

Let's Stop The Enemy!

A Critical Discourse Analytical (CDA) Case-Study of the Rhetoric of a State-Conducted Survey in Hungary, April 2017

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Abstract

In April 2017, the Hungarian government launched a national consultation entitled '*Let's stop Brussels!*' focusing on topical issues such as Brussels' prohibition of reductions in household utility charges; illegal immigration; foreign attempts to influence the domestic political scene; Brussels' attacks on tax reductions and job creation programmes in Hungary. The ruling party's intention of conducting the consultation was to gain alleged public support for the government's implementation of measures the EU has been concerned about. The present paper investigates the extent of the presence of manipulation in the rhetoric of the questionnaire of the consultation sent to Hungarian eligible voters by using van Dijk's (2006) triangulated Critical Discourse Analytical (CDA) approach. Van Dijk's three-layered approach to the investigation of manipulation in discourse is an integrated theory that establishes links between three different dimensions of manipulation: society, cognition and discourse. The findings of the study show that in all the three dimensions various rhetorical tools of manipulation were applied in the text of the national consultation.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), rhetoric, manipulation

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1 Introduction

In April 2017, the Hungarian government launched a national consultation¹ entitled ‘*Let’s stop Brussels!*’ to ask the opinion of the Hungarian electorate about economic and legal issues. The consultation, whose cost of conducting rose to 29 million Euros,² covered topics such as public utility charges, illegal immigration, the transparency of international organisations, and Brussels’ alleged attacks on tax reductions and job creation programmes in Hungary. The Hungarian Prime Minister found it crucial to conduct the consultation “on the five dangers”³ Hungary was claimed to face that year by arguing that external forces were trying to “take rights away in many fields from the member states [of the European Union], endangering national sovereignty”.⁴ In the consultation, the threatening external force was named to be Brussels.

The present study investigates whether there is any level of manipulation applied in the questionnaire of the national consultation sent to eligible Hungarian voters in April 2017. The qualitative analysis was carried out by applying van Dijk’s (2006) triangulated method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Van Dijk’s three-layered CDA approach to the investigation of manipulation in discourse is an integrated theory that establishes links between three different dimensions of manipulation: society, cognition, and discourse. The CDA framework goes beyond examining mere textual elements that occur in the discourse, thus allowing a text to be evaluated as manipulative in terms of its context categories.

In the first part of the study, the terms ‘manipulation’ and ‘rhetoric’ are clarified in order to illuminate the scope of their use in the present analysis. Next, it is argued why the CDA approach was chosen as the framework of the current inquiry. More specifically, the threefold model by van Dijk (2006) is presented in detail with the aim of showing the dimensions on which the investigation rests. Subsequently, the presence of manipulation in the discourse of the national consultation is explored by examining the balance in its participants and in the information shared; by considering its influence on social cognition; and by revealing the rhetorical techniques applied in the discourse of the set of questions. Since Prime Minister Orbán is regarded as the leader “who

¹ Between May 2010 and December 2017, the Orbán government commissioned the conduct of seven national consultations (Körösenyi 2018, 12).

² The direct cost of conducting the consultation was 3 million Euros; however, the Hungarian governments spent another 26 million Euros on campaigning against Brussels. (Source: Cabinet Office <http://www.kormanyhivatal.hu/download/b/9a/b3000/vallalkozasiszerzodes.pdf>; Magyar Nemzet, 29 September 2017. Accessed 23 November 2018. <https://mno.hu/belfold/felrevezeto-az-uj-konzultaciosorosrol-es-terverol-2419168>;))

³ Source: Cabinet Office of the PM, MTI (Hungarian State News Agency), 21 February 2017. Accessed 23 November 2018. <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/national-consultation-to-be-launched-on-threats-faced-by-hungary>

⁴ Source: <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/kormanyzat/> 28 March 2017. In English: https://bbj.hu/politics/hungarian-govt-to-launch-stop-brussels-consultation_130873; 30 March 2017. Accessed 23 November 2018.

transformed Hungary into a textbook case of authoritarian populism” (Ádám 2018, 2), populist traits of the manipulative elements of the text of the consultation are shown as well. The text of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

2 Review of the Literature

2.1 The Nature of Manipulation

In the broad sense of the word, manipulation, understood as a social phenomenon, is the act of controlling and influencing people and situations in a skilful manner. In this sense, no value judgement can be attached to it. Manipulation, the power to influence others through interactions and typically through a communicative practice,⁵ can be seen as neither good nor bad. Simons et al. (2001, 7) suggest that manipulation, based on the notion of persuasion, is “a dialogue between two parties,” thus it is not a one-way, forceful coercion of power. In a similar manner, Parker (1972, 74), who defined manipulation as an action which includes the intention or “desire to fortify or to alter the existing behavior of another,” considered most human actions to be manipulative in nature. With such an understanding, Parker (1972) explicitly sought to dispense with the usual pejorative connotation attached to manipulation. In this broad sense of the term, manipulation, the use of one’s power to influence others, is viewed as an ethically neutral action. To justify this position, Parker listed several situations where manipulation is appropriate and even beneficial to society. People suffering from emotionally or mentally distressing conditions voluntarily bring themselves as patients under the control of a psychologist or a psychiatrist; students eager to acquire knowledge allow themselves to be manipulated by the instructions of professors; also, a marriage relationship or a parent-child relationship is based on the continuous effort of exercising power on the partner or the family member in the relationship. Manipulation in settings where manipulators are willingly solicited for their expertise, knowledge, or experience conforms to social norms, thus such type of manipulation can evidently be viewed as a socially legitimate form of manipulation (Dillard and Pfau, 2002).

In the narrower sense, however, the term manipulation carries negative connotations by denoting an unethical form of behaviour. Walton (2007, 21) condemns manipulation as a dishonest course of action that uses “deceptive argumentation tactics to unfairly get the best” of an opponent or to “deceive a mass audience” (ibid., 1). In a similar vein, Simpser (2014), who analyses why governments manipulate elections, defines manipulation as an instrument of political control. Van Dijk (2006) characterises the manipulator

⁵ The present study deals with the notion of manipulation in the symbolic sense, not in the physical sense. That is, the case study investigates discursive influences in social interactions rather than the various physical forms of handling or operating objects skilfully by one’s hands, as the etymology of the word implies.

from two different aspects. On the one hand, a manipulator is an agent who exercises control over other people against their will or fully conscious will. In cases of illegitimate manipulation, the participants of the dialogue are not free to believe or act as they please. This stands in contrast with legitimate forms of manipulation, where the interlocutors are not under control as to their beliefs and actions. In the various forms of socially legitimate manipulation the interlocutors themselves seek assistance. However, the victims of manipulation tend to lack essential resources to resist, to avoid or even to detect being manipulated as they are unaware of the real intentions of the manipulator. On the other hand, according to van Dijk (2006), a manipulator dominates other people against their best interest. Thus, manipulation in the narrower sense definitely involves the abuse of power.

Approaches characterising manipulation in the narrower sense along similar aspects proposed by van Dijk (the lack of willingness on the part of the victim and the lack of benevolence on the part of the manipulator) have a long history in the philosophy of persuasion. Kastely (2015, 5) warns that in Plato's *Republic* manipulation should be distinguished from persuasion. The purpose of the former is to change "the audience by imposing an outside order" on it, while the aim of persuasion is to "allow the audience to understand and embrace the order that is proposed to it." In other words, persuasion for Plato enables internalisation, while manipulation does not. The difference between the two actions stems from the different nature of persuasion and manipulation. Persuasion in the *Republic* is the act of a two-way collaborative effort, while manipulation is the one-way imposition of arguments on a party (ibid., 225). Besides the lack of internalisation, manipulation can be further discerned from persuasion by the intention of the interlocutor who attempts to introduce the order on the other party. While persuasion seeks to guide people in the "care of their souls" (ibid., 208), manipulation does not have such a noble aim. In the case of persuasion, internalisation combined with the genuine goodness of the persuader results in the shaping of fundamental values, beliefs and desires of the persuaded, who, in consequence, becomes ethically more refined for Plato.⁶ In contrast, manipulation does not bring morally appreciable fruits in the person manipulated.

Keeping the negative connotations of the term manipulation in focus, the present study uses the term in the narrower sense, maintaining its historically conventional undertone filled with the pejoratives described above.

⁶ The same can be observed in the *Apology*, where Socrates names his principal activity as the persuasion of his fellow citizens that leads to the good of the city. "For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state." (Plato, 30b)

2.2 The Means of Manipulation: Rhetoric

Since manipulation is typically a communicative practice, the means of manipulation is the art of verbal persuasion, rhetoric (McLean 2001). Conventionally, it is rhetoric that makes an argument effective in persuading the target audience (Tindale 2004). Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2001) also propose the view that rhetoric is a persuasive effort in order not to lose a discussion. More than five decades ago, Kennedy (1963, 7) emphasised that whenever persuasion is the purpose, “rhetoric is present.” Thus, rhetoric, “the collection of techniques of manipulation” (Parker 1972, 78), appears to be a neutral term. To effectively reach one’s aims through communication does not entail a deprecatory connotation.

However, the term rhetoric is not without heavily charged, negative connotations in the history of philosophy. Since the 4th century BC, rhetoric has been depreciated and even rejected by philosophers. Plato, whose condemnation of rhetoric is noticeable in many of his dialogues (Krabbe 2000), denied in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric was an art at all (454b1) and explained it was mere flattery (*kolakeia*), a fake counterpart of justice (463a6). Plato’s fierce criticism of rhetoric was targeted against its feature of not having any subject matter of its own, for which reason Plato argued that rhetoric cannot present truth. In Plato’s language, rhetoric deals with illusion and belief rather than true knowledge. For Plato, the notion of rhetoric became connected with shallowness, deception and immorality. Kennedy (1963, 23) insists that modern readers of Plato cannot side with rhetoric since it appears to be mere “verbal dexterity, empty pomposity,” a communicative activity which bears moral ambivalence. The rhetorician who is capable of achieving any sort of end by the means of his skilful eloquence is easy to be disapproved of morally. Plato’s objection to the rhetorician attacks the sophists, itinerant teachers who taught rhetorical techniques of argumentation. Traveller teachers who gave instruction in public speaking were infamous for teaching rhetorical tricks rather than philosophical truth or justice. Despite teaching the practicalities of oratory, the sophists were criticised for using fallacious arguments and for trading on the biases of audiences. Due to their lack of moral rectitude, the art of the sophists is depicted as “a seriously tainted and practically compromised knack” (Hohmann 2000, 234). Sophists were claimed to teach how to exercise power by deception, by making the worse argument appear to be the stronger to the audience. Eloquence without a righteous character was treated suspiciously since the ability to display erroneous actions in an attractive manner has the power to pose a potential danger. In the *Phaedrus*,⁷ Plato’s harsh disparagement of rhetoric became less rough. In this dialogue, rhetoric is at least considered as a faculty of persuasion. It was Aristotle who lessened the hostility against rhetoric. Aristotle acknowledged the usefulness of rhetoric as a tool, which he defined as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject what-

⁷ Plato, 260a – 277a

ever” (*Rhetoric* 1355b2). Aristotle did not find rhetoric to be the diametric opposite of philosophy but treated the two in a gently compromising union by claiming that those who expose truth have an obligation to be persuasive as well.

The present study adopts the Aristotelian view on rhetoric in so far as the analysis does not treat rhetoric as an unworthy or suspicious subject but appreciates it as the art of engaging the audience with a greater power of persuasion. Yet, the case study investigates the presence of manipulation in the narrower sense in the discourse of a 21st-century national consultation, thus the rhetorical techniques applied skilfully in this context bear negative connotations.

3 Methods

3.1 The Approach of Analysing Discourse: Critical Discourse Analysis

The conceptual contours between manipulative discourse and persuasive discourse do not appear to be entirely distinct. What deepens the fuzziness of the terms is the fact that the difference between the two often depends on the situation in which they were articulated. Thus, the mere analysis of a text on its own cannot result in definite answers about the extent of manipulation in it. For this reason, a discourse analytical approach was applied in the present investigation which allows for a more complex inquiry. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which particularly aims to reveal relations between discourse and society, sets out to examine “group relations of power, dominance and inequality, and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk” (van Dijk 1995, 18). The typically inter- or multidisciplinary CDA approach investigates not only discourse but its functions in society as well by dealing with “the discursive conditions, components and consequences of power abuse by dominant (elite) groups and institutions” (ibid., 24). The last two decades have seen the exploration of various relations regarding the abuse of power by discursive means.⁸ The CDA approach, whose foundation rests on the ethics of discourse (van Dijk 2006), is particularly appropriate for the present study as the CDA framework uncovers the various strategies of manipulation, the manufacture of consent, and other discursive techniques powerful groups use to influence people against their best interest.

⁸ To mention the most prominently researched fields within the CDA approach, Fairclough analysed the relations between language and power; Chilton worked on critical studies of political discourse; Wodak studied institutional power, male dominance, racism, anti-Semitism; van Dijk considered racism, media, relations between discourse and ideology; while Fisher & Todd investigated professional language and discourse.

3.2 The Method of Analysing Manipulation in Discourse

Strictly speaking, the CDA approach is not a method but a framework which gives space to the application of various analytical methods in the exploration of different layers of discursively enacted dominance. Van Dijk's (2006) threefold approach was chosen for the present analysis as it has the potential to yield more precise answers about the extent in which a text is manipulative. The three layers in van Dijk's (2006) model are society, cognition, and discourse. Emphasising the integrated nature of the CDA approach, all the three layers are recommended by van Dijk (2001) to be examined in an analysis.

The first layer, society, recognises the fact that discourse takes place between groups, not between individual actors. In van Dijk's (2006) model, manipulation is a form of social domination in public discourse, which reproduces inequality. The social aspect of manipulation refers to the act of "elite power reproduction that is against the best interest of dominated groups" (*ibid.*, 364) carried out via the abuse of power. The model deals with the exploration of the ways of social control of less powerful groups by dominant groups, that is, by people in positions of power. Yet, the examination of influential psychological factors, such as the personality of the manipulator, is beyond the scope of the analysis. Focusing on the social aspect of manipulation, the manipulative actions of individual social actors are not analysed, either. It is also important to note that the presence of manipulation in a discourse is not evaluated on the basis of the intention of the speaker but on that of the social consequences of the discourse. Socially speaking, the manipulation of public discourse is characterised by the lack of balance regarding both the participants and the information shared. Typically, the manipulative control of participants in public discourse takes the form of disproportionate control of mass media, which marginalises alternative voices; while the lop-sidedness in the control of information means providing a) incomplete, b) biased, or c) distorted information rather than duly adequate information.

The second layer in van Dijk's (2006) CDA model for the analysis of manipulation concerns the manipulation of cognition. The basic analytical categories of cognition in the model involve 1) short-term memory (STM) processing, 2) episodic memory, and 3) social cognition. The processing of discourse in the STM results in understanding, thus manipulation at this level means either the impairment of understanding of the discourse or the unbalanced facilitation of understanding of certain parts of the information which will result in a biased understanding of a text or talk. In contrast, episodic or personal memory constitutes part of our long-term memory (LTM), which is noteworthy as our knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies are constructed in relation with our personal mental models. Manipulation at this level denotes the promotion of the formation of subjective mental models preferred by a powerful group, which results in the limitation of the freedom of interpretation for the individual. Social cognition, however, refers to general and abstract beliefs, such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, and values shared by a social group. Van Dijk (2006) ranks the manipulation of social cognition as the "most influential form" (*ibid.*, 368) of the three categories.

First, socially shared representations or beliefs are “far more stable” than specific, individual mental models of a person as they stay the same for a relatively long period of time. Second, socially shared beliefs influence the individual personal mental models and attitudes, thus with their manipulation the costly multiple manipulation of individuals remains unnecessary for the dominant manipulative social group. Among the discursive strategies of manipulating social cognition, van Dijk lists a) generalisations, b) strong polarisation and c) the distribution of partial, misguided, and biased knowledge. In the case of generalisation, a specific case is generalised to attitudes or ideologies in the interest of a powerful group. Strong polarisation involves the creation of a sense of community where the group denoted as ‘we’ is depicted as innocent, while ‘the other’ social group is shown as guilty. The third type of strategy aims at adopting a specific social representation by impeding people to acquire critical general knowledge.

The third layer in van Dijk’s (2006) model concerns manipulative discourse strategies. According to the CDA framework, the discourse strategies of a text or talk are assessed as manipulative along their context categories and not merely along their textual structures. To produce a biased record of events, the means of creating a positive self-representation and a negative other-representation appears to be an effective manipulative strategy. Van Dijk (2006) offers a range of discourse levels at which polarisation patterns can be analysed: macro speech act, local speech act, semantic macrostructure, local meaning, lexicon, local syntax, rhetorical figures, and expressions. The list of potentially manipulative discourse strategies is not exhaustive, and van Dijk (2006) proposes that it is the choice of the analyst to consider which ones are worth examining.

In the present study, I will both implement the theoretical CDA background of van Dijk’s (2006) model and employ its qualitative methods, the three-layered model used for the analysis of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s speech of March 2003, which gave legitimisation for the UK to enter into war against Iraq. As emphasised by van Dijk (2006), social representations have a crucial importance in the course of manipulation, thus manipulation most typically focuses on social cognition. The current analysis examines the discursive tools used in the national consultation which have the power to manipulatively influence shared knowledge of the people. That is, within the second layer of van Dijk’s (2006) model the third category (social cognition) is investigated; while manipulation of the short-term memory or that of personal mental models does not form part of the inquiry. Table 1 summarises the items from Van Dijk’s (2006) triangulated model which were applied in the present research to reveal the extent of the presence of manipulation in the national consultation conducted in April 2017 in Hungary.

LAYERS	Characteristics of manipulation	
1) Society	A) Lack of balance: participants	
	B) Lack of balance: information	a) incomplete information b) biased information c) distorted information
2) Cognition	Social cognition	a) generalisations b) strong polarisation c) the distribution of partial, misguided and biased knowledge
3) Discourse	Rhetorical techniques	Lexicon: a) verbs and actions b) adjectives and adverbs

Table 1: The items from Van Dijk's (2006) triangulated model characterising manipulation that were applied in the present study.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Layer 1: Society

4.1.1 Participants

From the social aspect, manipulation of public discourse can be characterised by strengthening inequality by means of creating an absence of balance regarding the participants. In the case of the Hungarian national consultation conducted in April 2017, imbalance in terms of the participants was highly typical. The governing party held a national consultation rather than calling for a referendum. One of the major differences between the two forms of voting lies in the degree in which the opinion of the citizens bears consequences. The second most important distinguishing feature of the two types of public expression of opinion is the level of transparency. In the case of a referendum, citizens vote for or against a measure proposed by a legislative body. A group of legally responsible counting officers conduct the verification and the count of the votes. The transparency of the voting process is ensured by supervising bodies, who pay special attention to guaranteeing that no unlawful steps are taken during the conduct of the referendum. Since the result of the referendum is binding, the electorate can reach the adoption of a new law.

In marked contrast, the nature of a national consultation offers the possibility of increasing one-sidedness in the process of recording the opinion of the people. In the April 2017 national consultation, none of the six questions in the consultation initiated

by the government contained specific measures. As a result, the electorate could not express their opinion about an explicit legislative plan to be introduced. Also, the way of conducting the voting process gave rise to serious concerns about the trustworthiness of the result at several points. First, casting a vote in the consultation was possible by either sending the questionnaire back to the government by post or by electronically answering the questions on the government website.⁹ The electronic version of the consultation, however, allowed citizens to register their votes multiple times. In fact, voters could express their opinion electronically as many times as they pleased.¹⁰ Second, verification and counting of the votes were not carried out by legally accountable officers.¹¹ Third, the data were not made available to the public. The government website failed to make the results of the consultation open to public scrutiny.¹² Moreover, the government refused to answer official letters requesting public data, e.g. the raw statistical data of the consultation¹³ or even the number of votes cast electronically or that of questionnaires sent back by post.¹⁴ Fourth, no supervising body was set up to observe the quality of conducting the consultation. Thus, the transparency of the voting procedure was not safeguarded by any means whatsoever.

The act of conducting a national consultation on matters of public policy bears the trait of populism. Mudde (2004, 543) defines populism as “an ideology [...] which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” However, as Müller (2016, 101) warns, calling for referenda does not necessarily mean the initiation of “an open-ended process of democratic will-formation among citizens.” The fact that a consultation and not a referendum was held to delineate the will of the people indicates that the government did not encourage people for more participation in politics but endeavoured to confirm what they had “already determined the will of the real people to be” (ibid., 101).

The two cardinal principles of populism according to Shils (1956), the supremacy of the will of the people and the concept of the direct relationship between people

⁹ <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/hirek/matol-interneten-is-kitoltheto-a-nemzeti-konzultacios-kerdoiv>

¹⁰ An investigative TV programme tested the same electronic voting system of the next national consultation conducted between October and December 2017. It was possible to register votes to an unlimited extent, and the investigative journalists cast 81 votes within an hour. Yet, the government announced there were no serious problems with the reliability of the electronic voting system. <https://mno.hu/belfold/nemzeti-konzultacio-konnyu-kijatszani-a-rendszert-2420433>

¹¹ The paper questionnaires sent back to the government by post were processed by the National Infocommunications Service Company Ltd., an ICT provider in the public sector. https://kimittud.atlatszo.hu/request/nemzeti_konzultacio_2?unfold=1#incoming-14045

¹² After conducting the consultation, the government website contained no precise information about the answers given to the six questions. Not until eight months later, data was hyperlinked to the official website of the consultation by the Cabinet Office of the PM. Confusingly enough, these hyperlinked data reveal information about another consultation conducted between October and December 2017 and the results of the consultation conducted in April cannot be reached. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/hirek/matol-interneten-is-kitoltheto-a-nemzeti-konzultacios-kerdoiv>; <http://nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu>

¹³ https://kimittud.atlatszo.hu/request/2017_evi_nemzeti_konzultacio_adat#incoming-13876

¹⁴ https://kimittud.atlatszo.hu/request/nemzeti_konzultacio_2?unfold=1#incoming-14045

and the government, are manifestly present in the national consultation. Conducting the consultation meant the reinforcement of a direct, personal relationship with the electorate by sending each eligible voter a letter signed by the Prime Minister. Asking the opinion of the people individually promoted the notion of the paramountcy of the will of the people.

Furthermore, Körösényi (2018) reveals that the Prime Minister's apparent direct link to the people by sending letters to the electorate is an element of the plebiscitary character of the regime. Körösényi (2018, 12) also emphasises the marked difference between national consultations and referenda, the former lacking "formal legal regulation, transparency, and controllability" and whose "outcomes place no obligation on the government." Such a plebiscitary tool, Körösényi (*ibid.*, 12) argues, allows for its arbitrary use by the Prime Minister to "legitimise his politics and public policy."

In conclusion, launching a national consultation rather than conducting a referendum meant the choice of carrying out a one-way social communication procedure, the one-sided imbalance of which regarding the participants of the communication is a clear sign of social manipulation. Despite the fact that Hungarian voters were asked, the opinion of the electorate was not considered for the adoption of new laws or regulations. The questionnaire of the consultation contained no planned future measures at all. In accordance with the nature of consultations, the final result bore no legal consequences. Yet, the consultation results were used by the government as a means to promote and apparently legitimise their previous moves. However, the complete lack of transparency of the voting procedure gave rise to obvious worries about the reliability of the survey and presented a cause for concern about the trustworthiness of the result.

4.1.2 Information

In social terms, the dissemination of imbalanced information is another sign of manipulation of public discourse in van Dijk's (2006) model. The questionnaire of the April 2017 consultation is structured in such a way that each of the six questions is preceded by one or two statements which depict an alarming situation. Apparently, these disturbing accounts of the state of affairs gave the incentive for the government to ask the questions from the electorate. According to Albertazzi (2008, 5), the act of evoking a sense of imminent crisis along with the notion of the distressing urgency to solve or avoid the catastrophe is a distinguishing feature of populism. In questionnaires, prefacing a question with a descriptive statement places the question in a particular context, which then can no longer be treated as neutral. In the text of the national consultation, an emphatic danger is stressed in each descriptive account. Walton considers the creation of context in polling as giving the question a "spin" (2007, 240), thus categorising this manipulative technique under the fallacy of the question structure bias.

Regarding the balance of transmitting factually correct information to the public, the April 2017 consultation spread not only unbalanced, incomplete, or biased information, but even factually distorted allegations, which the European Commission in

its document entitled ‘Facts Matter’¹⁵ officially assessed as “highly misleading.” In each context-creating account preceding the six questions, the European Commission found and explicitly warned about a false claim which lacked truthful information. The first question falsely claimed that “Brussels wants to force us to abolish the reduction in public utility charges” despite the fact that the Commission strives to ensure affordable energy prices for households. The second question gave a false account of the European Union’s migration policy by stating that “Brussels wants to force Hungary to let in illegal immigrants” even if the EU obviously fights irregular migration and provides aid to its member states to successfully protect their external borders from illegal trespassers. The third question disseminated distorted information about the EU’s policy regarding human trafficking by declaring that “Illegal immigrants heading to Hungary are encouraged to illegal acts by not just the human traffickers but also by some international organisations,” whereas, in reality, the EU does not at all tolerate human trafficking and overtly takes stern measures in order to eliminate such criminal activity. The fourth question misled the public about the EU’s responsibility regarding the activities of non-governmental organisations by affirming that “More and more organisations supported from abroad operate in Hungary with the aim to interfere in Hungarian internal affairs in a non-transparent manner”. In fact, it is the responsibility of each member state to create the legal environment in which non-governmental organisations operate in that member state.¹⁶ It is the national legislation and not the EU that defines the exact conditions of operation. Moreover, the EU is firm about maintaining strict rules on transparency. The fifth question spread incorrect information about the EU’s employment policy by maintaining that “Brussels is attacking our job-creating measures,” despite the fact that neither the Commission, nor the European Union was doing so. As the ‘Facts Matter’ document pinpoints, the last question created a false image about the EU’s taxation policies by asserting that “Brussels is attacking our country because of tax cuts.” The claim is evidently false as the European Commission makes no interference in national taxation policies. EU taxation rules, in practice, must be agreed by all member states unanimously, that is, all current EU taxation rules were approved by the Hungarian government as well.

The government was asked in writing¹⁷ to support the six allegations disseminated in the consultation by quoting the appropriate rules, regulations, or resolutions of the EU which the government interpreted as dangerous. In their answer, the Cabinet Office of the PM failed to make mention of any EU legislation.¹⁸ Instead, the government

¹⁵ First published 27 April 2017 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation_en

¹⁶ At the time of conducting the consultation, NGOs operating in Hungary were already obliged to make their budget transparent on their websites in order to continue their operations. Thus, the government’s call for transparency is beyond comprehensibility.

¹⁷ https://kimitud.atlatszo.hu/request/a_nemzeti_konzultacio_2017_kerde

¹⁸ http://www.kormany.hu/download/3/8d/01000/NK_2017_A4_v05.pdf

denounced the European Commission's response to the national consultation¹⁹ to be a "highly misleading opinion, which conceals or distorts fundamental facts."²⁰

In conclusion, the transition of balanced information was not characteristic of the questionnaire at all. On the contrary, all the questions of the national consultation were based on distorted or false information. The act of placing statements before the consultation questions, which create a one-sided and uneven context, is another technique which contributes to manipulation. Moreover, the fact that each account preceding the questions failed to spread truthful claims is an indubitable sign of the heavy presence of manipulation in the consultation.

4.2 Layer 2: Social cognition

4.2.1 Generalisation

The second layer in van Dijk's (2006) model focuses on the manipulation of cognition. Among the three analytical categories, the abusive influence of social cognition, i.e. the authoritative domination of general and abstract beliefs such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values shared by a social group, is considered to be the most powerful. The national consultation launched in April 2017 was not without examples of generalisations. Rather than focusing on clear, specific examples, the consultation made use of more abstract, generalised notions. It is important to note that the application of generalisations is a rhetorical technique characteristic of non-manipulative and legitimately manipulative discourse as well. However, in such cases the use of generalisations helps the better understanding of a situation or a process through the introduction of general terms which distinctly focus on the main features required to be comprehended. As van Dijk (2006) warns, generalisation is considered to be manipulative when it creates socially shared fears and/or increases the sense of threat.

In the national consultation, five of the six accounts of the troublesome situations prefacing the questions include generalisations. All the five instances of generalisations manipulate citizens into believing that their lives are exposed to imminent perils. In question two, voters get to know that "in recent times terror attack after terror attack has taken place in Europe". Question three imparts the information that "there are international organisations which, without any consequences, urge the circumvention of Hungarian laws". Question four allegedly claims that "more and more foreign-supported organisations operate in Hungary with the aim of interfering in the interna-

¹⁹ 'Facts Matter' First published 27 April 2017 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/stop-brussels-european-commission-responds-hungarian-national-consultation_en

²⁰ <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/hirek/nemzeti-konzultacio-kormanyzati-reakcio-az-europai-bizottsag-allasfoglalasara>

tional affairs of our country in an opaque manner.”²¹ While question five asserts that “Brussels is attacking our job-creating measure.”

What all the five threatening generalisations have in common is that none of the inferences refer to any specific incident, and neither of them are concluded from the analysis of particular events. The claims of the generalisations are insufficiently factual, thus they cannot be subject to analysis. Due to the lack of relying on any specific examples, the accurateness of the statements and that of the conclusions of the accounts cannot be investigated at all. The evasion of resorting to exact cases creates the possibility of a sciamachy, where arguments are directed at an imaginary opponent. As the shadowy adversary figures are lacking all explicitness, people themselves cannot directly take part in the debate challenging the threatening enemies. This inertness can evoke the feeling of helplessness in the people and thus increases a sense of dependence on a protective power. Ágh (2019, TBC) underscores the tendency of the Orbán government to strengthen its position by creating enemy images through skilful “negative communication strategies.”

In sum, the questionnaire contains a plethora of generalisations which all aim to mount socially shared tensions and fears. The generalisations create intangible enemies that catalyse a feeling of helplessness and dependence. None of the generalisations help the better understanding of a situation by purposefully focusing on its main features. Thus, the use of generalisations is a pronounced rhetorical technique of manipulation in the consultation.

4.2.2 Strong Polarisation

Apart from the use of generalisations, van Dijk (2006) lists strong polarisation among the discursive strategies of manipulating social cognition. The national consultation abounds in instances of disseminating polarised perspectives to the electorate. All of the accounts of the distressing situations which introduce the six questions heavily rely on a polarised, dichotomous worldview. According to the questionnaire, the two parties of the polarised world are Brussels and the conductor of the consultation, the Hungarian government. The two are illustrated as entirely different from each other. Brussels is portrayed as a powerful enemy of the Hungarian nation, while the ruling Hungarian party is represented as a conscientious, independent force that takes care of its nation by conducting a consultation which, in the government’s narrative, could prevent Brussels’ abuse of power.

The polarised view of the questionnaire makes mention of other agents besides Hungary and Brussels, who make the division between the two powers even sharper. The agents connected to Brussels are characterised by the ability to cause harm and commit

²¹ It is a rightful question to ask why the compiler of the questionnaire did not take legal action against the unknown agents of the specific criminal acts rather than conducting a national consultation about the alleged illegal activities.

actions which are not authorised by law. The agents supporting Brussels in the accounts of the consultation are criminal subjects, such as illegal immigrants (Q2, Q3), human traffickers (Q3), international organisations which help illegal immigration (Q3), and international organisations which interfere in Hungarian internal affairs and jeopardise Hungarian independence (Q4). Additionally, large companies (Q1) also appear as agents giving assistance to Brussels by inflicting injury on the Hungarian nation through their abuse of power in increasing Hungarian public utility charges. As it appears in the narrative of the consultation, Brussels is not without allies, with five different types of agents backing them in committing alarming deeds forbidden by law. In comparison, the consultation construes the view that Hungarian people can rely on nothing else but Hungarian authorities (Q2). The dichotomous, polarised nature of the narrative of the consultation can be identified as a populist feature. In Albertazzi's (2008, 117) definition of populism, the populist ideology contrasts "virtuous and homogeneous people" with "dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice." In a similar manner, when characterising populism, Panizza (2005, 3) also stresses the importance of the "other that is deemed to oppress or exploit the people."

The narrative applies such a polarised view where Hungary is left alone, and apart from the Hungarian authorities, not even one single powerful agent supports the people of Hungary, who are in danger of imminent, serious criminal attacks. Hungarians are represented as vulnerable yet unassisted, without the support of cooperating powers. Rather than being backed by allying agents, the Hungarian government is linked with agentless, indefinite notions in the questionnaire. Each of the six situations preceding the questions in the consultation contains a concept which attaches a positive, yet abstract idea to the Hungarian agent: reduction of public utility charges (Q1); safety (Q2); responsibility and consequences (Q3, Q4); independence (Q4); job creation (Q5); own strategies (Q5); and tax cuts (Q6). These ideas depict the Hungarian authorities in a favourable light and increase the tension between the two extremes of the pole: an exceptionally powerful Brussels, backed by criminal allies, that attacks a helpless but responsible government, which aims to increase the standards of living of its nation against all adversities. The mission of the promotion of public good against dangerous "others" is another characteristic feature of populism (Albertazzi 2008, 84).

The strongly polarised worldview of the consultation does not serve the better understanding of the troubling situations by reducing their complexity to a stable but simple binary, since the seemingly impassable division (Brussels vs. Hungary) relies on a false dichotomy. By the use of a false dichotomy, an artificial binary choice is presented, where two options are shown despite the fact that many other alternatives exist. The nature of a false dichotomy is well characterised by its other names, "the black and white fallacy" or "the fallacy of simplistic alternatives" (Walton 2007, 244). A false dichotomy typically offers the two options as mutually exclusive, either black or white. The choice between the alternatives often poses no severe dilemma since they

are depicted as extremes, one of them as a solution, while the other is shown as an obviously unattractive ruin. Van Dijk's (2006) model does not identify the construction and the application of false dichotomies as a manipulative discourse strategy. Since false dichotomies powerfully manipulate cognition, I consider it worthwhile to distinguish this discursive strategy as a special class of creating strong polarisation, thus I apply an extension to van Dijk's (2006) taxonomy within the cognition layer.

In the case of the consultation, a false dichotomy was created by opposing Brussels with Hungary. Such a binary is evidently false, since the EU is definitely not a conquering power and its member states decided democratically to join the Union.²² Moreover, contrary to what the false dichotomy of the consultation suggests, decisions in the EU are not made irrespective of the member states' decisions and votes. For this reason, the allegedly opposed parties are definitely not mutually exclusive but form a part-whole relationship.

In sum, the questionnaire of the consultation extensively applies generalisations. All the six questions are contextualised in a polarised world, where the narrative of the polarisation strengthens the sense of threat and increases the feeling of fear and vulnerability. Thus, the discourse of the consultation manipulates people into believing that they need a protecting agent.

4.2.3 Partial, Misguided and Biased Knowledge

Among the discourse strategies that manipulate social cognition, apart from the use of generalisation and strong polarisation, van Dijk (2006) enumerates the distribution of partial, misguided and biased knowledge. The questionnaire of the national consultation clearly distributes partial knowledge from a one-sided perspective since it completely avoids disseminating balanced arguments. All the six alarming situations preceding the questions are presented without listing even one single counterargument. Only that approach which is in the best interest of the government in terms of justifying their actions in the past is presented. Offering various and potentially differing aspects for public analysis is completely omitted in the accounts of the questionnaire. Thus, the recipients are not adequately informed, i.e. manipulation resides in the lack of providing potentially critical general knowledge. Absolute partiality and the complete lack of balance in the argumentation blocks any debate of the alleged problems.

Sunstein (2007) argues that in a democracy, as long as it is a well-functioning system of free expression, people should face unexpected and specifically unselected encounters of topics and opinions. Even if people find the presented points of view irritating, the "unanticipated encounters enrich [...] the public sphere by creating a kind of shared text of issues and information that in turn facilitates [...] dialogue amongst citizens"

²² Hungary joined the EU in 2004, when 83.76% of the voters expressed their will for the country to become a member state. (Source: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/hungary_en)

(Sunstein 2007, 5). The argument warns that one-sidedness in the selection of topics, points of view, and arguments enhances extremism in society and, in turn, undermines democracy. Spreading partial information might be an effective tool of manipulation, yet it is troubling for democracy. As Ágh (2019, TBC) observes, the decline of democracy and “the damages done to democratisation in Hungary by the ruling hard populist party” after the elections in 2010 was noted by international ranking institutes.²³ In defence of supporting one-sidedness, the Hungarian Prime Minister gave reasons why he himself refused dialogues and discussions by stating that “What needs to be done is obvious; no debate about values or weighing of empirical evidence (sic!) is required” (Orbán, as cited in Müller 2016, 26). Since the PM’s avoidance of debates did not occur once as a singular, isolated case but forms a habitual disposition, his conscious refraining from public debates is treated as a sign of populism by Müller (2016).

In conclusion, the omission of facts and points of view unfavourable to the powerful social group results in a biased body of knowledge in the consultation, which manipulatively hinders discussion, prevents a better understanding of the proposed situations, and manipulates people into believing that the government’s policies are justified.

4.2.4 Layer 3: Discourse: Lexicon: Verbs and Actions

The third layer in van Dijk’s (2006) triangulated model for the analysis of manipulation in public discourse regards manipulative rhetorical strategies. The present analysis examines the rhetorical strategies which create a positive self-representation and a negative other-representation at a lexical level both by investigating the implications of the choice of verbs and actions and by exploring the connotations of the use of the adjectives and adverbs in the text of the consultation. In the questionnaire, all the verbs connected to Brussels express actions and none of them are static verbs referring to states or mere existence. The excessive use of active verbs creates the image that ‘the Other’ is deliberately engaged in activities to achieve its aim. Besides conveying the impression of the capability of the pursuit of action, all the verbs used in relation to Brussels suggest aggression. The activities of Brussels in the narrative of the consultation appear to be violent. ‘The Other’ is depicted as an agent capable of confrontation, one who is likely to attack Hungary. The majority of the aggressive actions carry the alarming message that the hostile intent of Brussels is planned to be carried out illegally. As the consultation claims, Brussels “wants to force us to let in illegal immigrants” (Q2), it “encourages” immigrants to illegal acts (Q3), supports international organisations to “urge the circumvention of Hungarian laws” (Q3); gives them “support with the aim to interfere in

²³ BF, Bertelsmann Foundation (2017) Hungary country report, http://www.sgi-network.org/docs/2017/country/SGI2017_Hungary.pdf EIU, Economist Intelligence Unit (2017) Democracy Index 2016, http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2016 FH, Freedom House (2017) Breaking Down Democracy: Goals, Strategies, and Methods of Modern Authoritarians, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/breaking-down-democracy-goals-strategies-and-methods-modern-authoritarians>

Hungarian internal affairs” (Q4). The rest of the aggressive actions associated with Brussels might be considered as lawful, yet they still express an obvious, impending threat. The consultation narrates Brussels as if it was “planning to take a dangerous step” (Q1) to “force us to abolish the reduction in public utility charges” (Q1). Aggression is joined with the image of war, where Brussels is repeatedly depicted as attacking Hungary for serving the interest of its people. Brussels allegedly launched attacks against Hungary for its job creating measures (Q5) and also against the reduction of taxes (Q6). Aggression is also represented in the form of oppression. The consultation depicts Brussels as disproportionately exercising its power to keep Hungary under control by “jeopardizing our independence” (Q4) and by “dictating tax rates” (Q6). In the narrative of the consultation, Brussels’ evil activities generate reaction from the Hungarian government. The anti-EU feature in one’s politics is regarded by Panizza (2005, 69) as a populist trait, since European integration is typically identified in populist discourse with the “authoritarian strategy of the elites,” which stands in contrast with the will of the people.

In marked contrast, the verbs and actions used in the national consultation depict the Hungarian government as a benevolent power acting in support of its people. The caring attitude of the government is created by the very first question, which distributes the information that the government “reduced public utility charges” (Q1). The next question in the consultation couples this caring attitude with a sense of legal responsibility. A lawful image is disseminated about the government, which is supposed to encourage the reliance on official decisions in the case of asylum seekers. The law-abiding character of the government is further underlined by the third question, which promotes the punishment of both the assistance and the popularisation of illegal immigration. The fourth question further strengthens the image that the government keeps its legal obligations in high esteem by its effort to require organisations to register and take responsibility for their actions and objectives. Besides legal responsibility, the other notion connected to the government’s caring attitude through the particular use of verbs and actions in the questionnaire is autonomy. The consultation implies that the Hungarian government can initiate and implement measures as long as it is autonomous and independent. In the framework of the narrative of the consultation, the government would not be able to reduce public utility charges without independence, for which reason the consultation attempts to persuade voters to “insist to determine” the prices in Hungary (Q1). According to the accounts of the questionnaire, job creation has been successful in Hungary. This success is attributed to the autonomous operation of the government in Question 5, which imparts the idea that Hungary can reach its desired aims, provided it “follows its own strategy” (Q5) and “continues to make decisions” on its own (Q5). Independent decision making is emphasised in the case of the apparent success of tax-cuts as well (Q6). If the Hungarian government’s autonomy, which results in an effectively caring attitude, is threatened by external forces, such as Brussels, it is ready to defend its independence. According to the text of the consultation, Hungary needs to be defended from “Brussels’s plans” (Q 1, Q5, Q6), and from illegal immigrants by

“placing them in detention” (Q2). Emphasising the impending loss of sovereignty and autonomy of the nation is a crucial feature in populist discourse. Panizza (2005, 4) considers the concept of the sovereign people imagined as being in “antagonistic relation with the established order” to be the core element of populism, while McNight (2018, 14) also views the foregrounding of the conflicting opposition of the people and the oppressive elite as a typical characteristic of populism. Ágh (2019, TBC) notes that the ruling party in Hungary has been “using the mantra of national sovereignty as the freedom fight against the EU, in which ‘Brussels’ appears as ‘Moscow.’”²⁴

The questionnaire of the consultation is structured along a straightforward pattern. Each short context-creating situation is followed by the same question: What do you think Hungary should do? The voter is given the choice to mark either of two answers, A or B. By choosing answer A, the voter supports the government in the protection of Hungary from the supposed attacks, while the choice of answer B promotes the maintenance of the threatening situation described before the question. The verbs in answer B seem to fulfil a specific function. These actions aim to break down trust. The narrative of the questionnaire tries to convince the electorate that large companies are not to be trusted (Q1), “Brussels’ plan” is not to be accepted (Q1, Q6), international organisations are not to be accepted either (Q3), and consequently they should not be allowed to continue their activities (Q4). The questionnaire supports these suggestions by drawing out the supposedly dangerous, risky, and illegal nature of the agents. As the electorate is implied to withdraw their belief in the reliability of the decisions of the EU and those of international organisations and companies, the tone of the manipulation in the consultation is rather incendiary. Shortly after the publication of the ‘Facts Matter’ document, the European People’s Party (EPP) warned the Hungarian Prime Minister to comply with the EU laws and EPP values as the Party found “the blatant anti-EU rhetoric of the ‘Let’s stop Brussels!’ consultation unacceptable.”²⁵ The EPP press release insisted on the fact that “the constant attack on Europe, which Fidesz has launched for years, have reached a level”²⁶ they could not tolerate.

The analysis of the verbs and actions in the questionnaire reveals that the rhetorical strategy of the consultation follows the fear and threat appeal argument in each of the six questions. Fear appeal arguments propose that the state of affairs is dangerous to the respondent, typically suggest that his safety is at risk, and imply a course of action which will result in averting catastrophe by avoiding the alleged peril. The use of threats and force in argumentation is categorised under the fallacy ‘argumentum ad baculum,’

²⁴ Moscow refers to Hungary’s past when the country was ruled by the Communist Soviet Union (until 1989). During the Communist regime it was impossible to make important decisions at a national level; instead, orders were sent from Moscow.

²⁵ Source: <http://www.epp.eu/press-releases/prime-minister-orban-to-comply-with-eu-laws-and-epp-values-following-meeting-with-epp-presidency/> 29.04.2017

²⁶ Source: <http://www.epp.eu/press-releases/prime-minister-orban-to-comply-with-eu-laws-and-epp-values-following-meeting-with-epp-presidency/> 29.04.2017

or the appeal to the stick. Using the threat of losing safety in order to bring about the acceptance of a conclusion is not only fallacious but heavily manipulative as well. The use of the argument *ad baculum* fallacy is often considered to be an element of populist rhetoric. Albertazzi (2018, 5) clarifies that while populists “preach impending doom, they also offer salvation.”

To summarise, at the lexical level, a positive self-representation and a negative other-representation is noticeably present in the discourse of the consultation. ‘The Other’ is illustrated to be active, violent, aggressive and unlawful, while those who govern Hungary are portrayed as benevolent and respectful of law and order. The application of the *argumentum ad baculum* manipulates the electorate into believing that the alleged imminent threats can only be avoided by supporting the claimed protector.

4.3 Layer 3: Discourse

4.3.1 Lexicon: Adjectives and Adverbs

Regarding the use of adjectives and adverbs in the consultation, the same positive self-representation and negative other-representation can be observed. The adjectives connected to Brussels convey a threatening image. Brussels intended step is dangerous (Q1), the international organisations it supports are risky and non-transparent (Q4), while the people it forces to be let into the territory of Hungary are illegal (Q2, Q3). The seemingly neutral adjective ‘international’ (Q3) also appears to be a threat in the discourse of the consultation. The text insinuates that whatever is international is the enemy of the country, a serious danger to national interests. The national consultation creates the image of serving the protection of the nation against external, international forces. In this way, those who do not accept the narrative or the argumentation of the national consultation at any point can be accused of being unpatriotic and disloyal to the nation, which is a manipulative way of silencing the opposition. A renewed interpretation of the notion of patriotism is noticed by Ágh (2019) in the rhetoric of the present Hungarian ruling party. As a skilfully planned strategy of a value war, which “redefines the societal division lines,” the political opponents of the government are labelled as “traitors,” while the loyal followers of the ruling party are recognised as “patriots” (*ibid.*, 366). Palonen (2018, 313) also noted that the Hungarian Prime Minister’s claims unveil the idea of the “exclusive ownership of the nation.”

Quite contrary to the image created about Brussels, the adjectives linked to the Hungarian government convey a completely different image. The consultation makes the impression that the government is successful (Q5) and committed to the people (Q6). Both of these positive characteristics are related to the interest of the nation: job creations and tax cuts.

Besides the two main agents, the dangerously threatening Brussels and the successful and caring Hungarian government, there is one more agent connected to Brussels whose action is modified with an adverb. In the account of the consultation, illegal immigrants

are described as moving freely (Q2). That is, freedom becomes associated with criminality and danger in the questionnaire. Through directly being connected to dangerous and illegal activities, freedom is depicted as if it was obviously needed to be restricted by the Hungarian authorities. It is striking to what extent the language of the consultation aims at legitimising the restrictive measures of the government.

In conclusion, the manipulative discourse strategy of a positive self-representation and, in turn, a negative other-representation is distinctly observable at a lexical level. ‘The Other’ is narrated as illegal, non-transparent, and threatening, while self-representation boasts of success and commitment to making society flourish.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Findings

To reach an answer to the research question, to what extent the April 2017 national consultation can be described as manipulative, let us summarise briefly the findings of each layer of the van Dijkean (2006) model as applied to the national consultation. From the social point of view, the lack of balance characterises the discourse of the national consultation with regard to both the participants and to the information shared. Social cognition is also manipulated by creating socially shared fears through generalisations, strong polarisation, the use of false dichotomies, as well as through the lack of disseminating balanced arguments or potentially critical general knowledge. Positive self-representation and negative other-representation is heavily present at a lexical level, regarding both the use of verbs and that of adjectives. The excessive use of the fallacious argumentum ad baculum also increases the manipulative power of the discourse of the consultation. The application of the various rhetorical tools of manipulation at all three levels builds up a strengthened, combined effect of manipulation in the consultation.

5.2 Further research

In April 2018, general elections were held in Hungary. The governing party, not having a manifesto, refused to participate in any public debate discussing their own political aims and planned policies. Their not taking part in public discussions has a long and successful history in Hungarian politics. Namely, the Prime Minister already decided not to participate in public debates both before the 2010 and 2014 elections (Müller 2016), both of which he succeeded to win. In Körösenyi’s (2018, 12) observation, the lack of a party manifesto is interpreted to be an alarming sign of the “unambiguous shift from a program-oriented competition towards a personalised campaign”. The absence of a policy statement resulted in the governing party’s campaigning with the simple slogan ‘We continue!’ During the campaign of the general elections in 2018, one single

topic was communicated to the electorate. The singular campaign topic focused on the threatening concerns raised via the issues of the April 2017 national consultation (Qs 2-4). In order to maintain their power, dominant social groups are in dire need of knowledge about the nature of the themes that successfully resound with the public. Agenda setting can close down or open up political dimensions, and the manipulation of issue dimensions can effectively ensure stable results in elections (McLean 2001). The results of the present study about the extensive presence of manipulation in the discourse of the consultation suggest the necessity of further investigations into the issue of whether the consultation itself may have served as a means of ranking the topics and messages the public strongly resonated with.

5.3 In retrospect

The CDA method does not investigate whether the intentions of the discourse producer were manipulative but focuses on the social consequences of the discourse. However, State Secretary, Csaba Dömötör's announcement stating that the result²⁷ of the survey "clearly shows²⁸ that Hungarians do not want Brussels to take away Hungary's right to make strategically important decisions"²⁹ reveals that the government's aim of conducting the survey was to gain alleged public support for the implementation of previous and new measures. Keeping in mind the extent of the lack of transparency regarding the conduct of the consultation, reference to solid results can be viewed as a manipulative act, too.

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²⁷ According to MTI (Hungarian State News Agency), 1,680,933 people took part in the consultation and ninety-nine (sic!) percent of the respondents backed the government's standpoint of maintaining the country's sovereignty against Brussels. <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/national-consultation-proves-hungarian-government-is-going-in-the-right-direction/>

²⁸ In view of the fact that the public has grown sceptical about surveys (Witt 2001) and knowing that "in most real-life situations there will be critical, sceptical, cynical, incredulous or dissident people" (van Dijk 2006, 375), a 99-percent outcome is less than plausibly convincing.

²⁹ Source: <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/national-consultation-proves-hungarian-government-is-going-in-the-right-direction/>

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Appendix 1



Please, fill in the questionnaire.

1. Brussels is planning to take a dangerous step. It wants to force us abolish the reduction in public utility charges. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) Defend the reduction in public utility charges. We should insist that the Hungarian price of utilities must be determined in Hungary.
 - (b) We should accept Brussels' plan and trust large companies with fixing utility prices.
2. In recent times, terror attack after terror attack has taken place in Europe. Still, Brussels wants to force Hungary to let in illegal immigrants. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) For the sake of the safety of the Hungarian people, illegal immigrants should be placed in detention until authorities decide in their cases.
 - (b) We should allow illegal immigrants to move freely in Hungary.
3. By now it has become clear that illegal immigrants heading to Hungary are encouraged to illegal acts by not just human traffickers but also by some international organisations. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) Activities assisting illegal immigration such as human trafficking and the popularisation of illegal immigration should be punished.
 - (b) We should accept that there are international organisations which, without any consequences, have the right to urge the circumvention of Hungarian laws.

4. More and more organisations supported from abroad operate in Hungary with the aim to interfere in Hungarian internal affairs in a non-transparent manner. The operation of such organisations could jeopardise our independence. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) We should oblige them to register and take responsibility for the country or organisation on whose behalf they act and also for their objectives.
 - (b) We should allow them to continue their risky activities without any supervision.
5. In the last few years Hungary has been successful at job creation because we followed our own strategies. But Brussels is attacking our job-creating measures. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) We, Hungarians, should continue making decisions about the future of the Hungarian economy.
 - (b) Brussels should decide what to do in the sphere of economics.
6. Hungary is committed to tax cuts. Brussels is attacking our country because of it. What do you think Hungary should do?
 - (a) We should insist that we, Hungarians, decide about tax cuts.
 - (b) We should bow to Brussels dictating tax rates.

Sending the questionnaire back by post is free of charge.