far from the EU and NATO line.

4.2. ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE

International trade as a dimension of the foreign policy strategies of Hungary and Poland under their right-wing populist government is one that, theoretically, should give us an idea of where their eyes are set on the geopolitical arena. In subchapters 3.2.1 and 3.2.2., data on the total value of all imports and exports between each of the two case countries and their trading partners in the EU is presented. What these numbers tell us is that the volume of trade between the two case countries on the one hand, and their EU partners on the other, has only increased in recent years, even as the governments of Hungary and Poland have clashed with other European governments on a range of other issues. They also show that trade with the five original BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has increased overall throughout the case countries' periods of right-wing populist governance.

Despite this, drastic shifts occurred in Hungarian and Polish trade with Russia following key events 2014 and 2022, respectively, with the Russian incursions into Ukraine having affected imports and exports at various points in time. The collapse of Hungarian trade with Russia from 2014 to 2015 reflects of the broader European hostility towards the Russian government following its annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in February and March of 2014. Such a drop in Hungarian trade with Russia did not manifest again to the same degree in 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine anew to the chagrin of the European governments, although a smaller decrease can be observed. In Poland, on the other hand, a sharp decline in both imports from, and exports to, Russia occurred in the year following the invasion of February 2022. It appears therefore that in the case of Poland, trade relations have largely developed as one could expect given the sanctions and other similar measures

imposed on Russia in retaliation for its successive incursions, whereas in the case of Hungary, the numbers following Russia's latest attack on Ukraine do not indicate significantly worsened relations.

These marked changes are not wholly unexpected, given the EU position on trade with Russia following each of its invasions, and as such, reductions in trade values in the relevant years are compatible with an adherence to the broader EU policy on this matter. The maintaining of strong trade relations, such as in the case of sustained Hungarian imports from Russia in 2022, is, conversely, an indication of a breach with the EU stance. If one considers the foreign policy profiles of Fidesz and PiS, this might not come as a great surprise. For as previously discussed, they differ starkly in their views on Russia in particular; where Fidesz is seen as somewhat skeptical of the established Western order as a whole, and as open to illiberalism and close relations with illiberal and non-democratic states, PiS, on the other hand, is considered Atlanticist, and, despite the at times Euroskeptic rhetoric emanating from this grouping, it favors close ties with the West, and with the United States in particular. It is markedly more hostile to the Russian government and its foreign policy strategy than is Fidesz, and it is likely an expression of this difference that that can be seen in the numbers presented here. Overall, one thing that can be deduced from this data is that the two RWPPs in question have increasingly diverged from each other in this particular dimension, with Hungary in particular having also defied European expectations in trading more with Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine than it did before.

4.3. ON COORDINATION OF FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

The third dimension explored in Chapter Three, the international coordination of foreign and defense policy, says something about the ability of the case countries to adhere to a foreign policy strategy devised multilaterally and in conjunction with friends and allies on the geopolitical scene. The purpose of measuring whether there has been an improvement or a deterioration in such coordination is to determine whether Hungary and Poland have moved closer to, or away from, their traditional allies on this issue. As the abovementioned chapter discusses, it is the EU and NATO that form the framework in which most of this coordination takes place in the case of these two states. Through their participation in common strategies such as those defined by, among others, the CFSP and CSDP, they are bound, to an extent, to the

greater and overall foreign and defense policy approach of the EU. And through their membership in NATO, each of them is bound by certain obligations towards their co-members within this defensive alliance. Although both Hungary and Poland are integrated to some extent into coordinating bodies and organizations such as these, this does not mean they necessarily always adhere to common international strategies, as evidenced by the findings presented throughout section 3.3. of Chapter Three of this thesis.

An interesting pattern presented there shows that not only do the right-wing populist governments of the two case countries diverge at times from the broader EU and NATO policies on certain events, developments, and external powers, but they also appear to diverge from one another quite markedly in certain areas, despite their shared classification as RWPPs and common ground on a host of other issues. This pattern can be observed quite clearly in the case of Russia's war on Ukraine, where the Fidesz government of Hungary has been described as a relatively Russophilic when compared both to the average European government, and to the government administered by PiS in Poland, which has been described as broadly Atlanticist in its geopolitical outlook (Zima, 2020: 54). The existence of such differences is corroborated by recent actions taken with regards to the EU's CSDP missions in Ukraine, where the Polish government has been largely supportive and contributed to their implementation, whereas the Hungarian government has either only passively accepted, or outright refused to support, the same. Overall, it appears, based on the presented findings, that a deterioration of the relations between Hungary and its geopolitical affiliates has indeed taken place, not least thanks to the country's position on the Russo-Ukrainian war, whereas in the case of Poland such a development is not observable in this particular dimension within the relevant time period.

4.4. ON SANCTIONS AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

The fourth and final dimension of the foreign-political approach of Hungary and Poland explored in this thesis, comprises sanctions and disciplinary measures. More specifically, it covers such reprimands on the interstate level and mainly as a mechanism used by other geopolitical actors against these two countries. As can be deduced from the data presented in sections 3.4.1. and 3.4.2. of Chapter Three, the EU in particular has frequently been both willing to, and capable of, imposing such reprimands and disciplinary measures on both Hungary and Poland. The bloc and its

leadership has not shied away from resorting to measures such as the withholding of funding, fines, and similar. The catalyst for these actions, as has often been expressed quite plainly by the responsible authorities themselves, is the political situation in Hungary and Poland under the RWPPs that have governed there over extended periods of time throughout the past few decades. The concerns of the EU, in particular, appear to be rooted in a perceived democratic backsliding in each of these states; the rule of law and expansive and comprehensive judiciary reforms triggered swift responses from the former already in the same year that PiS returned to power in 2015, whereas in Hungary, EU outcry over an observable erosion of the established institutions and the separation of powers can be traced back even further, as can be seen in the EU response to Fidesz' restructuring of the Hungarian central bank in 2011.

The disciplinary tools at the EU's disposal are many, and are for the purposes of this thesis generally divided between economic sanctions on the one hand, and other, miscellaneous measures on the other. Within the former category, we find a plethora of incidents of EU usage of economic sanctions against Hungary and Poland in the relevant time period. As mentioned, these were in some cases related to concerns over the deterioration of the rule of law in the aforementioned, but, in some ways perhaps even more damningly, such moves were spurred by a perception in European leaderships that the Hungarian and Polish governments have drifted away from the core values of the EU project while under the governance of their respective RWPPs. One of the most interesting aspects of this dimension overall is that it allows us to make observations of developments just like this: instances of deteriorating views of Hungarian and Polish leadership by their neighbors and allies; had this dimension not been included, this thesis would have been restricted to a largely one-way analysis, capable only of examining the case countries' approaches to the outside world, and not the inverse. But, as mentioned, the observations made in the policy areas covered by this dimension allow us to see that the frequent imposition of sanctions and other disciplinary measures on their states has been a notable characteristic of Fidesz' and PiS' time in power. What can this tell us about the relationship between these two states and their European neighbors, though? What is definitively certain is that it does not represent an improvement in the interstate relations of these nations, on the contrary it might be a strong indicator that the relationship between them has weakened throughout the relevant timeframe. While it may seem as though this weakening has come about as a result of increasingly

diverging prioritizations and policy platforms on the domestic political turf, it appears that this divergence has had, in some cases, genuine and impactful consequences for the interstate relationships and general international standing of Hungary and Poland, as evidenced by the motion in the EP aiming to determine whether the former should even be eligible to assume the presidency of the EC in the future, under the prevailing circumstances.

In all, it seems we may thus conclude that, based on the disciplinary measures taken by the neighbors and traditional allies of the two case countries against them both, their interstate relations have indeed deteriorated. Given that the explicitly stated reason for the imposition of these measures is rooted in the track record and policy approaches of Fidesz and PiS specifically, we can also conclude, with some certainty, that within this dimension, the right-wing populist governance of the case countries has indeed resulted in a weakening of their relations with the aforementioned.

4.5. FINAL THOUGHTS

By compiling all the observations made across each of the four core dimensions explored in this thesis, a fuller and more rounded understanding of the foreign-political developments in Hungary and Poland in recent years might be obtained. Let us therefore briefly revisit each of these dimensions, and the observations made within each policy area. Within the first dimension, pertaining to international treaties and agreements, it may be gleaned that the relationship between the case countries and their neighbors and traditional allies has shifted somewhat, partly owing to the opening of alternative diplomatic paths by Hungary's Fidesz in particular, and its maintaining of close relations with governments considered to have an antagonistic relationship with the EU and NATO, such as Russia. Poland, meanwhile, appears to have been less affected by this, with PiS generally being considered an adherent of a pro-Western, and especially pro-American, foreign policy, though it, too, has advanced its relationship with certain non-allied states such as China in the relevant time period.

Moving on to the second dimension, which encompasses international trade, it can be observed that the overall value of imports and exports between the case countries and their neighbors and traditional allies have not shifted substantially during the periods in government of Fidesz and PiS. The overall value of both imports from, and exports to, the EU has increased throughout their time in power. Likewise,

the value of their trade with the five original BRICS member states has increased overall throughout the same period, though mainly due to increased imports; the total value of exports to the BRICS countries, on the other hand, has remained largely stagnant. Overall, it appears that although neither of the two case countries have experienced markedly worse trade relations with their European allies, they have seen an improvement in their trade relations with the BRICS bloc, a rival of the EU in the global market. Future studies with additional research into the overall EU trade relationships with the BRICS countries would shed more light onto whether the case of Hungary and Poland truly represents a bucking of the European trend in this dimension.

When it comes to the third dimension, which covers the international coordination of foreign and defense policy, it can here be observed, once again, that an alternative approach taken by Fidesz, including to significant military conflicts, has caused some tension between Hungary and its neighbors and traditional allies in Europe and the West. As before, PiS appears to have remained more adherent, overall, to the coordination of foreign and defense policy stipulated by organizations such as the EU and NATO. The war in Ukraine remains one of the most contentious issues here, with Hungary in particular having taken a stance that defies the EU line in several areas, and also contradicts Poland's largely pro-Ukrainian position.

Finally, regarding the fourth dimension, which pertains to the imposition of sanctions and other disciplinary measures against Hungary and Poland, it can with a strong level of certainty be concluded that the governance of Fidesz and PiS has contributed to a worsening of these countries' relations with their traditional partners; a number of major economic penalties and restrictions have been imposed on these by e.g. the EU and other bodies, for reasons directly related to aspects of their domestic governance style; allegations of authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, human rights violations, and concerns over institutional integrity and the rule of law have all fueled these reactions from the EU.

Overall, these indicators point to the following: the periods in government served by Fidesz and PiS in Hungary and Poland respectively, and the policies and approaches that have been taken as a result of these, have caused a shift in the relationship between each of these countries and their neighbors and traditional allies, including the member states of both the EU and NATO. While this much appears clear based on the findings of this research, this does still not directly answer the research question that forms part of the basis of this thesis, namely: is there a correlation

between the exercising of government foreign policy by RWPPs, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states? The research presented here can discern whether a shift in the interstate relations of Hungary and Poland has taken place, but can it provide a satisfactory answer to the aforementioned research question? This matter requires some deliberation.

In order for the conclusion of this research to be applicable to all RWPPs, and not only to those in Hungary and Poland, some degree of extrapolation is needed; we must assume that certain norms that govern the behavior of Fidesz and PiS, and that originate in their intrinsic nature, also govern the behavior of other such parties elsewhere. Based on a number of concepts presented throughout this thesis regarding the common traits observable in RWPPs across borders, this assumption may, to a certain degree, be valid. Some of these traits include the aforementioned authoritarianism, as well as nativism, sovereignism, and others. One of the core arguments supporting this position is that several of the controversies and disputes that have triggered international reprimands against the case countries have stemmed directly from their right-wing populist nature; characteristics such as illiberalism, anti-migrant, and anti-LGBT sentiment are among those linked with right-wing populism according to some of the established literature reviewed earlier in this thesis. The negative international response, including from the EU and NATO where applicable, to these positions has therefore been expressed, but on the basis of these groups pursuing political goals that largely align with right-wing populist prioritizations, and which thereby clash, in certain ways, with the established norms that define the international order in their geopolitical neighborhood. There is, therefore, much reason to assume that governance by RWPPs might have a similar effect in other states besides Hungary and Poland; this justifies the cautious extrapolation of the results presented here to other countries as well, meaning that the following can be concluded: yes, there is a correlation between the exercising of government foreign policy by right-wing populist political parties, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states. In the Hungarian and Polish cases specifically, the evidence presented in this thesis points to this shift having been towards deteriorating relations overall.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research presented here, explored within the context of a fount of established, pre-existing literature, it can be safely concluded that right-wing populist governance impacts the interstate relations of the countries in which it gains power and influence over this policy area. Right-wing populism, though defined in a multitude of variously overlapping and conflicting ways by different scholars, has proven in the last few decades to be a potent political current, and it has made inroads in the European political arena in particular throughout that timeframe. In certain Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Poland, it has gained a solid foothold in the party landscape and gained access to executive political power through the forming of governments. This development has made countries like Hungary and Poland a testing ground for right-wing populist governance, and, to the scholarly community, interesting cases that warrant closer examination. Indeed, prolonged right-wing populist governance in Hungary and Poland in particular has made them ideal objects of study that can help determine whether right-wing populist control of the foreign policy strategies of states leads to lasting shift in their foreign-political relations.

By examining some of the central dimensions of foreign policy and interstate relations, delineated based on established literature and theories, this thesis set out to answer the following question: is there a correlation between the exercising of government foreign policy by RWPPs, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states? To this end, the ruling RWPPs of Hungary and Poland, namely Fidesz and PiS, whose right-wing populist nature has been definitively established, have been closely examined. The ideational foundations, ideological motivations, and overarching political narratives of both groups have been explored, as have their practical policies and initiatives in the foreign policy sphere. Within four broad dimensions of foreign policy and interstate relations, the strategies of these RWPPs, as well as the effects of these, have been observed and discussed: 1) the establishment and ending of international treaties and agreements, 2) international trade, 3) international coordination of foreign and defense policy, and 4) the imposition of international sanctions and other disciplinary measures.

The findings of this research show that within the first of these dimensions, international treaties, the distance between the case countries and a number of their

European partners has grown somewhat throughout the years of right-wing populist rule. Fidesz and PiS' rejection of initiatives such as the GCM, and attempts by the Polish government to abandon treaties like the Istanbul Convention, have put both countries at odds with their traditional partners, and garnered them criticism from CoE officials. Fidesz' Hungarian government has also eagerly approached states from other geopolitical spheres that are by many considered illiberal and non-democratic, which is in line with its expressed skepticism towards liberal norms and the notion of liberal democracy itself. PiS' administrations, on the other hand, have largely kept Poland more closely aligned with its partners in the EU and NATO in this area. Nevertheless, both countries can be observed to have grown more distant from the other members of these organizations overall, mainly due to the aforementioned disagreements over specific international policy initiatives. As such, within this dimension, a shift in relations can be said to have taken place as a result of right-wing populist rule.

When it comes to international trade, meanwhile, certain patterns suggest that a divergence has emerged between the ruling parties and the two case countries, in particular over their relationship with Russia. Fidesz, which has often been described as sympathetic to the Russian government, has overseen relatively stable trade relations between Hungary and Russia even against the backdrop of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and consequent European sanctions on Russian trade. Poland under PiS, meanwhile, has seen its trade with Russia plummet following the 2022 invasion, more in line with both EU and NATO expectations and the historically Atlanticist track record of that party. And so, it can be deduced that in this dimension, not only have the ideologies and outlooks of these RWPPs colored their countries' interstate relations, but a shift in the relations of one of them has taken place; in this case, it is Fidesz' approach that has removed it to some degree from Poland and from its other traditional partners within the EU and NATO.

In the dimension encompassing the coordination of foreign and defense policy, it can be observed that Hungary under Fidesz, in particular, has moved quite markedly away from a number of its usual partners, owing not least to the position of that party on the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. As mentioned, Fidesz' more favorable view of the Russian administration has been widely noted, and it appears clear, from the findings of this research, that this outlook has informed its stance on the ongoing conflict in Europe's easternmost reaches. The party has been reluctant to support the Ukrainian war effort, and skeptical of imposing punitive measures on Russia, putting

it at loggerheads with the leaderships of other EU and NATO member states. Poland's PiS, once again, has largely taken a different approach, and can be considered more adherent to the stance of most Western states; it has, for instance, partaken directly in military aid missions to Ukraine, such as EUMAM Ukraine, while Hungary has not. In this dimension, overall, a shift can be observed in Hungary's foreign-political relations, but not definitively so in the relations of Poland.

Finally, concerning sanctions and disciplinary measures, the results of this research indicate that the policies pursued by the Hungarian and Polish RWPPs have had a significant impact on their countries' standing and relations with the other member states of the EU in particular, as well as with the European institutions and bodies themselves. Concerns over worsening conditions in the areas of civic and human rights, the rule of law, democratic standards, and similar, have compelled the EU to impose a number of disciplinary measures on both Hungary and Poland throughout the terms in government of their major RWPPs. Some of the domestic developments in these areas are linked by scholars to the ideologies and outlooks of the two parties, and so it appears clear that in this dimension, too, the right-wing populist nature of Fidesz and PiS can be said to have a quite direct correlation with shifting, and in this case worsening, relations between their countries and the neighbors and traditional allies of these.

Overall, it appears clear from the research presented in this thesis that marked shifts in the foreign-political relations of the two case countries have indeed taken place within the relevant timeframe; in the case of Fidesz, a shift has occurred within all four dimensions, while in the case of PiS, a clear shift has taken place within two of these. This suggests that while both countries have experienced changing relations, this development has been more dramatic in the case of Hungary than in the case of Poland. In all instances in which significant shifts can be observed, there are indications of deteriorating relations between one or both of the case countries on the one hand, and their neighbors and traditional allies on the other. Given the observably causal relationship between the right-wing populist nature of these parties and the shifts in question, it is clear that yes, in the observed cases, there is a correlation between the exercising of government foreign policy by RWPPs, and a lasting shift in their state's foreign-political relations with neighboring and allied states.

Given that certain traits of these RWPPs that have been established as inherent to all or most parties under this classification have been instrumental in bringing about these shifts, solid arguments exist for the possibility and merit of

extrapolating the findings of this research on Fidesz and PiS onto the wider right-wing populist current. It would, nevertheless, be beneficial to conduct new and even broader research into this and related topics in the future, in order to attain an even greater and more well-rounded understanding of the workings of RWPPs in contemporary politics. A slight shift in focus to observe RWPPs in states in other regions of the world, or simply RWPPs within a larger sample of states, would be beneficial. A larger, broader, and more diverse selection of samples, in particular, would help corroborate the validity of the conclusion drawn in this thesis. In furthering this research, we would not only strengthen our understanding of an increasingly powerful political force in political systems around the world, but also unlock greater knowledge of the complex and ever-changing dynamics of interstate relations as a whole.

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